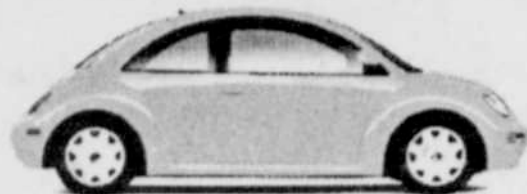


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WORLD news**POLAND**

Sen. Maria Szyszkowska has introduced a bill to set up gay civil unions that grant many of the rights and privileges of marriage.

She took action after hospital authorities refused to let a dying man's lover visit him. According to *The Chicago Tribune*, the bill has received support from leaders of the ruling Democratic Left Alliance and the head of the populist Self-Defense Party.

"Even representatives of the gay community told me to slow down, but I decided to go for it," Szyszkowska told the *Tribune*. "If we are going to be part of Europe, we have to learn to accept some things that we may not personally agree with. Tolerance is what a democratic society is all about."

A recent survey found that 62 percent of Poles strongly oppose the idea of gays living together as a couple and that 14 percent somewhat oppose the notion. Only 4 percent like the idea.



Maria Szyszkowska

Poland's Central Statistical Office broke a promise to report a count of same-sex couples in the new census, gay activists charged July 31.

"Between May and June 2002, just prior to the commencement of the census, LGBT organizations were able to persuade [the office] into announcing at a press conference that same-sex couples in fact will be recognized," the organization Lambda Warsaw said in a statement. "This was accomplished with the support of the Prime Minister's Office."

But no such numbers appeared when the census was published in July. "It results in a census report which is misleading and misrepresents the reality in Poland and is a further example of how the Polish government ignores sexual minorities," Lambda said.

COLOMBIA

Three ex-presidents of Colombia are supporting a gay civil union bill that came up for debate Aug. 19 in the Senate. Alfonso López Michelsen, Julio César Turbay and César Gaviria Trujillo, who now is secretary general of the Organization of American States, all say the measure should be passed.

Debate on the legislation stretched late into the evening, by which time there was no longer a quorum for a vote. The measure was expected to be reconsidered Aug. 26.

Should the bill pass the Senate, it would advance to the House of Representatives, where activists believe it would be approved, then on to President Alvaro Uribe Vélez for his signature.

The proposal extends marriage rights to same-sex couples in areas such as job benefits, insurance, pensions, social security, alimony, inheritance, health care decisions and family violence. It also bans all discrimination based on "sexual identity, gender or orientation."

"If we want it to be true, as our Constitution promises, that Colombians are free and equal before the law, then it is necessary to guarantee equal rights for unions between homosexuals," Gaviria said.

UNITED KINGDOM

Police in rural Hebron, Wales, say homophobia was the reason someone left two dildos outside the home of three gay men. The men responded by putting up a sign, placing the dildos underneath it and asking the owner to retrieve them.

"We've had a laugh about it, but it's still been done out of homophobia," said Mike Foxwell, one of the residents. "The local subdivision has taken advice and says it comes under public order [laws]. Whoever left them will be in no doubt by now that it's the sort of behavior that won't be tolerated."

"Living as we do in a very rural area, some people might be afraid to make a complaint because they don't want their sexuality known," Foxwell said. "We hope that by making our own protest—and involving the law—we may have helped to give others the confidence to act if they're ever victims of homophobia."

HONG KONG

Members of the Hong Kong gay group Rainbow Action invaded the sacristy of the Roman Catholic cathedral Aug. 17 during Mass to protest a Catholic newspaper having called same-sex marriage "immoral." They demanded the church apologize for the article.

Bishop Joseph Zen has filed a complaint with police concerning the incident. Officers arrived at the cathedral after the protest concluded but took no action because no property had been damaged.

SINGAPORE

Gays should be accepted but not encouraged, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said during his televised National Day Rally speech Aug. 17.

"In every society, there are gay people," he said. "We should accept those in our midst as fellow human beings and as fellow Singaporeans. If the public sector refuses to employ gays, the private sector might also refuse. But gays, too, need to make a living."

"That said," Goh continued, "let me stress that I do not encourage or endorse a gay lifestyle. Singapore is still a traditional and conservative Asian society. Gays must know that the more they lobby for public space, the bigger the backlash they will provoke from the conservative mainstream. Their public space may then be reduced."

"I am glad that conservative Singaporeans and religious leaders have made known their views on the matter, clearly but responsibly," he said. "I hope we will now move on and focus on more urgent challenges."



Hamburg Mayor Ole von Beust came out of the closet Aug. 19, which means Germany's two biggest cities now have openly gay mayors

GERMANY

Hamburg Mayor Ole von Beust came out Aug. 19 after firing the city-state's interior

minister, Ronald Schill, for allegedly trying to blackmail him.

Von Beust claimed Schill threatened to reveal that von Beust and city Minister of Justice Roger Kusch are lovers—which von Beust denies—in an attempt to stop von Beust from firing Schill's deputy, Walter Wellinghausen, who violated government regulations by drawing income as a director of a private company while serving in the Cabinet. Schill denied any blackmail attempt but said he did accuse von Beust of exhibiting favoritism in his appointments while not tolerating such behavior by those working under him.

Von Beust's coming out means Germany's two biggest cities now have openly gay mayors. Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit also is gay.

SOUTH AFRICA

At long last, South Africa will provide anti-HIV drugs to people with AIDS. The government and the health ministry have withheld the drugs for 15 years, arguing alternatively that they are too expensive, that they are too toxic and that HIV might not be the cause of AIDS.

One in five South African adults is HIV-positive, and 600 die of AIDS each day. The drugs should become available in October.

The anti-treatment stance came under heavy fire from the media and international delegates during South Africa's first national AIDS conference held in early August in Durban.

South Africa extended its government employee pensions to same-sex couples and polygamists Aug. 13. When an employee dies, his or her same-sex or opposite-sex partner or partners, as well as his or her children, can now make claim to the employee's pension.

South Africa's Constitutional Court dismissed July 31 a lesbian couple's appeal of the Pretoria High Court's refusal to let them legally marry. The Constitutional Court said the case should be heard first by the Supreme Court of Appeal because it raises complex questions related to South Africa's common law.

Marie Fourie and Cecilia Bonhuys argued that the ban on same-sex marriage violates the South African Constitution, which bans all discrimination based on sexual orientation. After the ruling, the Lesbian and Gay Equality Project announced it will file a class-action suit in the Johannesburg High Court challenging the common law definition of marriage, which recognizes only male-female unions.

AUSTRALIA

Prime Minister John Howard nixed the idea of same-sex marriage last month. "Marriage, as we understand it in our society, is about children: having children, raising them, providing for the survival of the species," he said.

In reporting on the comments, *The Age* noted that Australia, like many other nations, is seeing a lesbian "baby boom." "There is increasing evidence that homosexuals are going forth and multiplying," the daily newspaper said.

CANADA

A total of 13 gay activists in Saint John, New Brunswick, filed a complaint Aug. 11 with the Canadian Human Rights Commission against their federal member of Parliament, charging she is discriminating against them by refusing to meet with them.

Elsie Wayne, a Tory, upset gays May 8 when she blurted out in the House of Commons: "Why are they in parades? Why are they dressed up as women on floats? They do not see us getting up on the floats, for heaven's sake, to say we are husband and wife. We do not do that. Why do they have to go around trying to get a whole lot of