



2010–2011 Media Review

Equality for All

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Introduction

Each year, the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project (NSRAP) compiles a collection of news stories pertaining to the LGBTQ community locally, nationally, and internationally. The purpose of NSRAP's annual media review is, first and foremost, to collect mainstream media coverage that mentions NSRAP specifically. It is also important for us to be aware of what is going on across the country and around the world, as these issues inform our own projects. In effect, an organization like NSRAP cannot operate with blinders on that keep us from seeing what is going on beyond our provincial borders.

2010–2011 produced a significant amount of LGBTQ news, both uplifting and disheartening. NSRAP received media attention for awarding Eric Smith with the annual Community Hero Award, for LGBTQ elders' perspective on Spirit House, and for our response to Q104's holiday "gay apparel" station identifier.

Other local media attention was garnered by Tanya Bloomfield's refugee claim, the Hello, Sailor! exhibit at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, Halifax Pride's efforts to be family-friendly, and, most recently, the violent attack of Chris Cochrane.

In the Canadian Parliament, then-Member of Parliament Bill Siksay's private member's bill (C-389) to explicitly protect transgender rights in the Canada Human Rights Act and to make transphobia-motivated crime a hate crime in the Criminal Code was successfully passed in the House of Commons. While the bill was not expected to pass in the Conservative-controlled Senate, the federal election meant that the Senate did not have the opportunity to put the bill to a vote. Mr. Siksay did not run in this year's election, but it is expected that a similar bill will be introduced in the new Parliament.

In other national news, the debate over Canadian Blood Services' ban on donations from men who have sex with men is ongoing in the courts of both law and public opinion, and the balancing of LGBT rights and religious freedom continues to play itself out. Cases are making their way through the courts regarding provincial marriage commissioners who refuse to perform same-sex marriages. Publicly-funded Ontario Catholic school boards have been attracting much attention over their resistance to updated sex education and, in some cases, bans of gay-straight alliances with one board going so far as to ban the use of rainbows at an anti-homophobia event.



Uganda's "kill the gays" bill and the murder of gay activist David Kato in that country drew the ire of the international community as well as much media attention. In the United States, President Barack Obama delivered on his promise to repeal the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. This positive step was perhaps overshadowed by a string of suicides in the US that were attributed to anti-gay bullying. The tragedy of these deaths and the alarmingly young age of some of the teens spurred sex columnist Dan Savage to begin an online video campaign called "It Gets Better."

Cher's son, Chaz Bono, has become the face of transgender Americans while transgender athletes made strides in college basketball and professional women's golf. Also in sports, South African track star Caster Semenya has been permitted to run as a woman following a year of "gender testing" following her impressive showing at the World Championships in Berlin in 2009.

Coverage of LGBTQ stories in mainstream media raises public awareness and encourages discussion about topics people might not otherwise know or talk about. For NSRAP's part, we hope to continue to draw the attention of media and the public to both the positive stories and the challenges in Nova Scotia's LGBTQ community in the coming year.

Lisa Buchanan
Executive Director
Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project

Note: References to the **Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project** are highlighted as such.

Local News

Transgender woman can file refugee claim

August 19, 2010 By CBC News
CBC News

A transgendered Irish woman living in Nova Scotia has been deemed eligible to apply for refugee status, her lawyer says.

Tanya Bloomfield is originally from Ireland and has been in Canada since 2006. She said being transgendered will make her a target for hate if she is sent back to live in Europe.

Immigration officials on Thursday gave Bloomfield 28 days to file a 16-page, 35-question document to claim refugee status, said Lee Cohen, Bloomfield's lawyer.

Cohen and Bloomfield will then start preparing for a hearing that will take place sometime in the next 12 to 18 months.

They will attempt to prove that Bloomfield will be persecuted if she returns home, based on human rights records and the personal testimonies of other transgendered people.

Cohen admits the case will face some serious obstacles.

"We're cognizant of the possibility that the refugee board might say, 'Well, if you couldn't find safety in Northern Ireland, why couldn't you do so elsewhere in the European Union?'" Cohen said. "That would be a legal issue, and at this point, we haven't researched it, but we will probably argue that she shouldn't be obliged to live in another country."

Bloomfield became a local hero earlier this year when she raised money for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community by running the Scotiabank Blue Nose Marathon barefoot.

She owns and operates a computer business outside Chester, N.S., called Computer Angels.

Bloomfield said Thursday's news is encouraging.

"I think you can only but feel enthusiastic," she said. "I'm able to now remain in Canada whilst this process goes on. I'm able to continue working in my business as part of being found to be eligible. I'm able to get a work permit. I'm able to get some very basic health care as well."

She said her goal is to grow her business and create jobs for at least three Canadians.

Articles also appeared in: UK Daily Mail, Toronto Sun, Vancouver Sun, Nanaimo Daily News, Belfast Telegraph

Video: Man Says He Was Asked To Leave Taxi After Kiss

August 27, 2010 Interview by Heidi Petracek
Haligoniac.ca

A Halifax man says he won't be using Casino taxi again after an incident earlier this month. Paul Laybolt and his husband flagged down a cab on Gottigen Street after a night out. Laybolt says on the way, he and his husband shared a kiss.

At that moment, Laybolt says the cabbie stopped suddenly and told the couple to get out. Shocked, they did, and ended up walking home. Laybolt complained to Casino and received an apology, but says it's an unfortunate reminder that homophobia still exists. The manager at Casino, Brian Herman, says he wasn't able to find out who the driver was because Laybolt didn't have enough information to give him. Herman says he can't even know for certain it was a Casino taxi driver.

Watch the video: <http://live.haligoniac.ca/halifax-ns/news-headlines/15707-man-says-he-was-asked-to-leave-taxi-after-kiss.html>

Maritimers rally for gay community

October 20, 2010 By CBC News
CBC News

Hundreds of people gathered in Halifax and Charlottetown on Wednesday in a show of support for the young gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community.

Rallies in downtown Halifax and on the University of Prince Edward Island campus took place as part of a movement called It Gets Better project.

One of the goals of the movement is to raise awareness about homophobia following the suicides of five gay teenagers in the U.S. within a span of three weeks.

"I was called gay names and I didn't even know what it meant to be gay. I just knew I was different," said Tanya Bloomfield, one of the organizers of the Halifax rally.

"Subsequently, in my later teens, I tried to take my life twice."

The It Gets Better project was started by popular sex columnist Dan Savage, who posted a video online talking about the bullying he endured growing up gay.

The movement now includes hundreds of videos of people sharing their experiences and messages of encouragement, including those from public figures such as celebrities and politicians.

On the UPEI campus on Wednesday evening, many students wore purple clothing to symbolize their support for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community.

"Everyone's wearing purple to unite against the violence and homophobia, so I think it's really important," said Alicia Altass, a UPEI student.

Chris Gallant, the media co-ordinator at Abegweit Rainbow Collective, said about 300 young gay people kill themselves each year in Canada.

"We have 365 days in the run of a year. That's two suicides every three days," he said. "You never hear about this stuff."

The organizers of the candlelight vigil at UPEI said bullying of gay teens is common, especially at schools in rural communities where some youth feel they have nowhere to turn.

"Even when I was in high school, there was nobody I could turn to," said Gallant.

"Even the guidance counsellor I had, we knew her by name, we knew her family, so for me to go to here and say, 'By the way, I'm gay and I need help dealing with this,' it was completely unheard of."

AIDS activist lauded for perseverance

October 23, 2010 By CBC News
CBC News

Eric Smith, a former Nova Scotia schoolteacher who was shunned in the 1980s when it was revealed he was HIV-positive, now is formally recognized as a gay community hero.

A former schoolteacher who was shunned in the late 1980s when it was revealed he was HIV-positive is now a recipient of the Community Hero Award from the [Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project](#).

Eric Smith, now 53, was teaching at Cape Sable Island Elementary School in 1987 when word got around that he had contracted HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Parents in the rural area at the southwestern tip of Nova Scotia threatened to keep their children at home, and some demanded that homosexuals be banned from the classroom. Smith was moved to a non-teaching position and was eventually given an education-related position in the Nova Scotia Task Force on AIDS.

'Changed a lot of people's attitudes'

Smith, now a prominent AIDS activist living in Halifax, says he's glad the backlash happened. "I can look back and see that there was a big benefit to it, in that it changed a lot of people's attitudes," he said before Saturday evening's award presentation.

Smith said he appreciates the award because when the controversy erupted he wasn't sure how much support he was getting from the gay community. "It feels good that they're letting me know that they appreciate what I did," he said.

Back in 1987, Smith thought he'd be lucky to have a year or two to live. Now he's aiming for life as a senior. "I still want to hit 65 so I'm getting my pension," he said. "I'm not in any rush but I'll get there."

The Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project, a 15-year-old organization advancing the interests of gay, bisexual and transgendered people, arranged the award presentation as part of its annual fundraising gala, with a keynote speech by Michelle Douglas, who successfully fought for lesbian and gay equality rights in the Canadian Forces.

Gay seniors complex urged for Halifax site

October 19, 2010 By CBC News
CBC News

A community group in Halifax is hoping a vacant church will be replaced with a seniors complex that will focus on welcoming gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered seniors.

St. John's United Church, on the corner of Windsor and Willow streets in Halifax, has been vacant for two years.

Some members of the congregation have applied to the City of Halifax for permission to tear down the building and replace it with a seniors residence complex - to be named Spirit Place.

"GLBT-positive is the way that we would say it," said Louisa Horne, a Spirit Place board member.

"In all aspects of the complex - while we are welcoming and open and celebrating the diversity of our community and wanting to reflect that diversity - that will be a specific designation."

Horne said no one from the gay and transgendered community is turned away from traditional nursing-care homes, but she said life is different for them.

"I liken it a little bit to, perhaps, something that we might hear about in the American military. Sort of a 'Don't ask, don't tell' situation for many folks."

Church included

In addition to the seniors residence, the proposed development includes a church, green space and underground parking.

Lynn Murphy, a board member with the [Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project](#), said many senior members of the gay and lesbian community often deal with people who are well-meaning but insensitive.

"People will say, 'Oh, were you married? Where is your husband or your wife? Do you have children?'"

"They only mean to express their interest and their care for you, perhaps, but it's just the presumption that you are going to be straight. That everybody is going to be straight," she said.

The project is awaiting approval from the municipality.

Congregation offers up its church

October 20, 2010 By Sheena Goodyear
QMI AGENCY

When Hugo Dann's elderly mother faced homophobic slurs about her son from a caregiver, he started to seriously worry about his own retirement and what would happen if he ended up in the care of someone like that.

