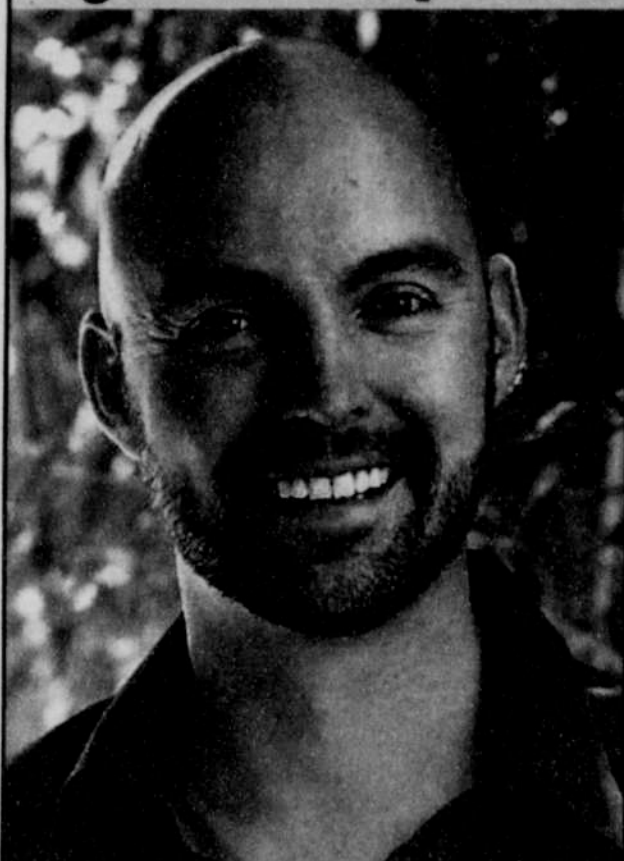


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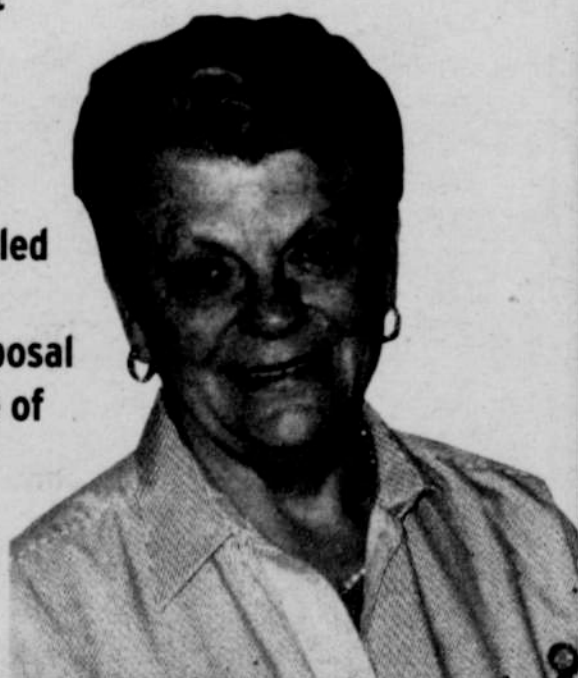
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AMERICAS

Cuban Culture Minister Supports Same-Sex Marriage

Cuba's culture minister, Abel Prieto, has come out in support of same-sex marriage, *The Miami Herald* reported Feb. 6.

"I think that marriage between lesbians, between homosexuals can be perfectly approved and that in Cuba that wouldn't cause an earthquake or anything like that," Prieto, who is a member of the Politburo, told reporters after a screening of a new documentary about folksinger Silvio Rodríguez.

Prieto, 57, also is a member of the Council of State, Cuba's governing body. The *Herald* noted that he is the only top government official with "shoulder-length hair."

Prieto's statement is one of several pro-gay developments in Cuba in the past year.

In November, Mariela Castro Espín, director of the National Center for Sex Education, said her dad, Raúl Castro, supports letting open gays serve in the military. Raúl Castro was elevated to president after his brother Fidel's resignation Feb. 19.

Castro Espín also has said the island will begin offering sex-change operations.

"There are 27 transsexuals waiting for the operation, [and] the medical team is being trained," she told the Buenos Aires newspaper



Abel Prieto, Cuba's culture minister, says same-sex marriage will not cause any "earthquakes" or other natural disasters in his country.

Clarín three months ago. "As soon as it's ready...they will start to operate."

In December, two Havana lesbians were symbolically married in the National Center for Sex Education's courtyard. Mónica, 19, and Elizabeth, 28, tied the knot before 60 friends and supporters in the first-ever same-sex union to receive support from a government agency. The ceremony was filmed by students from the Cuban Higher Institute of Art.

And last July, the Roman Catholic vicar general of Havana, Monsignor Carlos Manuel de Céspedes García-Menocal, wrote that he supports "stable same-sex relationships" being "protected by civil laws."

"Contemporary Western society is no longer the same as that which arrived at present clarifications concerning marriage," he said.

Another Anti-Gay Attack in Jamaica

Another in a string of violent attacks on Jamaican gays occurred Jan. 29 in the town of Mandeville, Human Rights Watch reported Feb. 1.

A mob of 15 to 20 men approached a house where four men lived and demanded they leave the community because they are gay, Human Rights Watch said. The attackers later broke down the door and beat and slashed the inhabitants.

Police arrived 90 minutes after being called and rescued three of the men. The fourth man fled, with the attackers in pursuit, and is feared to be dead. Blood was found at the mouth of a nearby pit, suggesting that the man fell into it or was killed nearby, Human Rights Watch said.

Two of the other three men were taken to a hospital. One had a severed left ear, spine damage and his arm broken in two places.

"This incident is the latest in a string of homophobic mob violence over the last year," Human Rights Watch said.

Scott Long, director of the group's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights Program, added: "Roving mobs attacking innocent people and staining the streets with blood should shame the nation's leaders. Official silence encourages the spread of hate."

EUROPE

Euro Commission Warns Netherlands on Discrimination

The European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities has told the Netherlands to fix laws that permit anti-gay churches and religious schools to discriminate against gay people in hiring, local media reported Feb. 4.

Vladimír Spidla said the European Commission could haul the country before the European Court of Justice if it doesn't beef up gay protections within two months' time. European Union law bans employers from discriminating based on sexual orientation, disability, age, race and religion.

The European Commission is the executive branch of the 27-nation European Union. Several other nations also received warnings about their implementation of various aspects of the European Union's Employment Equality Directive, which was supposed to be fully implemented by the end of 2003.

Dutch Would Be OK with Gay Prime Minister

About 78 percent of Dutch people would be OK with having a gay prime minister, according to a poll of 21,000 members of the television program *EenVandaag's* permanent opinion panel, NIS News Bulletin reported Feb. 6.

The panel also would be fine with a prime minister who is female (93 percent approval), unmarried (90 percent approval), atheist (87 percent), black (75 percent) or Jewish (53 percent). But only 27 percent of the panel would support an Islamic prime minister, and only 33 percent would be OK with a fundamentalist Christian prime minister.

Romania Considers Same-Sex Marriage Ban

Romania's Parliament is considering defining marriage as between a man and a woman. Current law defines it as "between spouses."

A bill passed unanimously Feb. 4 by the Senate Judiciary Committee would change the law to read, "The marriage between a man and a woman is the basis of the family."