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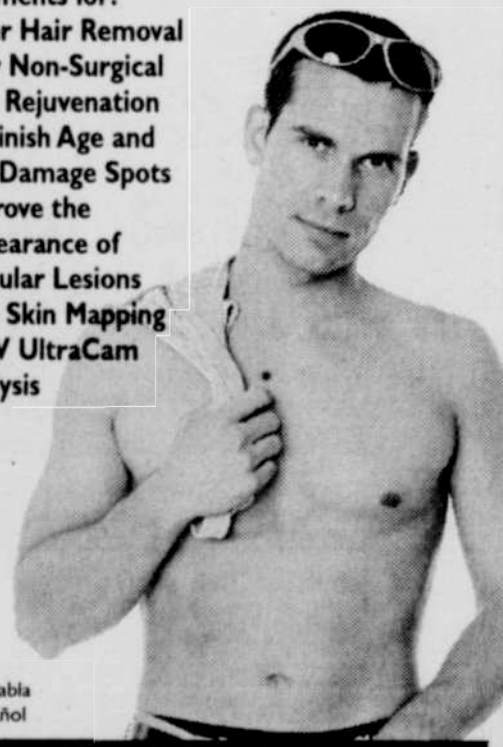
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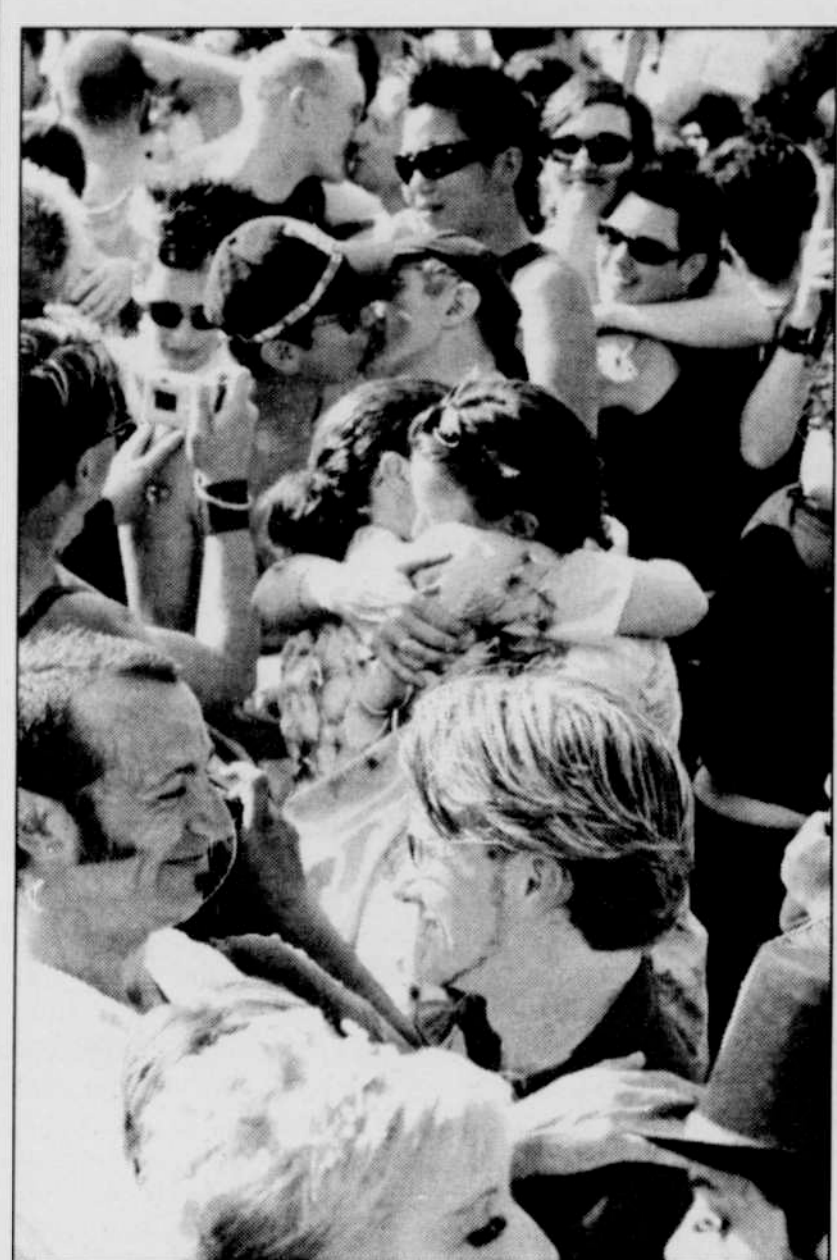
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## WORLD news