"I imagined how truly frightening that would be," said Dann, executive director of the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project (NSRAP). "I'm advancing in my middle years and looking at going into retirement."

But if one church congregation gets its way, Halifax will soon house a retirement home that is welcoming and inclusive to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered seniors.

The St. John's United Church has been vacant for two years, and the congregation -- which uses rented space and a church house for its activities -- has been working on a proposal to turn it into an affordable LGBT seniors' complex called Spirit Place.

"We are celebrating the diversity of our neighbourhood and excited that our building will reflect the character of the local area," said Louisa Horne, who sits on the redevelopment committee.

St. John's United is an affirmative church, meaning they accept LGBT membership and perform same-sex marriages and baptisms for same-sex couples.

"There's quite a strong outreach program at the church and (the congregation) felt that they wanted to something that would fit in with that theology and philosophy," said Brian Jay, team leader of the redevelopment project.

While the home will be LGBT friendly, it won't be LGBT exclusive. Just like the church itself, all are welcome, said Horne.

The plan has been in the works for years, but the committee has recently applied to the City of Halifax for permission to go ahead with the project.

The review process is expected to take about a year.

LGBT seniors in Canada have faced discrimination in elderly homes, with some people reporting getting evicted or being separated from their partners.

Dann said a lot of LGBT seniors "express a fear of having to go back into the closet" when they get older. "These people all came of age before homosexuality was decriminalized and so they have received an additional layer oppression and discrimination," he said.

What's more, many of their families tried to "cure" them of their homosexuality through psychology or even painful procedures like electric shock.

"Those people have a particular apprehension about medical institutions," he said.

While St. John's United works to get Spirit Place up and running, NSRAP is using a \$10,000 government grant to work with existing seniors' homes to make them into more LBGT-positive spaces -- an initiative he says is going very well.

"It's a big issue. Nova Scotia has one of the oldest populations in the country and we are getting older," Dann said. "And I think we have a very large LBGT population as well."

Spirit Place, if approved, will be the first of its kind in Atlantic Canada.

Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver all have retirement homes geared to the LBGT community.

In 2009, the Quebec government spent half a million dollars on an education campaign to improve the lives of LBGT seniors.

Radio station changed 'gay apparel' promo

December 16, 2010 By Michael Lightstone
The Chronicle-Herald

Listener complained ad homophobic, Q104 says it didn't intend to offend

Q104 has had to resolved two separate complaints this month from listeners upset with the Halifax radio station's attempts at humour.

On Wednesday, Q104 agreed to change a promotional advertisement for the station that elicited an allegation that it negatively stereotyped gay people.

The station's management consented to alter the in-house radio ad after the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project issued a news release and set up a Facebook page about it.

According to Q104, the offending ad said: "We'll deck the halls, but we draw the line at gay apparel."

The action project's release called the promo ad homophobic. The group does advocacy work and health support work for the province's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered residents.

Q104 has been supportive of the local gay community, the action project's release says, but the promo spot was inappropriate. For its part, the radio station said it didn't mean to offend or hurt anyone.

"Our sense was that this piece was an innocent joke," a Q104 release says. "However, upon further reflection and discussion, we decided it would be to the benefit of the radio station, our audience and the community at large to change the wording of the ad to present a positive portrayal of the word 'gay.'"

The new version of the ad will say: "At Q104, we're all about decking the halls, and if the mood strikes us, donning a little gay apparel."

Hugo Dann, the action project's executive director, said his group had received a complaint from a Q104 listener and issued its release early Wednesday morning. He said his organization is satisfied with Q104's response.

The radio station said in its own statement in the afternoon that the original promo ad was simply an attempt at edgy humour.

"We are not afraid to offend equally," the Q104 release says. "We believe it is vital to our sanity as a human race to be able to laugh at ourselves."

"Being an outlet for political incorrectness can sometimes put us in a situation where we may offend some people, but that is a position we are comfortable with."

Q104 program director J.C. Douglas said in an interview Wednesday evening that the ad was produced in 2008 and no one had ever objected to it -- until now.

“It aired many, many times, but in the world of social networking, when someone gets a hold of something like that . . . and posts it, and starts to direct people’s attention to it, then all of a sudden, you know, I got my first complaint and my hundredth complaint within the last 48 hours,” he said.

Dann said the gay community can, and does, laugh at itself. But he said a radio station with a young audience needs to be careful when it comes to messages it’s broadcasting over the airwaves.

He told The Chronicle Herald the problem with the original ad was the wording “draw the line at gay,” which could indicate to a listener “that gay is bad -- it’s something that you wouldn’t want to be involved in.”

“You have to put yourself in the shoes of of a kid in junior high who hears ‘That’s so gay’ every time he walks down the hall, (or) from his teachers or constantly getting messages about how any kind of sexual orientation, other than heterosexual, is deviant and is wrong,” Dann said.

“You have to think about that kid.”

Another complain Q104 received recently stemmed from the use of the word “hooker.” The executive director of Stepping Stone, a support group that helps sex-trade workers, said she will meet with station management but stressed that the matter has been settled.

“For now, we’re satisfied,” Rene Ross said.

Thieves target gays on dating website

January 7, 2011 By CBC News
CBC News

Halifax Regional Police are warning gay men to be cautious online after two robberies.

Police said the first robbery happened on Jan. 2 at 6:43 p.m. at Point Pleasant Park.

A 35-year-old man picked up a man he had met online on Tower Road and drove to the park.

Moments later, two other men approached the vehicle, threatened the victim and demanded his money.

The victim complied and was not hurt.

The main thief is described as white, approximately 20 years old, with short dark hair and wearing a dark coat and black jeans.

The second robbery happened Thursday night at 6:39 p.m. in the area of Wellington Street and Lundy Lane in Halifax.

A 29-year-old man picked up a man he had met online on Spring Garden Road and drove to the city's south end.

A few minutes later, several other men approached the vehicle, claimed they had a knife and stole the victim's wallet before they fled the area on foot. The victim was not physically injured.

The main thief is described as white, in his early 20s, five feet 10 inches tall, 170 pounds, with a dark jacket and orange, hooded sweatshirt.

Likely connected

Investigators believe the incidents are connected, that the person the victim picks up is working with the other suspects and that they appear to be targeting gay men through the online dating website PlentyOfFish.

Const. Brian Palmetter said police believe there could be more victims.

"We're concerned that there may be other incidents and that people may be reluctant to come forward, so we've reached out to the **Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Group** which represents the gay, lesbian bi-sexual and transgendered community in hopes that if there are other victims out there, we can arrange a safe and delicate way for them to report these incidents to investigators," said Palmetter.

Police are reminding those who use online dating sites to exercise caution when arranging to meet someone in person they know little about, regardless of the online dating service they use.

Police are also suggesting people select a well-lit, public location for the meeting where there are a lot of people around. If possible, they should tell a friend or family member where they are going, with whom and when they'll be back.

Todd Hannam met a man on the website in July. The man stayed the night, but started behaving suspiciously as Hannam got ready for the day the next morning.

"He hollered to me that he was going out to get something from the car. I was kind of timid about that so I got out of the bath right away and went to the secret place where I have money," Hannam said. "There was \$160 missing from the money and he was gone."

Hannam didn't report it to police because he thought his case would be hard to prove. The Halifax man said he hopes by sharing his story, he can spare someone else a bad experience.

3rd man arrested in robbery of gay man

February 12, 2011 By CBC News
CBC News

A third man has been charged with one of the robberies last month that targeted gay men, Halifax regional police said Saturday.

The Halifax man, 21, has been charged with robbing a man in the south end of Halifax on Jan. 6, police said in a news release. He was arrested on Thursday

The victims in that robbery and another on Jan. 2 were both gay men who were found through the online dating service Plenty of Fish, police said.

On Jan. 2, police alleged, a man, 35, picked up a man he had met online and drove him to Point Pleasant Park from Tower Road. Moments later, two other men approached the vehicle, threatened the victim and demanded his money. The victim complied and was not hurt.

On Jan. 6, a man, 29, picked up a man he had met online on Spring Garden Road and drove to the city's south end, police said. A few minutes later, several other men approached the vehicle, claimed they had a knife and stole the victim's wallet before fleeing the area on foot.

The victim was not injured.

Last month, two young men, one 17 and the other 20, were charged with robbery in relation to both incidents.

Hundreds rally for gay rights

May 18, 2011 By Michael Lightstone
The Chronicle-Herald

Day against homophobia marked

Gay rights advocates rallied in Halifax on Tuesday to denounce homophobia, support transsexual and transgendered citizens and call on legislators to shore up human rights legislation.

About 200 participants heard speakers praise the progress made in this country over the years. But attendees also heard critical comments about the lack of gay rights in some regions and the stigma that can be attached to a person's lifestyle choice.

Hugo Dann, outgoing executive director of the [Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project](#), told the rally that some parts of the province are lagging on gay rights.

"Four jurisdictions in this province will not fly the rainbow flag during Pride Week, and a business owner in Pictou County trying to start a bed and breakfast had their property vandalized," Dann said.

He was referring to harassment and property damage experienced by a gay couple in Pictou.

Since taking over W.H. Davies House Bed and Breakfast about two years ago, Tom Wright and Todd Sweet have endured hollered obscenities, an attempted home invasion, three broken windows and feces in their yard, they told The Chronicle Herald in February.

Kevin Kindred, the action project's vice-president, acknowledged "a lot of advances" have been made in the last decade. But intolerance continues, and gay rights need to be protected, he said.

"Yes, homophobia and transphobia (are) still an issue," Kindred told the crowd.

Tuesday was the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia. The late afternoon rally took place in Victoria Park on Spring Garden Road, across from the Public Gardens.

A group of gay and lesbian cheerleaders kicked off the event with protest cheers. Colourful banners were either carried or temporarily attached to a park fence.

The rally attracted folks of all ages but many were young. One of them, a Dartmouth-area junior high student, recited a class assignment to the audience.

It was titled Let's End Homophobia. The piece included a reference to modern-day school life, an experience that can be extremely challenging and stressful for gay students.

When peers "make fun of you, they laugh so hard they cry," it says. "The word 'fag' gets tossed around, like it's no big deal."

The International Day Against Homophobia is celebrated on May 17 because on that date in 1990 the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from its official list of mental disorders.

Anglican Church approves same-sex blessings

May 28, 2011 By Bill Power, Staff Reporter
The Chronicle-Herald

The governing body of the Anglican Church for Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island has approved a motion that allows for blessings of same-sex relationships in cases where the couple is legally married.

A motion that approves blessings of same-sex relationships of legally married couples was approved at the 143rd Synod of the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, which concludes today at Dalhousie University.

