

**CANADA**

Openly gay Member of Parliament Svend Robinson announced April 15 that he will take a medical leave from politics after he stole a \$50,000 diamond ring from a sale he attended.

Robinson, who has represented a Vancouver, British Columbia-area district for 25 years, was not apprehended at the time of the theft. He went to the police and confessed four days later.

The following day, Federal Auction Services said it had provided video evidence of the crime to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police before he turned himself in.

"For some time now, I have been suffering from severe stress and emotional pain," Robinson told reporters. "I have experienced great inner turmoil. The reasons for this are of course intensely personal, and I am not prepared to discuss them, but among others relate to the cumulative pressures of dealing with the emotional consequences of a nearly fatal hiking accident [in 1997]."

"This accumulated stress culminated last Friday in my engaging in an act that was totally inexplicable and unthinkable. While attending a public jewelry sale, I pocketed a piece of jewelry.... Something just snapped in this moment of utter irrationality."

"Immediately upon leaving the premises I realized that I must return the jewelry. Too afraid to go back and unable to contact the owners by telephone...I spent a weekend of great anguish, determined to return the jewelry at the first opportunity. On Tuesday morning, I attempted to contact the owners, and not being able to do so directly, I went to the police and gave them a full account of what I had done and returned the jewelry to them.... I await the decision of Crown Counsel and will not seek to in any way avoid full responsibility for my actions should charges be laid in these circumstances."

"I have sought and am receiving professional medical help to understand and deal with these issues...and I look forward to full healing and recovery," said Robinson, 52. "As you can imagine this has been a nightmare. I cannot believe that it has happened, but I am human and I have failed."

Federal Auction Services said April 16 that it will not press the authorities to lay charges and "accepts Mr. Robinson's apology," which was offered in a letter that was not made public.



Openly gay Canadian Member of Parliament Svend Robinson says he stole jewelry in a "moment of utter irrationality"

Canada's national gay lobby group, Egale, expressed distress at the news.

"We are all deeply saddened to hear about the ordeal that Svend Robinson is now going through," executive director Gilles Marchildon said. "Svend has been a bold and effective champion of equality and a role model for countless lesbian, gay, bi and trans people. He has made Canada a better place for all those who are different. Despite the difficulties he is now facing, he continues to demonstrate his personal integrity in the way he is handling this matter."

Bandanna-wearing lesbians stormed the national convention of the Concerned Christian Coalition on April 17 in Calgary, Alberta. Seven women and one man burst into the conclave at the Coast Plaza Hotel, screaming, "Right-wing bigots go away, Gay Militia is here to stay."

According to *The Calgary Sun*, convention attendees held hands and prayed as the protesters unfurled a banner reading, "Liberation: Queer Invasion." Police are reviewing tapes of the intrusion and might charge militia members with mischief or with disturbing a peaceful assembly, Calgary Constable Doug Jones said.

Denizens of Vancouver's famed gay nude beach, Wreck Beach, are upset about University of British Columbia's plans to build 20-story dormitories nearby.

They say their privacy will be invaded by dorm dwellers with binoculars and Web cams. A university spokesman said the school will take sunbathers' worries into consideration when designing the buildings.

In a first, a Canadian gay military man has publicly married his partner, *The Kingston (Ontario) Whig-Standard* reported April 6.

Navy Officer Cadet Jason Stewart, 19, married Joey Schwehr, 20, April 3 in Toronto. The couple will live together in married quarters at Canadian Forces Base Kingston.

Stewart is a first-year cadet at Royal Military College. The two men met just four months ago.

"Our first date was at the Second Cup downtown, and we sat there for hours just talking and

talking," Schwehr told the *Whig-Standard*. "It was instant. He told me that he loved me, and I felt the same way toward him. Everything seemed to connect, and we just hit it off. We both felt really strongly for each other."

"It's just one of those things that you know," Schwehr said. "You don't want to let that person go to find out five years from now that they were the person you were supposed to be with for the rest of your life."

During the past 11 months, top courts in the provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec extended full marriage to same-sex couples. In response, the federal government is planning to open up marriage nationwide.

An unscientific poll conducted by the Web site of the Toronto gay magazine *fab* found that only about one-third of gay people care about having access to full marriage.

