

WORLD news

Courts already have legalized it in eight of Canada's 13 provinces and territories—British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan and the Yukon Territory.

"Canada is a land built on a tradition of equality and respect," said Justice Minister Irwin Cotler. "The government cannot, and should not, pick and choose which rights they will defend and which rights they will ignore."

Prime Minister Paul Martin said: "Canada is a country where minorities are protected.... I don't think this will change the way we live. I think this recognizes it's already the law in seven provinces with the majority of the Canadian population."

A final vote may not take place for weeks or months. If the measure passes, same-sex couples in Alberta, New Brunswick, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Prince Edward Island also will be able to get married.

Meanwhile, the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. reported Feb. 2 that 10 percent of Newfoundland and Labrador's marriage commissioners have resigned their positions to avoid having to marry same-sex couples.

Numerous people have signed up to replace them, including a lesbian filmmaker, the report said.

Only two other countries have legalized same-sex marriage nationwide—Belgium and the Netherlands.

U.S. CHRISTIANS TARGET SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN CANADA

Christian activist organizations in the United States are sending money to Canada in an attempt to thwart Parliament's legalization of same-sex marriage.

Courts already have legalized same-sex marriage in eight of Canada's 13 provinces and territories. Passage of a bill pending in Parliament would extend marriage rights to the other five provinces and territories.

"[We will spend] whatever it takes. The family is too important," said Patrick Korten, vice president of communications for the Knights of Columbus head office in New Haven, Conn., in an interview with *The Montreal Gazette*.

The Knights recently spent \$64,262 to print 2 million anti-same-sex-marriage postcards that were distributed in churches across Canada.

Focus on the Family has sent hundreds of thousands of dollars to the smaller Focus on the Family (Canada) Association.

Alex Munter of Canadians for Equal Marriage told the *Gazette* he was sure most Canadians do not approve of U.S. right-wingers interfering in Canadian affairs.

"This is fundamentally an issue about Canadian values and the Canadian Charter of Rights," he said. "Do we want the American far right engaged in that debate? I would say no, and I would think most Canadians would say no."

Justice Minister Irwin Cotler said he also doesn't approve of the interference, although there's nothing he can do to stop it.

"From a legal perspective, there's nothing we can do about it," he told reporters Feb. 9. "We live in a global universe, and ideas cross borders, and it's a free speech issue.... I just would like to maintain the integrity of the Canadian political culture and the Canadian political debate and not see it skewered by the kinds of lobbying that comes from the States."

SHORT SENTENCE IN GAY SLAYING CASE

The apparent ringleader in the 2001 killing of a naked gay man in a cruisy Vancouver, British Columbia, park received only a six-year prison sentence Feb. 8.

Local gay activists criticized the length of the sentence and British Columbia Supreme Court Justice Mary Humphries, who determined there

was no evidence the killing of Aaron Webster near Stanley Park's cruising trails was a hate crime.

Ryan Cran, 23, and at least two other men beat Webster, 41, with baseball bats, a golf club and a pool cue.

Gay former Member of Parliament Svend Robinson called on B.C. Attorney General Geoff Plant to review the case and remind prosecutors to use hate crime laws.