An overwhelming majority of participants voted in favour of the motion, and at least one participant left the event in disgust after the vote, said a participant.

“It’s a contentious issue and it will continue to be,” said Rev. David Fletcher of Lantz.

He said he’d like to see the Anglican church go further and offer blessings for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities.

Rev. Fletcher said he would also like to see the church offering blessings to people in long-term heterosexual relationships who are unmarried, such as elderly and widowed couples who live together.

The issue of blessing same-sex relationships has been hugely controversial for years for the Anglican Church of Canada.

Halifax exhibition looks at gay subculture at sea in 50s and 60s

May 30, 2011 By Oliver Moore
The Globe and Mail

For those who can't interpret nautical signal flags spelling out the message "Hello Sailor," the museum has helpfully hung a rainbow flag as well.

The flag commonly associated with gay pride is fluttering on the wharf outside Halifax's Maritime Museum of the Atlantic to mark a new show that delves into age-old stereotypes of sexuality at sea.

It seems there is a lot of truth in the clichés.

The exhibition looks primarily at a gay subculture that flourished aboard British passenger liners of the 1950s and 1960s, many of which docked in Halifax. At a time when homosexuality was illegal, there was a remarkable openness on board.

"Homophobia from shipmates was relatively rare," said Dan Conlin, the museum's curator of marine history.

Unofficial gay marriages were performed at sea, crews would host drag shows and a cabin where lovers cohabited might be known as Balmoral, named for one of the Queen's residences. Although ritualized cross-dressing isn't necessarily a gay behaviour – there's a long history of it at sea – there did seem to be a live-and-let-live attitude.

Guest curator Jo Stanley, who helped adapt the exhibition *Hello Sailor! Gay Life on the Ocean Wave* from one mounted at the Merseyside Maritime Museum in Liverpool and is also co-author of the book *Hello Sailor! The Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea*, suspects that acceptance developed because of the necessary pragmatism of life at sea.

"There was a saying, 'Nothing's queer once you've left the pier,'" said Stanley, who came from England for the show's opening on May 19. "Ships are a unique place where you're all having to work together."

The exhibition, which runs until late November, is appearing for the first time in North America. There are disappointingly few artifacts, but a lot of explanatory material and reproduced photographs. Visitors will learn about shore-leave adventures, the realities of life on board and the slang called Polari that helped keep straights in the dark.

The show also incorporates the recollections of Canadian mariners. Among them are the stories of a gay navy officer who resigned in 1970 after being confronted with a three-inch thick file on his personal life compiled by investigators, a lesbian who stayed largely closeted aboard a freighter, and a gay man who served in modern times aboard *Bluenose II*.

But the focus is largely on the British ships of a bygone era. And it recreates a world in which exaggerated campiness was acceptable. One of the exhibits is a naval uniform adapted for a drag show. The jacket is fringed with gold and would be worn over a short sequined dress.

To depict life on board, the show includes a mocked-up cabin with an awfully narrow bed. The display comes complete with beefcake pinups on the wall, makeup and jewellery strewn over a cabinet, and both male and female clothing hanging nearby.

“Look at that wardrobe,” Stanley said. “Navy blue uniform and pristine white shirt, and then look at that frothy dress and heels. That really points to the duality.”

Hello Sailor! Gay Life on the Ocean Wave continues at Halifax’s Maritime Museum of the Atlantic until Nov. 27

Organizers proud of this year's Pride

June 2, 2011 By Alex Boutilier
Metro Halifax

Pride festival 'has things that will benefit everyone': Event co-chair Runs July 17 to 24, with parade on 23

Halifax Pride organizers say this year's festival will be reflective of "a new professionalism" born from community and business relationships.

And with that new professionalism comes ambitious goals.

Halifax Pride Festival co-chair Ed Savage said yesterday the group wants to double the amount of people participating in the post-parade party.

Held at Garrison Grounds directly after the parade, the event includes a stage show, a market of vendors, organizations and artisans, and cold drinks.

"This year's goal is to bring a good percentage of (parade viewers) to that event," Savage said prior to last night's media launch. "There's 60,000 people on the parade route, usually. So we would like to at least bring (20,000) to 30,000 (to the Garrison Grounds)."

For the first time in the festival's history, it will be introducing a fully staffed secure play area for children to allow them to experience the event.

The Kids Can area, short for Kids Can Enjoy Pride Too, will feature children's entertainers, musicians, face painting and a magician.

Organizers hope that the Kids Can area will also increase the number of people sticking around for the full event.

It's also in keeping with Halifax Pride's family friendly image, according to Savage.

"That's what we strive for, to make it less promiscuous than other prides across the country," he said. "Our way of life in the Maritimes is different. And we also feel that our allies and our family aspect of Pride are just as important."

INSET: Pride history

- The first Pride Parade in Halifax happened in 1987, when 75 people marched down Spring Garden Road.
- According to organizers, many wore paper bags over their faces to conceal their identity.

Halifax Pride to be 'less promiscuous' this year

June 2, 2011 By Andrea Houston
Xtra.ca

Family friendly is just another term for 'no sex please, we're British,' Perry

This year, organizers of Halifax Pride say they want to keep it clean.

In the June 2 Halifax Metro newspaper, Pride organizers say they're aiming for a "new professionalism" and to host a festival "that has things that will benefit everyone."

"That's what we strive for, to make it less promiscuous than other Prides across the country," Halifax Pride Festival co-chair Ed Savage said. "Our way of life in the Maritimes is different. And we also feel that our allies and our family aspect of Pride are just as important."

Xtra could not reach Savage for comment. Halifax Pride is July 17 to 24.

Randall Perry, editor of Wayves, a gay, lesbian and trans magazine in Nova Scotia, has a problem with Pride becoming "less promiscuous. What does that even mean?" He says Pride always been a celebration of sexuality, "all sexualities."

"I'm not sure where Ed is coming from my saying he wants it to be less promiscuous," he says. "Halifax Pride is fairly tame in terms of having a sexually charged atmosphere."

Perry says any attempt to bring in more people is a good thing, but the festival shouldn't be sanitized.

"Family friendly is just another term for 'no sex please, we're British,'" he says. "Are we just supposed to be boring fags that fuck in our beds?"

Unlike Ontario, women are not permitted to go topless in Nova Scotia, he says. And nudists?

"We don't have anything like TNT Men in Toronto... Sexuality should not be something to be frightened of."

Savage told Metro the goal is to double the amount of people participating in the post-parade party. Held at Garrison Grounds directly after the parade, the event includes a stage show, a market of vendors, artist's displays and cold drinks.

Among the new additions to the festival will be a play area for children. Organizers tell Metro they would like at least 20,000 to 30,000 to join the post-parade party.

Mary Burnet, the organizer for the Halifax Dyke & Trans March, who also works at Venus Envy in Halifax, says cleaning Pride up for mass consumption could very well bring more people and revenue to the party, but it comes at the cost of alienating many people in the queer community.

“I don't feel represented by Pride organizers who prioritize the presence of police and corporate floats over members of the queer community,” she says, adding that many participants don't want to “assimilate to these professional and less promiscuous norms.”

At Menz Bar in Halifax, bartender Mark Lawton says it's not such a bad idea to cover up some of the skin showing at Pride.

“These days there's more gay couples adopting children, and you're seeing more kids at Pride... It makes sense. These days, children's innocence is taken away at such a young age.”

But Perry says he gets his back up when people start talking about making Pride ‘family friendly.’ The term is often attached to religious and social conservative groups.

“It's been trotted out for so many years to put us down, to keep queers as second-class citizens. Often hate groups have the word ‘family’ in their mission statement. Queers have families too, and often just as dysfunctional.”

“If you don't want children to see what celebration is like, by all means keep them at home,” he says. “But every Pride I've ever been to in Halifax there's always been loads of kids.”

Like Burnet, Maggie Haywood, owner of Venus Envy in Halifax, says the “new professionalism” could indicate the festival is shifting to a more corporate focus.

Haywood says she's most confused by the language used by Savage. Words like “professionalism” and “less promiscuous” is worrisome, she says, especially since there's already very little nudity. “I think our parade is already pretty family friendly.”

“I really appreciate diversity in Pride. It's a time when people can express themselves, and I don't think any of that is at odds with being family friendly.”

A similar controversy happened in Winnipeg in 2009. Before the festival, the Pride committee warned participants to keep it “family friendly,” after an unidentified person lodged a complaint with local police, but participants simply vowed to ignore the warning.

Shooting victim says she was target of hate crime

June 15, 2011 With files from CTV Atlantic's Kelland Sundahl and Felicia Yap
CTV

A woman who was shot during an attempted home invasion early Tuesday in Halifax believes she is the victim of a hate crime.

Chris Cochrane, a performer known as "Elle Noir," identifies herself as transgendered and she says she was targeted because of it.

The 25-year-old was in her Evans Avenue second-floor apartment when she heard a knock at the door shortly after 1 a.m. She told police the two men behind the door identified themselves as police officers, so she opened it.

When she saw that one of the men was holding a firearm, she quickly tried to shut the door. The suspects attempted to the push it open and shots were fired through the door, hitting Cochrane in the arm.

"There was a huge, loud 'bang' and there was a hole through the door and I looked down and thought I might be shot, and in the light, sure enough, my arm looked like a hamburger, just like a hamburger," Cochrane explains.

The suspects then fled on foot.

Police arrived around 1:30 after receiving a report of shots fired. They searched for the men but were unable to locate them.

"The concern is that somebody was injured by a firearm, but certainly we're also concerned over the fact that's somebody's out there identifying themselves as a police officer in this nature," Const. Brian Palmeter told CTV News Tuesday.

Cochrane was rushed to the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital where she received treatment for a gunshot wound to her right arm.

She was released from hospital Wednesday morning and says she's happy that she can still move her wounded arm.

Her best friend, Allister MacDonald, says he can't understand why someone would want to hurt his friend.

"Elle is a very hard worker," says MacDonald. "She works all the time, seven days a week, seven nights a week. She's 100 per cent professional. There's no thought in my head why this would happen."

But Cochrane has a theory as to why she was targeted. She believes the incident was a hate crime because her attackers shouted homophobic slurs as she was hit through her door with a bullet.

"To be yelling 'tranny, faggot' they must know I'm there," she says.

Police say they can't define the shooting as a hate crime at this point and that they are looking for more information and for witnesses to come forward.

"Certainly we're exploring, there are motivating factors why this took place," says Const. Brian Palmeter.

Police don't have any suspects at this point and Cochrane isn't taking any chances. She's moving out of her Evans Avenue apartment right away.