About 36 percent of respondents said gays should "settle for marriage and nothing less," while 47 percent said gays should "go for something like civil unions and develop our own customs as long as we have the same rights as straight married couples." About 11 percent refuse "to buy into the heterosexual, oppressive institution of marriage," and 7 percent wish gays would "help lead a movement to abolish the institution of marriage."

**SPAIN**

Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero promised to legalize same-sex marriage during an April 15 speech to Parliament.

"It is time to bring to an end, once and for all, the intolerable discrimination still suffered by many Spaniards exclusively by virtue of their sexual preferences," he said. "Homosexuals and transsexuals deserve the same public consideration as heterosexuals and have the right to live freely the life that they themselves have chosen. We will recognize, on an equal basis, their right to marriage, with the consequent effects on labor rights, inheritance and social security protection."

Full marriage is offered to same-sex couples only in Belgium, the Netherlands and the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec. It will become available May 17 in Massachusetts. Several other nations offer same-sex domestic partnerships or civil unions that include up to 99 percent of the rights and obligations of matrimony.

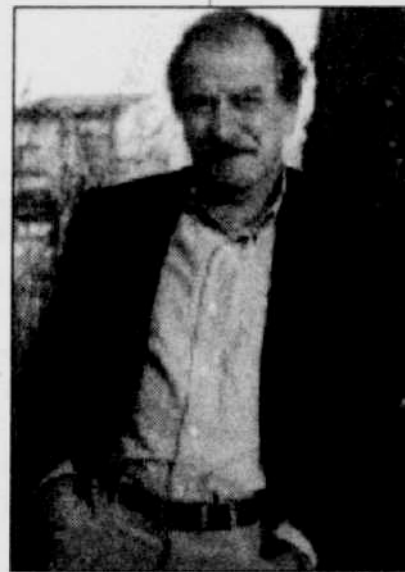
**FRANCE**

The mayor of Bègles, a suburb of Bordeaux, plans to perform a same-sex marriage in June. There's nothing in French law to prohibit the marriage, and gays should have full equal rights, Noël Mamère says.

"This act is the continuation of a struggle I have fought for a long time—for equal rights and against all discrimination," he told Britain's *The Guardian*. "Homosexuals in this country, as in many others, suffer from a great deal of discrimination. They are the last category of French people who are banned from getting married. There's nothing extraordinary about marrying two people of the same sex in the European Union, because Belgium, Sweden and the Netherlands have done it already and the new Spanish prime minister...has already put it in his political program."

Actually, Sweden does not offer same-sex marriage but rather gay registered partnership that provides the same rights. France has offered gay and straight couples marriage-like civil unions since 1999, but they lack certain matrimonial rights in areas such as adoption and economic benefits.

Mamère, who also is a member of France's National Assembly and vice president of the Urban Community of Bordeaux, plans to marry the gay couple June 5.



Bègles Mayor Noël Mamère says French laws don't prohibit same-sex marriage

**PORTUGAL**

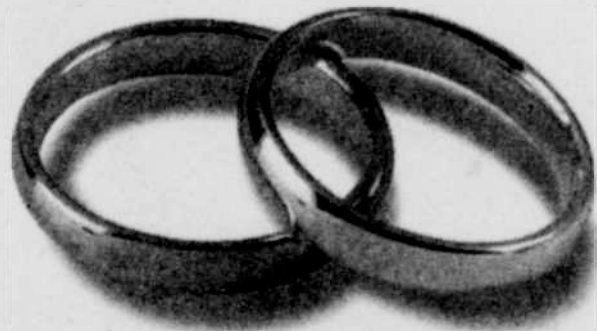
The commission reviewing Portugal's Constitution approved adding a ban on discrimination based on sexual orientation April 23. "Portugal is now one of the few countries in the world that includes nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the fundamental law of the nation," said João Paulo, editor of the Web site PortugalGay.pt.

Other nations that ban anti-gay discrimination constitutionally include Canada, Ecuador, South Africa, Switzerland and, possibly, Fiji. At last report, Fiji's government had announced it wanted to repeal the protections because it had no idea how they ended up in the 1997 constitution in the first place.

**DAGESTAN**

The Culture Ministry of Dagestan blocked a concert by gay Russian pop singer Boris Moiseyev in the capital city of Makhachkala,

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