The world's largest same-sex commitment ceremony was held Feb. 15 at Melbourne's Midsumma Gay and Lesbian Festival

without a proper commitment, in the sense that we understand it, is up for grabs."

In what was called the world's largest same-sex commitment ceremony, some 300 gay and lesbian couples got hitched Feb. 15 at Melbourne's Midsumma Gay and Lesbian Festival, the Australian Associated Press reported. Organizers said they hoped to highlight the federal government's refusal to recognize same-sex relationships.

"Federally, we do not exist," Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby convener David McCarthy told the AAP. "We are second-class citizens, and we are treated as such."

Australian Prime Minister John Howard has repeatedly denounced same-sex marriage.

"I don't support gay marriages being given the same legal and community status as a traditional marriage," he said Dec. 8. "I believe traditional marriage is one of the benchmark institutions of our society, and I hold that view very strongly. Even if you produced an opinion poll tomorrow that showed me 80 percent of the Australian community disagreed with me, I would still hold that view."

### AUSTRALIA

Three out of four voters between 18 and 35 years old in the Australian state of Western Australia, where Perth is located, support equal recognition of same-sex relationships, a poll has found.

But the Westpoll survey saw support plummet to 43 percent among people 36 and older, *The West Australian* newspaper reported. According to pollster Keith Patterson, older voters probably have had less exposure to queers.

"Gay people in older age groups are more likely to have repressed their sexuality than gays in the under-35 age group," he said. "Older people are therefore less likely to knowingly have friends who are gay and would be viewing the great gay revolution at somewhat more of a distance than would their younger counterparts."

The poll also found that political conservatives and people who live in "the bush" are less gay-supportive than liberals and city dwellers.



Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk supports same-sex marriage

Last August, Howard asserted, "Marriage, as we understand it in our society, is about children: having children, raising them, providing for the survival of the species."

### NEW ZEALAND

A civil union bill will be introduced in Parliament shortly, the New Zealand Press Association reported Feb. 8. It would grant couples most of the rights of matrimony.

To build momentum for the bill, six gay couples got hitched in a commitment ceremony before 10,000 spectators at Auckland's Big Gay Out festival Feb. 7 in Coyle Park.

The measure has the backing of Prime Minister Helen Clark. "I think a majority [vote] is there for it," she told festivalgoers.

### CAMBODIA

Cambodia's King Norodom Sihanouk said Feb. 20 that same-sex couples should be allowed to get married. Writing on his Web site after watching news reports from San Francisco, the monarch said, "I think [the Cambodian government] should allow marriage between man and man or between woman and woman."

### CANADA

Canada's Supreme Court decided Feb. 20 to postpone its hearings on same-sex marriage until October.

Same-sex marriage was legalized by provincial court orders in Ontario and British Columbia last summer, and weddings began taking place immediately. Thousands have occurred.

The federal government said it agreed with the rulings by the provinces' highest courts and would introduce legislation to open up marriage nationwide. But the feds also sent three procedural questions to the Canadian Supreme Court. Then, in January, the government added a fourth question. That question caused the postponement.

Canada's Parliament will not consider legis-

The Legislative Assembly of Australia's Capital Territory voted 11-6 to approve adoption by same-sex couples Feb. 10. The state of Western Australia, where Perth is located, and the island state of Tasmania also allow gay couples to adopt.

Prime Minister John Howard denounced the trend Feb. 14.

"I don't support gay adoptions at all," he said. "I respect people's choices about their own lifestyles—that's their right, and I don't seek to discriminate against them—but I have a view that gay adoption goes against what the community regards as the traditional family formation, and that is a mother and a father."

"I think [gay adoption] sends the wrong signal," Howard said. "I do not believe changes of this nature will strengthen family life. I think they send the signal that basically family life