Lisa Buchanan, a spokeswoman for the [Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project](#), says she believes violent crimes against the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community in Canada are on the rise.

"It really hits home quite literally when it happens in your community," says Buchanan. "We think Nova Scotia is a pleasant place to be, people are friendly. We're usually not dealing with things of this magnitude but it can truly happen anywhere."

Cochrane says she hopes the incident doesn't scare others to stay "closeted" and she is just hoping to get her life back on track.

"In the next two weeks or so I'm going to be strapping on those heels because I may be fearful, but I have to live my life to the fullest."

As for the two suspects, police say they could face charges of attempted murder and impersonating a police officer if caught.

They are said to be white males who were wearing dark, baggy clothing at the time of the attempted invasion. One was also wearing a red bandana.

National News

Vicious attack puts gay Vancouver couple in hospital

June 14, 2010 By Rebecca Lindell
Globe and Mail

Attackers hurled homophobic insults before beating men with fists, say victims

A gay couple were beaten so severely they ended up in hospital in Vancouver Saturday night.

Peter Regier and his partner David Holtzman were coming home from a Dionne Warwick concert, when they saw two men urinating on the doorstep of their Keefer Street home.

The couple had earlier been singing "What the World Needs Now is Love, Sweet Love," with other Warwick fans at the River Rock Casino, but Mr. Regier said there was "no love" when they asked the men to stop.

Mr. Regier said the two men launched into a "barrage" of homophobic slurs and insults before beating himself and Mr. Holtzman, with their fists.

The attackers ran off when they realized there were witnesses watching the events unfold, he said.

The assault left both men with concussions. Mr. Holtzman was also bitten and is suffering from impaired vision. Mr. Regier had his scalp torn open. Both were taken to hospital.

"We came out of this certainly damaged, but anti-gay assaults tend to be extremely savage," said Mr. Regier. "We recognize that there are many others in the GLBT community that have been hurt much, much more badly than we have."

According to the Vancouver Police Department witnesses have been interviewed and investigators are looking into all aspects of the assaults and any comments made by those involved in the incident.

Mayor Gregor Robertson spoke out against Saturday's attack, saying in a statement that he was "troubled and saddened" by the assault.

"Vancouver is a wonderfully diverse city and there is zero tolerance for any action or behaviour that discriminates or harms people for their beliefs, ethnicity or sexuality," he said.

"We need to speak out about it. This is a huge problem for the LGBT community and the greater community as well," Mr. Regier said.

The queer community is upset and concerned for the men, said Jennifer Breakspear, executive director of QMunity, a resource centre for the lesbian, gay, transgendered and bi-sexual community, situated in Vancouver's West End.

Ms. Breakspear said the bravery of the men in reporting the attack may empower other victims of hate crimes to feel more comfortable going to police.

An increase in reporting could also be behind the higher rate of hate crimes in Vancouver, she said.

"If we are seeing a rise in the hate crime numbers, some of that may be because members of our community are getting the message that it is safe to call police," she said, adding that the Vancouver Police Department also has a special hate crimes unit which may skew the numbers upwards.

People may hesitate going to police because of historical attitudes and laws, a feeling that they won't be taken seriously, or because they haven't come out of the closet yet, said Ms. Breakspear.

Statistics Canada released new data on Monday showing that hate crimes based on sexual orientation doubled [<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/hate-crimes-up-by-one-third-in-2008/article1603160>] from 2007 to 2008. Sixteen per cent of all reported hate crimes countrywide in 2008 were motivated by sexual orientation. These crimes were also more violent than those motivated by race or religion.

Vancouver - along with Hamilton, Ont. - had the highest rate of hate crimes in 2008 with 6.3 crimes committed for every 100,000 people. The statistics are based on the census metropolitan areas which includes municipalities surrounding the cities.

Among violent incidents motivated by sexual orientation, 85 per cent of the victims were male.

Neither the recent attack nor the statistics mean Vancouver is unsafe for the queer community, according to Ms. Breakspear.

"This has got to be one of the best places to be queer," she said. "This is a city where the police department is paying attention to the queer community in a way that I don't see in other cities."

The B.C. New Democrats on Monday called for a review of legislation and enforcement dealing with hate crimes with the release of the new statistics and Saturday's attack.

"Even one hate crime is one too many," said New Democrat solicitor-general critic Mike Farnworth in a press release. The B.C. Liberal government has done very little to curb hate-fuelled violence in our province, and action is overdue."

Gay Ont. man loses blood donation negligence suit

September 9, 2010 By CBC News
CBC News

A gay Toronto man who concealed his sexual history on a blood donor form and was sued for negligence by Canadian Blood Services has lost in Ontario Superior Court.

In a decision released Thursday, the court sided with CBS in its suit against Kyle Freeman for "negligent misrepresentation."

The court said Freeman did not have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms defence against the claim of negligence.

The decision essentially upholds the current CBS practice of prohibiting men who have had sex with other men anytime since 1977 from donating blood.

Freeman donated blood several times between 1990 and 2002. Each time, he falsely denied that he had had sex with another man since 1977.

Ban not discriminatory: judge

In June 2002, Freeman donated blood that subsequently tested positive for syphilis. He was permanently ruled out as a donor. Freeman did not know at the time he had syphilis, and did not know how he had contracted it, the judge wrote.

CBS took steps to get any blood traceable to Freeman out of its system, at a cost of about \$10,000. It later filed suit against him.

In her decision, Justice Catherine Aitken ruled that the CBS ban on donation was not discriminatory based on sexual orientation.

"It is based on health and safety considerations; namely, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and other blood-borne, sexually transmitted pathogens in the [men who have sex with men] populations, and the corresponding risk this creates for the safety of the blood supply system," the judge ruled.

CBS chief executive officer Dr. Graham Sher applauded the decision.

"It is important to understand, and as the judge affirmed, our donor selection policies have always been about protecting the safety of blood recipients, and the [men who have sex with men] policy is no exception."

Freeman was held liable to the blood bank for \$10,000 in damages.

A counterclaim by Freeman against CBS was also dismissed. The court ruled that CBS is not a government entity, and therefore, not covered by the Charter.

Ruling disappoints groups

"We're very disappointed with this decision," Monique Doolittle-Romas, the executive director of the Canadian AIDS Society, said in a statement.

"Although the judge agreed with us that there is no evidence to justify the current deferral period being used, which applies to any man who had sex with another man even once since 1977, the court refused to order a change," she said.

Helen Kennedy of Egale Canada said that because the court found the blood bank's policy was based on safety concerns, the questionnaire did not discriminate against gay and bisexual men.

"The negative consequences this ruling has on Charter rights are enormous," Kennedy said.

Thursday's ruling reverberated even in British Columbia, where the executive director of a Vancouver HIV/AIDS advocacy group called it "misguided."

"In an era when gay men are discriminated against in many ways, I think this is one area where it need not be," said Maxine Davis, of the Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation.

"It does perpetuate a perception that somehow gay men are more promiscuous."

Military's former gay policy could cost feds

December 2, 2010 By CBC News
CBC News

A Halifax lawyer believes the Canadian government could be held financially responsible for military discrimination against homosexuals.

A Halifax lawyer and veteran of successful class-action lawsuits believes the Canadian government could be held financially responsible for military discrimination against homosexuals.

John McKiggan - who helped launch the successful class action for victims of Native residential schools, as well as the \$13-million sexual abuse settlement for victims in a Roman Catholic diocese of Nova Scotia - says recent cases have set a precedent for compensation for breaches of charter rights.

"Sexual orientation is protected by the charter," McKiggan said. "If there are people who had their charter rights breached by being unfairly terminated from the military, the potential exists for a claim for all of those people."

Until 1992, Canadian Forces investigators would track down homosexuals as a potential security risk and have them fired. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms was adopted in 1982, so there's a 10-year window of potential legal responsibility.

"This is clearly a case that cries out for a remedy, it cries out for an answer," McKiggan said. "What that answer is remains to be seen."

McKiggan said a possible case could face legal hurdles, including the fact that the policy ended 18 years ago. However, he believes there's a possibility of a class-action lawsuit because the discrimination was part of a concerted national policy.

"When issues like this come up that have been ignored for a very long time, the first inclination is to ignore it," he said. "But now that it's been outed, so to speak, the Canadian government is going to be forced to address the decisions that were made by the military, and come up with an appropriate response. They're not going to have any choice but to do that."

McKiggan would not say if he's been contacted by anyone seeking compensation for losing their military job due to their sexual orientation.

Marriage officials can't refuse gays: Sask. court

January 10, 2011 By CBC News
CBC News

Saskatchewan's highest court rules that marriage commissioners who are public servants cannot refuse to marry same-sex couples.

Saskatchewan's highest court has ruled that marriage commissioners who are public servants cannot refuse to marry same-sex couples.

The decision by the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal rejects two proposals from the provincial government that would allow some or all marriage commissioners to refuse to perform a service involving gay or lesbian partners if it offended their religious beliefs.

The government proposed that marriage commissioners who were employed before the law changed in 2004 could refuse to perform the services. It also proposed a second option where all marriage commissioners could refuse.

But the court noted that marriage commissioners are appointed by the government to perform non-religious ceremonies and are the only option for some same-sex couples seeking to tie the knot.

Lawyers appointed to argue that the proposals were constitutional said that if anyone was refused a marriage service, it would be easy to find another commissioner who would perform the same service. The court of appeal wasn't persuaded by that argument, saying that both government proposals were "contrary to fundamental principles of equality in a democratic society" and must be rejected.

"Both of the possible amendments offend the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Either of them, if enacted, would violate the equality rights of gay and lesbian individuals," Justice Robert Richards said in the ruling, supported by justices John Klebuc, Ralph Ottenbreit, Gene Ann Smith and William Vancise.

Implications cited

Richards also expressed concern that if marriage commissioners were allowed to opt out of services, they might also do so because they object to interfaith marriages or interracial marriages.

While requiring marriage commissioners to perform same-sex services may curtail their religious rights somewhat, it's justified, Richards wrote.

"The Supreme Court has repeatedly confirmed that freedom of religion is not absolute and that, in appropriate cases, it is subject to limitation," he said. "This is clearly one of those situations where religious freedom must yield to the larger public interest."

In response to the decision, Saskatchewan Justice Minister Don Morgan said the government will consider the court's advice.

Given the "thoroughness" of the analysis, he won't be recommending an appeal, Morgan said in a news release.

The Opposition New Democrat's justice critic, Frank Quennell, had harsh words for the Saskatchewan Party. The government has been wasting the province's money on legislation it should have known was unconstitutional, Quennell said.

The case has its roots in a 2004 Supreme Court of Canada decision affirming the validity of same-sex marriages.