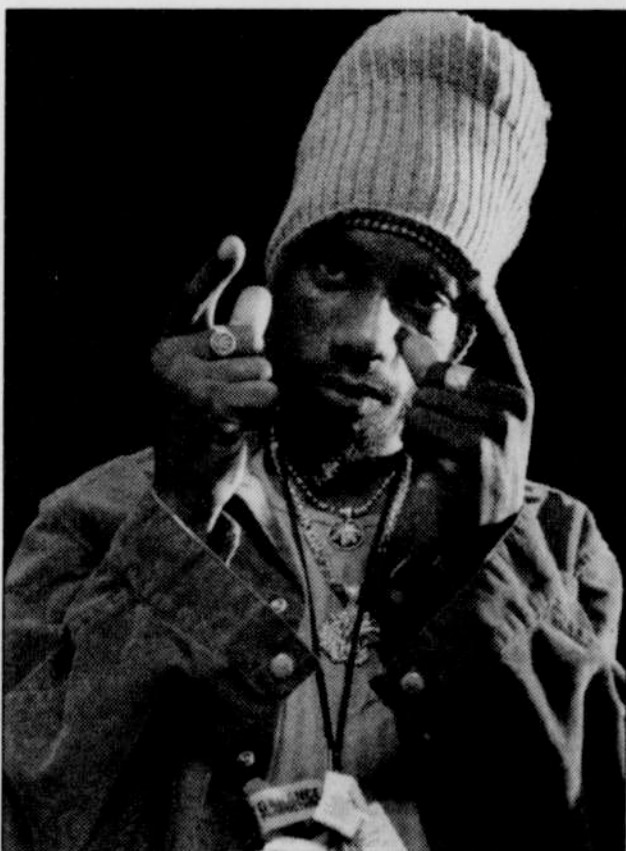
"I hope that out of the tragedy of Aaron Webster's death will come a renewed determination...that never again will the crown fail to recognize the reality of gay-bashing," Robinson told the Canadian Press news service. "Six years...is an outrage. What message does that send about the values of the lives of gay people?"

Canada's national gay lobby group, Egale, called for a formal inquiry into the sentence.

"The criminal justice system needs a good shakeup," said Egale's Tami Starlight. "The circumstances leave no doubt that this murder was a hate crime, and the justice system seems not to want to recognize this."

Egale board member Stephen Lock called the sentence "an outrageous example of the state's refusal to acknowledge systemic violence against gay men."

Two youths previously pleaded guilty in the case and were sentenced to two years in jail and a year of house arrest. A third man was acquitted.



Sizzla, known for his homophobic lyrics, must spend some time in the hoosgow

SIZZLA JAILED

Anti-gay Jamaican dancehall singer Sizzla, aka Miguel Collins, was jailed Feb. 2 in Jamaica for swearing during a Dec. 25 concert.

The two-week sentence resulted from words Sizzla used on stage in St. Thomas parish, despite warnings from local police to watch his language. He was charged under a law that bans indecent expression and clothing.

Last year, Sizzla's tour of the United Kingdom was canceled after gay activists objected to his "kill queers" lyrics, which include "Burn the man who rides a man from behind" ("Fire fi di man dem weh go ride man behind").

"They've got to apologize to God because they break God's law," Sizzla said of gays in an interview with the British Broadcasting Corp.'s *1Xtra* last November. "I sing 'fire burn for homosexuals' and sometime in some street I walk, I see them and me no touch them. If I don't like what you're doing, I don't come there. If you don't like what I'm doing or what I say, you don't come where I'm at." □

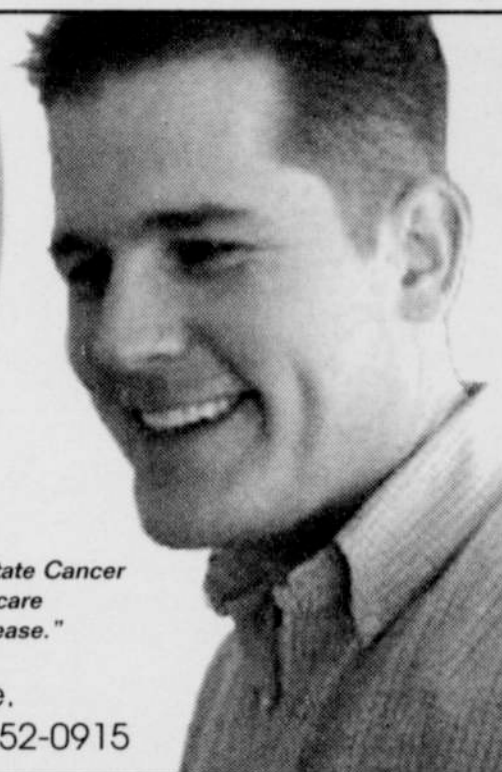
Compiled by REX WOCKNER, who has reported for the gay press since 1985. He has a bachelor's degree in journalism from Drake University and started his career as a radio reporter.

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