That decision and subsequent legal changes led some marriage commissioners in Saskatchewan to refuse to solemnize same-sex marriages, saying it was a violation of their personal religious beliefs.

One of those commissioners, Orville Nichols, had a human rights complaint filed against him by a same-sex couple. A tribunal under the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission upheld the complaint.

Among those praising Monday's decision was the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, one of the interveners in the case.

"This is a very important decision," Donna Smith, a member of the SFL's solidarity and pride committee, said in a release. "An important precedent has now been set that will help to deter discrimination against same-sex couples that wish to marry."

Complaint about anti-gay slur prompts ban on Dire Straits hit

January 13, 2011 By Campbell Clark
Globe and Mail

Broadcast standards council backs complaint against 25-year-old tune *Money for Nothing*

Canada's broadcast standards council has reached back to 1985's Top 40 to ban an anti-gay epithet in an old Dire Straits hit from the radio.

The song *Money for Nothing* was a smash when an animated music video seemed new and cool. But its lyrics, in which a loutish store worker ridicules a pop star as a "faggot," don't meet the test for 2011's public airwaves, the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council ruled.

St. John's OZ FM aired the song last year, sparking a complaint that has essentially resulted in a ban on the word from radio airplay in any song - a victory, according to a major gay-rights group, against a slur often hurled by violent gay bashers.

The ruling also brought criticism from those who argued the censors ignored the context of the song, and complaints to the council from many who feel a 25-year-old hit should be left alone.

"Most of them are certainly saying that this is a song that's been around for a long time and they don't think it should be interfered with," CBSC chair Ron Cohen said of the response so far. "Virtually nobody is saying that the word is okay."

The council never ruled on the song before because no one had complained, Mr. Cohen said. The panel judged that if the epithet once squeaked through, it shouldn't now.

"The panel concludes that, like other racially driven words in the English language, 'faggot' is one that, even if entirely or marginally accepted in earlier days, is no longer so," the decision states. Helen Kennedy, executive director of gay-rights group Egale, said: "It's the word that is used most often in hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation, which we know are the most violent, against gay men."

OZ FM's general manager, Don Neil, said the station will abide by the decision, and play an altered version without the slur, but doesn't like it. "I feel that this is a form of censorship," he said. "What they're saying is that the word was acceptable 25 years ago and it's not acceptable any more. But music is an art form."

The debate echoes one raging in the United States over changing language in well-known and years-old art after the publication of a version of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that substituted the word "slave" for a slur referring to black people.

The standards council decision doesn't affect versions of *Money for Nothing* available on CDs or the Internet. And the song has been consistently altered for decades, including by its writer, Dire Straits frontman Mark Knopfler.

A common radio version replaced the epithet with a term not related to sexual orientation, and Dire Straits' greatest-hits albums include a version without the entire verse. Mr. Knopfler has long substituted other words in performances.

The lyrics portray the character who uses the epithets as ridiculous. But in a 1985 Rolling Stone interview, Mr. Knopfler said complaints made him wonder whether having the word spoken by a fictional character was too subtle for song. "It suggests that maybe you can't let it have so many meanings - you have to be direct," he said.

Other songwriters argue that using the word in context can defuse its power as a slur.

Luke Doucet, a Canadian roots-rock singer-songwriter who addresses stark social issues in his music, uses anti-gay slurs in his song *New York*, about a transgender boy looking to escape abuse and alienation by moving to New York. The intentionally hurtful words are spouted by another character as abuse. For the singer, they are necessary to portray what the boy, modelled on an actual person, was going through.

"I'm all for trying to restructure our popular vernacular or the lexicon ... so it doesn't put minorities in harm's way," Mr. Doucet said. "But I also think that censoring a song like [*Money For Nothing*], with a lyric like that, will only serve to fetishize those words in the first place."

Transgendered-rights bill headed for defeat in Tory-held Senate

February 10, 2011 By John Ibbitson
Globe and Mail

Private-member's bill clears House but victory is expected to be short-lived

Once again, the House of Commons has passed legislation against the will of Prime Minister Stephen Harper - this time, to protect the rights of transgender and transsexual citizens. Once again, it is likely to die in the Senate.

Bill C-389 would amend the Canadian Human Rights Act to protect the rights of transgender or transsexual citizens. It would prohibit discrimination on the basis of "gender identity" or "gender expression" in the workplace or elsewhere, and would amend the Criminal Code so that crimes committed against people because they are transgender or transsexual would be treated as hate crime.

Because it is a private member's bill, sponsored by NDP MP Bill Siksay, C-389 should have had little chance of clearing the House of Commons. But MPs from all parties, including several Conservatives, rallied behind the legislation, which passed third reading on Wednesday night by the narrow vote of 143 to 135.

While Mr. Harper and most of the Conservative caucus voted against the bill, six Conservatives stood to support it, including House Leader John Baird, Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon and Heritage Minister James Moore.

The NDP and Bloc Québécois supported the bill unanimously, but seven Liberals opposed it.

Critics have dubbed C-389 "the bathroom bill," claiming it would allow male sexual predators to invade women's washrooms and change rooms.

"Bill C-389 is a danger to our children," said Charles McVety, president of the Institute for Canadian Values. "If 'gender identity' is enshrined in the Criminal Code of Canada, any male at any time will be permitted in girls' bathrooms, showers and change rooms as long as they have an 'innate feeling' of being female."

The bill's supporters say nothing in the bill would change the criminal prohibitions against voyeurism. But the debate is likely to be short-circuited in any case, since the legislation has little chance of making it through the Senate.

The Conservatives, who have a majority in the upper house, have adopted the tactic of using the Senate to block private members' bills passed by the House of Commons that don't accord with the government's agenda.

Legislation to force the government to act on climate change was defeated last year, while bills requiring Supreme Court judges to be bilingual, providing tax credits for university graduates who work in certain regions, and offering restitution for Italian Canadians interned during the Second World War lie in limbo.

Since Prime Minister Stephen Harper does not support the transgendered rights legislation, it may well face similar purgatory when it arrives in the Senate.

Marjory LeBreton, Government Leader in the Senate, said she "couldn't hazard a guess" as to how quickly C-389 might make it through the upper house. The vote will be free, she said. "Personally, I'm sort of ambivalent about it."

Mr. Siksay remains optimistic. "I don't think this is a partisan issue," he said in an interview, "it's a human rights issue." The Senate has risen above factional interest in support of human rights before, he said, and he is counting on it to do so again.

Even if the bill does progress through the Senate, a spring election over the upcoming budget is becoming increasingly likely, which means that any legislation that isn't on the brink of royal assent is likely to perish.

Those fighting to protect the rights of sexual minorities won a moral victory with the passage of C-389 through the House. It may be the only victory they are able to enjoy.

Ottawa's latest citizenship guide restores reference to same-sex rights

March 14, 2011 By John Ibbitson
Globe and Mail

Revised immigration handbook also includes expanded section on War of 1812 ahead of bicentennial

New Canadians learn about forced marriage, gay marriage and more about the War of 1812 in the latest edition of the Conservative government's citizenship guide.

The handbook, released Monday, is designed to equip people preparing for their citizenship test with a solid background in Canada's history, institutions and values.

When the first edition of *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship* came out in 2009, it raised eyebrows on two fronts: It was far more robust in celebrating the role of the Queen and in promoting Canadian history and patriotism than were previous guides. This, on the whole, was seen as a positive development, though some on the left smelled conservative revisionism in the rewrite.

More controversially, reference to the equality of rights for gays and lesbians, including the right to marry, was excised from the first edition, although Citizenship and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney insisted it was an accidental oversight. The reference is back in for the second edition, though without any historical context, along with an expanded section on the War of 1812. (Next year marks the 200th anniversary of the war.)

The new version of the guide also adds "forced marriage" to honour killings and female genital mutilation as "gender-based violence" that is "severely punished under Canada's criminal laws."

In recent years, voices have questioned whether new Canadians sufficiently understand and embrace the idea of what it means to be Canadian. But immigrants may well know more about the country's history and values than many people born here.

For example, the very first page of the guide points out that every new Canadian must swear or affirm "that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Queen of Canada, Her Heirs and Successors and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada and fulfill my duties as a Canadian citizen."

"It is a remarkably simple yet powerful principle," the guide explains. "Canada is personified by the Sovereign just as the Sovereign is personified by Canada."

Parents fight Catholic school board on sexual orientation teachings

May 21, 2011 By Jane Switzer
The National Post

The Toronto District Catholic School Board has become the last in the province to pass the Equity and Inclusive Education policy, ending a divisive debate on the policy's perceived emphasis on sexual orientation.

After nearly four hours of debate Thursday, the board voted 7-4 to pass the province-mandated policy. Introduced in 2009, it requires all publicly funded schools to address "ongoing incidents of discrimination" by the 2011-12 school year. This includes Catholic and French-language schools, which are publicly funded in Ontario.

The province identifies homophobia and cyberbullying as major concerns, but some Catholic parents aren't happy that sexual orientation is identified as a form of discrimination in the board's policy, which aims to "improve student achievement, well-being and to close achievement gaps for students by identifying, addressing and removing all barriers and forms of discrimination."

Christians are taught to "love the sinner and hate the sin," said Jacquie Guerron, chairwoman of the Roman Catholic Parents Coalition. Five of her six children are enrolled at TDCSB elementary and high schools and she does not approve of children openly discussing homosexuality in the classroom.

"They cannot come and tell us what we should teach our children and tell our children that it's OK to have two moms and two dads and to have homosexual relationships and that sex [outside of marriage] is not a sin," she said.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines homosexual acts as "intrinsically disordered," and implores homosexuals to be chaste.

Over the course of a weekend, Ms. Guerron and members of the coalition gathered nearly 2,400 signatures requesting the TDCSB trustees vote to reject or amend the board's draft policy. The petition requested that trustees add explicit language that requires "full teaching of the church regarding homosexual acts" when sexual orientation is discussed, to "eliminate ambiguity around secular terms" like homophobia, and to "eliminate sexual orientation as a prohibited ground for discrimination."

Board chairwoman Ann Andrachuck said the agenda was "hijacked" by people looking to identify specific groups within the policy. The school board has always had policies in place to protect all students from discrimination, she said, but adjusted its guidelines to fall in line with provincial requirements. "When you start identifying individual groups, you essentially segregate and you're not being inclusive in the policy," she said. "We have to address the needs

of all, but it would be inappropriate to start segregating and identifying individual groups within the policy.”

Though Ms. Guerron claims the policy will affect the way children are taught, Ms. Andrachuck said this is misinformation. “We can’t stop people from saying what they want to say, but what we taught in school yesterday before we passed this policy is exactly what we’re teaching today and next week and going forward.”

Gay-straight alliances, or GSAs, are still banned in TDCSB schools.

Students at St. Joseph Catholic Secondary School in Mississauga, in the Dufferin-Peel board, faced bullying and online threats after going public with their intention to start a gay-straight alliance earlier this year, but still plan to hold an anti-homophobia event at the school on June 3.

For a more illustrated example, Halton Catholic District School Board chairwoman Alice Ann Lemay told Xtra that the board “doesn’t allow Nazi groups either. Gay-straight alliances are banned because they are not within the teachings of the Catholic Church.” She later apologized.

For her part, Ms. Andrachuck said the Toronto Catholic board “doesn’t recommend the development of any specific type of groups” that are contrary to the teachings of the church.

Burnaby's policy on homophobic bullying meets opposition from parents

May 24, 2011 By Sunny Dhillon
Globe and Mail

The Burnaby School District is accused of promoting a 'hidden political agenda' with a proposal to educate students about sexual diversity

Tired of the taunts and afraid of the ever-increasing shoves, Kaitlin Burnett considered giving up on school after her Burnaby classmates learned she was a lesbian.

Ms. Burnett went on to receive her diploma, but only after switching schools because of the incessant bullying. Now 25 and preparing for graduate studies, the community activist said the high school experience appears to be somewhat easier for today's youth.

So it was all the more surprising when a policy by the Burnaby School District to address homophobic bullying by giving teachers material that would allow them to instruct students on its impact met opposition from a parents group that said it smacks of indoctrination.

"All it will do is teach tolerance and acceptance and help students to understand that LGBTQ people are part of their community and are not to be feared," Ms. Burnett said of the proposal, known as Policy 5.45.

"You can't teach someone to be gay any more than you can teach someone to be straight."

The policy, which is still in the draft stage, was developed over a two-year period. The goal as stated in the document is "to ensure that all members of the school community learn to work together in an atmosphere of respect and safety, free from homophobia."

But a group called Parents' Voice has spoken strongly against the policy and launched numerous protests, the latest of which was scheduled for Tuesday evening.

Gordon World, one of the group's spokesmen, said the policy isn't necessary because the district's code of conduct already includes sexual orientation as a protected right. He also accused the district of failing to consult parents properly.

In a news release, Parents' Voice blasted the school board for what it called a "hidden political agenda."

"We're simply saying that this gives too much breadth and width to activist teachers to preach, to indoctrinate, to unduly influence minds that are still in the formative stages," Mr. World said in an interview.

When asked what the outcome of this scenario could be and whether it would lead to more gay youth, Mr. World said he couldn't speculate.

When asked if homosexuality is a choice, the bike business owner said he was unsure.

"In some instances, it would appear that there is a lifestyle choice that is made, be it something traumatic or be it hard-wired in," he added.

Parents' Voice has objected to some of the wording in the draft policy. It defines "heterosexism" as "the mistaken assumption that all people are heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior and the norm by which all other sexual orientation and gender identities are measured." The document goes on to say "heterosexism perpetuates negative stereotypes and is dangerous to individuals and communities."

Larry Hayes, in his third term as a trustee and the board's chair, said some of the wording still has to be revised but that's what draft versions are for.

Mr. Hayes laughed off any suggestion that a hidden political agenda is at work.

"We're looking for a change of attitude in the district, we're not changing curriculum. We may make more LGBTQ-friendly material available to teachers in an age-appropriate way, but it's still all curriculum that's approved by the Ministry of Education. We're not doing anything dramatic as far as what's going to happen in the classroom."

When asked if the protest might be an example of homophobia, Mr. Hayes said it was likely just a misunderstanding.

Seven trustees will vote on the policy. The public has until June 4 to submit feedback. The topic has already been discussed at multiple board meetings. Mr. Hayes hopes enough information is compiled for the board to move forward by the end of this school year.

Twelve school districts in B.C. have already established similar LGBTQ policies.

Sarah Larsen, an elementary school teacher who was on the committee that developed the policy, said it would allow teachers to address LGBTQ issues more openly if they arise in the classroom.

Ms. Larsen said she's spoken with concerned parents, and once they hear how little it will affect day-to-day classroom activities, they're in favour.

Jennifer Mezei, chair of the Burnaby District Parent Advisory Council, said the policy was discussed at one of its meetings and the majority of parents agreed with its intent.

With public warnings, police walk a fine line between safety and victim-blaming

June 6, 2011 By Tristin Hopper
National Post

Police, wary of victim-blaming, are walking an ever-thinner tightrope when issuing public safety warnings to women.

On Saturday, Edmonton became the latest city to host a SlutWalk — gatherings of scantily dressed women protesting victim-blaming. The walks, in more than 60 cities across Europe, Australia and North America, were spurred by a January comment by Toronto Police Constable Michael Sanguinetti that women should “avoid dressing like sluts” in order not to be victimized. As one sign read at the April 3 SlutWalk in Toronto, “Don’t tell us how to dress, tell men not to rape.”

Police have taken notice. Departments across Canada have denounced Const. Sanguinetti’s comments, and at Saskatoon’s SlutWalk on May 28, Saskatoon Police Chief Clive Weighill even made an appearance. “We want to show that the Saskatoon Police Service is a very progressive service and we take this seriously,” he said.

However, in the wake of the movement, police are finding that issuing even standard safety warnings to women is becoming fraught. What would have been considered routine public safety pronouncements are now being viewed through the highly politicized lens of the SlutWalk.

In March, Saanich Police Constable Dean Jantzen faced a storm of criticism after he issued a public warning for women to “travel in groups, stick to well-lit areas, be mindful of your drink, where you leave it, and who you accept a drink from.” The warning was raised in response to an incident in which a 20-year-old female pedestrian was randomly abducted off a street near the University of Victoria by a vehicle containing three men. She was sexually assaulted for a “lengthy period of time” before being released, said police.

Almost immediately, angry letters and phone calls began pouring in to the 199-officer department in response to Const. Jantzen’s warning. Organizers in Vancouver cited Const. Jantzen’s comments as helping to spur the Vancouver SlutWalk, saying it was proof that victim-blaming still existed on the West Coast. Const. Jantzen, shaken by the response, defends the warning.

“Quite frankly, we have a responsibility to caution our community when we think it’s appropriate — to do otherwise wouldn’t be appropriate,” he said. At the time, Const. Jantzen notes that he was being asked by local journalists if he had any “messages for the women in the community.”

“It’s sort of a damned if you do, damned if you don’t type situation,” he said.

There was no public outcry 12 months earlier — before the climate of politicization over such things took hold with the SlutWalks — when a similar warning was issued to Victoria women following the discovery of the charred body of Kimberly Proctor on a Victoria hiking trail. At the time, police did not know whether Ms. Proctor’s murder had been random or targeted.

“Until we know the answers to the questions involved, we have a duty to warn the public about their personal safety,” said Cpl. Darren Lagan, spokesman for the Vancouver Island RCMP. “If it’s a warning that people don’t want to hear or they don’t appreciate it they can ignore it.”

While women receive a particularly large share of public warnings, police also routinely issue alerts to seniors, parents and various minority groups. In 2007, Halifax Police took the rare step of issuing a warning to the gay community after a pair of seemingly random murders that were suspected to be hate crimes.

“The police weren’t telling anybody what to do, but it was a warning that if you’re engaging in this activity, be conscious of the risks involved,” said Kevin Kindred, spokesman for the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project, a Halifax-based gay rights group. He noted that before issuing the release, the police met with members of the gay community to hammer out the best wording for the warning.

“Victim-blaming is a serious problem, but I think some people run to that concept far too readily,” said Mr. Kindred. “I would not use the term victim-blaming to describe efforts to remind people what they can do to mitigate risks to themselves.”

Police are not just duty-bound to issue a warning, they are legally responsible. In 1998, a Toronto woman known to the public as Jane Doe won an 11-year legal battle against the Toronto Police for failing to prevent her 1986 sexual assault by serial rapist Paul Callow. Both the rapist and his tactics were known to police at the time of Ms. Doe’s assault, but they failed to make the information public.

“Warnings should have enough information for women to take appropriate steps,” said Simona Jellinek, a Toronto sexual-assault lawyer. “There’s a huge difference between saying to someone, ‘walking in a dark alley may not be the best thing to do’ and the unfortunate comments by [Michael Sanguinetti].”

Still, women become frustrated when facing a constant stream of police warnings, said Janine Benedet, a law professor and violence-against-women researcher at the University of British Columbia. In cases where women’s safety is more at risk — such as a serial rapist — the police should simply state the facts and allow women to figure out for themselves what steps to take. “I really don’t think women need to be told again not to walk alone,” she said.

In 2008, police in Edmonton advised residents to be “diligent in locking their doors and windows” after a series of sexual assaults on women in their homes. “Locking your windows is not going to prevent rape,” said Lise Gotelli, a women’s studies professor at the University of Alberta. “All it does is advance this pervasive view that it’s women’s responsibility to solve sexual assault by constraining their behaviour.”

She said the Edmonton police are now “scrupulous” in making sure its news releases don’t contain anything that could be seen as victim-blaming. At the same time, the service has ramped up its “rapist blaming” with “Don’t be that Guy,” a male-focused anti-sexual assault campaign. One bus ad features a woman passed out face-first on a couch with the text “just because she isn’t saying no doesn’t mean she’s saying yes.” Posters mounted above urinals in Edmonton bars carried the particularly blunt tagline, “Just because she’s drunk doesn’t mean she wants to f–k.”

Behavioural tips for women are notably rare in Toronto Police news releases. In a May 30 release, for instance, the police noted that a man attacked and sexually assaulted a 19-year-old woman near Eglinton and Don Mills — but included no “travel in groups”-style safety tips. However, after a May 6 sexual assault on York University Toronto Police did issue an alert for students to be “extra vigilant, travel in pairs and avoid less populated areas of the campus.”

“We’re not in the business of fearmongering. However, the public need to know when there is potential for members of the public to be victimized,” said Constable Wendy Drummond. Even though police warnings may sometimes seem like common sense, they still have an impact, she said. “People let their guard down.”

Rainbows banned at Mississauga Catholic school

June 7, 2011 By Andrea Houston
Xtra.ca

Despite a ban on any rainbows at the St Joseph Catholic Secondary School anti-homophobia event June 3, the student organizers found a creative way to get their message across: hiding rainbows inside the cupcakes.

Leanne Iskander, 16, who founded the school's "unofficial" gay-straight alliance in March, tells *Xtra* the Dufferin-Peel Catholic School Board put the kibosh on displaying any rainbows at their information booth.

"We brought signs and posters with rainbows, and we were told that we can't put them up," says Iskander, who was recently named the 2011 honoured dyke and youth grand marshal. "They said rainbows are associated with Pride. There's so many other things that a rainbow could be. It's ridiculous."

The teacher who delivered the news told Iskander the decision came from the board. "The board wasn't there, but they knew about the event," she says.

Since rainbows couldn't be displayed openly and proudly, the students baked rainbows into the cupcakes by dyeing the batter in a rainbow of colours. The cupcakes were sold for 50 cents each, raising about \$200 for charity.

But the students couldn't donate the money to any gay, lesbian or trans charitable organization, such as the LGBT Youth Line. "We asked if we could donate to the money to the Youth Line and the board said no. We were told to donate to Covenant House, a Catholic homeless shelter."

Bruce Campbell, spokesperson for the board, could not be reached for comment.

Casey Oraa, chair of the political action committee for Queer Ontario (QO), has been supporting the students since they first submitted the GSA proposal. He says the rejection of the rainbow flag and the board's insistence on benefiting a Catholic charity rather than one chosen by the students proves administrators have no interest in diversity.

QO supplied the students with several materials for the event, but many were rejected by the board, including the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation's *Shout Out Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia and Heterosexism*, a booklet designed to educate young people on issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity; an AIDS Committee of Toronto flyer; and information on trans health, he says.

"We proposed a whole bunch of resources and only about four got approved, and the ones that were approved were censored," Iskander says. "They wouldn't let us have this one booklet because it had one or two sentences on safe sex."

Oraa says it's absurd to ban the rainbow flag, but it's completely in keeping with the Catholic board's treatment of queer students.

"The Catholic board gave the students a carrot to try to silence them when they announced the anti-bullying clubs. But it's not enough and it's not meeting the needs of youth," Oraa says. "The students recognize that and they are fighting for what they want."

"Nothing the schools do surprises me anymore. Not allowing the rainbow flag? They have no concept of diversity. [The board] is pushing back because Leanne is a problem for the school. She's also a problem for Catholic school boards and the Ministry of Education. Leanne's a problem in the best possible way, even more than she even realizes. It's fantastic she's a problem."

GSAs started making headlines in January after *Xtra* reported a ban on the student clubs by the Halton Catholic District School Board. Board chair Alice Anne LeMay told *Xtra* then that the board "doesn't allow Nazi groups either. Gay-straight alliances are banned because they are not within the teachings of the Catholic Church."

In February, *Xtra* revealed there are no GSAs at any Ontario Catholic school. Then, in April, all Ontario Catholic boards were instructed to allow "anti-bullying groups," but a silent ban remains on all student groups focused on gay, lesbian and trans issues and group names can't contain the word gay. GSAs are prohibited because "they lead to activism."

Iskander has already announced that the group plans to bring their fight to Toronto's Pride parade this year under the newly formed, student-led, student-driven contingent dubbed Catholic Students for GSAs.

Principal Frances Jacques doesn't want the students telling everyone at Pride what school they attend. "She's actually fine with it, she just doesn't want [Pride] connected to the school, so we can't say the school name or anything," Iskander says.

Iskander says it's more important to get the message out. To do that, the group plans to make buttons. Iskander is now appealing to the community for donations to raise about \$1,500.

"Marching in Pride is important to us because it will allow us to advocate for GSAs in Catholic Schools to a large audience," she says. "Handing out buttons will be an excellent way to spread the message that GSAs are needed in Catholic schools."

Oraa says Queer Ontario will continue to support the youth throughout the summer to advocate for GSAs in all Ontario secondary schools.

"The buttons are important as another way to spread the message and show solidarity for the cause across Ontario," he says. "Some people think by now allowing the anti-bullying clubs, the issue is over. But it's not. The youth want to hand these buttons out to their fellow students, public or Catholic."

International News

South African relief as Caster Semenya gets back on track

July 7, 2010 By Pumza Fihlani
BBC News, Johannesburg

South Africa breathed a collective sigh of relief when medical experts said the country's 19-year old "golden girl", athlete Caster Semenya, was free to hit the track once more.

None could be more thrilled than the world 800m champion herself, who has endured nearly a year of media scrutiny and speculation about her gender and the future of her career.

"I am thrilled to enter the global athletics arena once again and look forward to competing with all the disputes behind me," she said in a statement.

South Africans rallied behind Ms Semenya after news that the International Association of Athletics Federations had called for tests to verify Ms Semenya's gender before she competed in the World Athletics Championships in Berlin last August.

Amid cries of racism, the fall-out was huge and politicians from different parties pledged their support for the young girl from Limpopo Province.

The country's sports minister threatened "World War Three" should Ms Semenya be barred from competing in future games.

And she was hailed as a heroine upon her return from Germany, with people at the airport carrying placards: "Caster 100% female".

'Heartbreaking'

The mood then turned to anger as conflicting reports came out about whether Athletics South Africa (ASA) had carried out the tests in secret, without Ms Semenya's knowledge.

Former ASA president Leonard Chuene was suspended for his handling of the case after it was revealed he had in fact ordered gender verification tests before she went to Berlin.

Ms Semenya's coach, Wilfred Daniels, who resigned over the poor handling of the affair, said collective blame should be taken for the controversy.

"All parties concerned should be ashamed of the manner in which this was handled right from the beginning," he told the BBC hours after Ms Semenya's all-clear announcement.

"It would be heartbreaking if procedures are not put in place by South African authorities and the IAAF to make sure the athletes concerned are not exposed to the same kind of trauma that Caster was exposed to."

Many South Africans feel lessons about the importance of protecting privacy should be learned from the teenager's ordeal.

Women and Children's Minister Noluthando Mayende Sibiyi said her department would strive for this.

"The privacy of Caster was violated very, very seriously," she told the BBC.

"We need to ensure that the laws of the country are tightened so that the rights of people are observed and protected in that regard."

The minister had written a letter to the United Nations last year complaining about the "blatant disregard for Caster's human dignity".

"Nobody should be made to suffer in the way Caster was made to suffer in the past several months," she wrote.

Bitter

Ms Sibiyi says it is unfortunate Ms Semenya had to wait nearly a year for the case to be cleared up.

"We hope she will continue to be an inspiration to those looking to her as an example of a young woman determined to succeed in her chosen field. I am very happy about this," she said.

Mr Daniels said his former star runner should at last be able to enjoy her achievement in Berlin.

"When we were in Berlin and even after our return she never had the opportunity to enjoy her great achievement," he said.

"Now it's time for her to put the last 10 months behind her and begin a wonderful career of international athletics that we hope will bring further glory to her and her country."

Other South Africans still remain bitter.

"They could have treated her with a lot more integrity and dignity," says Louise Daniels, 40, a florist in Johannesburg.

"I think it's wonderful that she can race, she has got huge talent."

Mpendulo Hashe, 30, a lab assistant, agrees.

"Clearing her to compete is the least that could be done, she was treated unfairly," he says.

"But let's forget about all of that and wish her all the best."

Others feel that the IAAF was justified in asking questions.

"If the tests showed that she has male hormones - then yes that does give her an unfair advantage," says Motlatse Motloga, a 20-year-old university student.

"I'm glad that she is competing because it's what she loves but those questions needed to be asked because I'm sure many people who watched her run were asking themselves the same question."

Another student, Pathuxolo Manana, 22, says he does not believe Ms Semenya was mistreated or had her rights "violated".

"This has happened in the past to other athletes.

"Of course if could have been handled better but it had to be done."

Gay Community Sends Video Message: It Gets Better

October 7, 2010 By Leanne Italie
Associated Press

David Valdes Greenwood was 15 when he climbed to the highest arch of a bridge in his small Maine town and got ready to jump.

It was 1982. He was distraught over a pastor's Sodom and Gomorrah sermon that his homosexuality would bring God's wrath down on everyone around him. He didn't think his friends, family and fellow churchgoers deserved to suffer because he was gay.

"It had never occurred to me that I would wound people by my simply existing," Greenwood said. "And it seemed kind of true."

So he became that boy on the Sophie May Lane Bridge in Norridgewock. Thankfully, a neighbor walked by and shouted for him to stop fooling around up there — and he listened, then he fled town the first chance he got.

All grown up, married to a man he loves with a 5-year-old daughter they adore, the 43-year-old Greenwood hopes gay young people in pain will now listen to him. So do hundreds of others who, like Greenwood, have taken to YouTube to make a promise: If you hang on through the self-doubt, the coming out years, through the slurs, the isolation at school and being slammed up against the lockers, through the rejection and anger of parents and grandparents, it gets better. A whole lot better.

Moved by a recent spate of suicides by teens who were believed to be victims of anti-gay bullying, syndicated relationship and sex advice columnist Dan Savage began the YouTube project Sept. 21, hoping it would turn into exactly what it is: A destination for gay young people to receive comfort from a variety of perspectives on their Internet home turf.

There's a gay cop and an ex-Mormon, a young Muslim from a conservative Pakistani home, gay parents showing off photos of their kids and an openly gay Baptist minister.

Mixed in with somber stories of suicide attempts are a sassy lesbian cartoon, a video with gay men surrounded by shirtless male hotties, and a sprinkling of celebrities: Ellen DeGeneres, Tim Gunn from "Project Runway," Chris Colfer from "Glee" and blogger Perez Hilton, who went to a Jesuit high school in Miami and said in his contribution, "I would have loved to have had me around when I was a teenager."

There are gay people who confess THEY were the bullies and people with guitars singing. Cities and campuses (San Francisco, Smith College) are represented. There's also a lot of anger and frustration that the middle and high school years for so many gay youth haven't changed all that much since Greenwood was a kid.

"I really, really believed that kids killing themselves over being gay was a relic of another time," Greenwood, a writer and English instructor at Tufts University near Boston, said in an interview. "I mean, it was nearly 30 years ago when I climbed my bridge. I thought that even kids who were bullied now had online communities or other ways of feeling hope about their identities."

Savage, a gay rights activist who also writes books, travels the country speaking, but he knows many towns and schools will never invite him. That's one reason he set up the "It Gets Better" channel on YouTube and asked for video stories, starting with himself and his partner, Terry.

In two weeks, the channel has racked up more than a million views, the number of videos has exploded from a handful to 1,000 submitted, comment threads are growing and e-mails are pouring in from bullied and closeted teens.

"We're totally overwhelmed by the response," Savage said. "The most gratifying are parents sitting down at the computer and watching with their kids. So many kids, they're bullied at school by their peers, they go home to homophobic parents who bully them, and then they're dragged to church on Sunday for more bullying from the pulpit."

Sitting in an airport reading about the deaths of Minnesota 15-year-old Justin Aaberg and 15-year-old Billy Lucas, who killed himself in his family's barn in Greenburg, Ind., Savage knew the power of his own story, his years in Catholic boys schools as the son of a church deacon and a lay minister.

"High school was bad," Savage said. "I was picked on because I liked musicals. I was obviously gay."

But his parents came around. So did his partner's family in Spokane, Wash., where Terry was stuffed into bathroom stalls and school officials dismissed his parents' complaints about bullying as a natural consequence of being gay. They've been together 16 years and adopted their 12-year-old son, D.J., at birth.

"I didn't think when I came out to my parents in the very early 1980s when AIDS was slamming into the gay community that I would ever be a dad," Savage said in their video.

It's been 40 years since Stephen Sprinkle was in high school. At 58, he rocks gently in an office chair, his trim gray beard and gentle smile offering a touch of Santa Claus in his video. He describes his Christian upbringing in rural North Carolina and his decision to deny himself an "affectional life" as a gay man when he received his call to the ministry in his 20s.

"It made me lonely for a lot of years," he tells his viewers, as he constantly looked over his shoulder and lived in fear he would slip up and reveal his secret.

It wasn't until he was hired as an assistant professor at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas, that he decided to come out "utterly, fully and completely," surviving attempts to have him fired and earning tenure, Sprinkle said in an interview.

Since posting the video, he's heard from several young people, including one so upset that Sprinkle tracked down professional help.

"He's 18. He's a closeted religious person and he told me he was afraid he was going to explode," Sprinkle said. "He kept asking over and over, 'Does God hate me?' I said 'Heavens, no. God created you beautiful and complete. God makes no mistakes like that.'"

Nicholas Wheeler, a graphic designer who grew up Mormon in Idaho, said he no longer thinks much about God. He made his video because he knows that other kids from conservative, religious backgrounds "don't make it out alive. It breaks my heart."

Wheeler, 26, said being gay didn't fit into the picture in his head of how his life would turn out. In deep denial for years, he didn't come out until 2008, after going on a two-year church mission trip at 20. He had to dismiss his thoughts "of gay people as evil and unhappy."

His turning point came after he moved to Salt Lake City, where he met lots of gay ex-Mormons, and stopped thinking of himself as a sinner. Things aren't perfect, but "I'm leaps and bounds happier than I was," he said in an interview.

So is 28-year-old Bruce Ortiz, who works in marketing in Chicago. He tried to kill himself with a bottle of pills as a freshman in college. Healing was slow but steady after he opened up to his parents about being gay. He and his partner just bought a house together and are thinking about starting a family.

Ortiz's video message to young people: "It's not worth the attempt. Just go out there, find your support system, find that support system within yourself, because life does get better."

First transgender athlete to play in NCAA basketball

November 3, 2010 By the CNN Wire Staff
CNN

George Washington University junior Kye Allums will play women's basketball again this year. But he will now play the role of a brother, not a sister, to his teammates.

Everything will be the same when he takes to the court in the university's season opener later this month. Just that Allums, 21, will be identified as a man, becoming the first openly transgender player in NCAA Division I basketball.

"This means a lot," Allums said in a statement. "I didn't choose to be born in this body and feel the way I do."

The 5 foot 11 inch guard from Hugo, Minnesota, said the university has been supportive of his decision. But he will not be permitted to undergo testosterone therapy as long as he is competing.

A report last month from the National Center on Lesbian Rights and the Women's Sports Foundation provided guidance on the matter, saying that transgender student athletes "should be allowed to participate in any gender-segregated sports activity so long as that athlete's use of hormone therapy, if any, is consistent with the national governing body's existing policies on banned medications."

Robert Chernak, senior vice provost at George Washington, said the university is fully accepting of Allums decision to live as a male student.

"Kye has informed the university that he will not begin any medical or drug protocols while a student-athlete," Chernak said. "Kye will continue to be a member of the women's basketball team.

"Kye has informed his teammates, and the university, with Kye's consent, has informed athletics staff and others, as appropriate."

Allums grew up as a tomboy and later tried behaving and dressing the way teenage girls do, according to an interview with Outsports, an online gay sports site.

"I decided to transition, that is change my name and pronouns because it bothered me to hide who I am, and I am trying to help myself and others to be who they are," Allums said in his statement.

In his sophomore year, he began telling people he was a man trapped in a woman's body.

"I told my teammates first, and they, including my coaches, have supported me," he said. "My teammates have embraced me as the big brother of the team. They have been my family, and I love them all."

Daily pill helps prevent HIV infection in men: study

November 23, 2010 By Maggie Fox
Reuters

WASHINGTON -- A once-a-day pill combining two Gilead Sciences Inc AIDS drugs reduced the HIV infection rate by nearly 44 per cent in high-risk gay and bisexual men, researchers reported on Tuesday.

Men who took the pill the most consistently had more than a 70 per cent lower risk over two years, the U.S. government study in Peru, Thailand, South Africa and elsewhere found.

It is the first study to show that taking drugs before infection can reduce the risk of HIV transmission and has the potential to be a weapon in the fight against the fatal and incurable virus, the researchers said.

It makes for a trifecta in AIDS prevention research, coming months after a study released in July showing a gel could help protect women against the virus and one last year showing a vaccine had a partially protective effect.

“These results represent a major advance in HIV prevention research,” Dr. Kevin Fenton of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a statement.

The international team of researchers studied 2,499 gay, bisexual and transgender men at high risk of infection with the AIDS virus. Half took Truvada, a pill containing Gilead’s drugs tenofovir and emtricitabine, and half got a dummy pill.

After about 2 1/2 years, 100 of the men became infected with the human immunodeficiency virus that causes AIDS – 36 who took Truvada and 64 who received a placebo.

“This means that the daily use of Truvada reduced the risk of HIV acquisition by 43.8 per cent,” Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which funded the study, told reporters.

People often forget to take pills, so the researchers took regular blood tests. The men who had active drug in their blood 90 per cent of the time had a 73 per cent lower risk of infection than those taking placebo.

All those who were given Truvada and became infected had either very low levels of the drug in their blood or none at all.

“We think the best explanation for why the drug was not in the body is that the people were not taking it,” Dr. Robert Grant of the Gladstone Institutes and the University of California San Francisco, who led the study, said in a telephone interview.

Mr. Fauci said the study showed the drug was safe, caused only mild side effects and the men who took it did not develop resistance. This meant the drug stayed effective against the virus, with the exception of three cases who were already HIV-infected when they started taking the pills.

All 2,499 men will be offered “Prep” – pre-exposure prevention – with free Truvada pills. One thing the researchers want to find out is if the men will take the pills more consistently now that they know they work, are safe, and that they are getting the real drug and not a placebo.

Gilead supplied Truvada but was not otherwise involved in the study, paid for by NIAID and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The drug costs \$1,000 a month in the United States but Gilead lets several Indian companies make cheap generic versions costing as little as 40 cents a dose for use in Africa and other developing nations.

Dr. Howard Jaffe, president of the Gilead Foundation, said the company was not planning any price changes.

Mr. Fauci said some people were already getting Truvada “off label” from their doctors to prevent HIV from their doctors. But Dr. Jaffe said he was not sure if Gilead would ask the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for permission to market the drug for preventing HIV in addition to treating the infection.

“It’s a debate that really is bigger than Gilead,” Dr. Jaffe said in a telephone interview.

Activists called for immediate wider testing.

“Every year 2.7 million people are infected with HIV, and Prep has the potential to help bring those numbers down. We have a moral obligation and a public health imperative to quickly act on these results,” said Mitchell Warren, executive director of the HIV advocacy group AVAC.

L.P.G.A. Will Allow Transgender Players to Compete

December 1, 2010 By Katie Thomas

L.P.G.A. players have voted to eliminate the tour's requirement that players be "female at birth" and to allow transgender athletes to compete, less than two months after a transgender woman sued the tour in federal court, arguing that the rule violated California civil rights law.

"Steps will be taken in the coming weeks to make the appropriate changes in the language of the Constitution," Commissioner Mike Whan said in a statement. The players made their decision Tuesday during end-of-the-year meetings in Orlando, Fla., at the L.P.G.A. Tour Championship.

The L.P.G.A. was sued in October by Lana Lawless, a retired police officer who had sex reassignment surgery in 2005 and who won the 2008 women's world championship in long-drive golf. Lawless sought to play in L.P.G.A. qualifying tournaments after Long Drivers of America, which oversees the world championship she won, changed its rules to match the L.P.G.A.'s. Lawless also sued Long Drivers of America. A lawyer for that organization declined to comment.

"Ms. Lawless finds it regrettable that she had to bring a lawsuit to get somebody to follow the law, but is glad that the civil justice system in this instance worked," her lawyer, Christopher B. Dolan, said Wednesday.

The golfer Cristie Kerr told The Associated Press on Wednesday that the policy change was now a "dead issue."

"She can compete if she can qualify," Kerr said. "We certainly don't want to discriminate against anybody; that's not what the L.P.G.A. is about. And if she can qualify, she'll be able to play."

The L.P.G.A.'s policy shift follows similar changes made by other sports bodies to allow transgender athletes to compete, including the International Olympic Committee, the United States Golf Association, the Ladies Golf Union in Britain and the Ladies European Golf Tour.

The N.C.A.A. has also said that it is reviewing its policies regarding transgender athletes. A member of the George Washington women's basketball team, Kye Allums, came out this season as a transgender man. Allums has been permitted to play on the women's team because he has not undergone hormone treatments or sexual reassignment surgery.

Dolan said the L.P.G.A. players' decision reached beyond golf. "I think it's a victory for the transgender community," he said, "and that hopefully other women won't have to go through this just to have the right to play golf or any other sport."

Obama Signs Away ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’

December 22, 2010 By Sheryl Gay Stolberg
New York Times

WASHINGTON — The military’s longstanding ban on service by gays and lesbians came to a historic and symbolic end on Wednesday, as President Obama signed legislation repealing “don’t ask, don’t tell,” the contentious 17-year old Clinton-era law that sought to allow gays to serve under the terms of an uneasy compromise that required them to keep their sexuality a secret.

“No longer will tens of thousands of Americans in uniform be asked to live a lie or look over their shoulder,” Mr. Obama said during a signing ceremony in a packed auditorium at the Interior Department here. Quoting the chairman of his joint chiefs of staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, Mr. Obama went on, “Our people sacrifice a lot for their country, including their lives. None of them should have to sacrifice their integrity as well.”

The repeal does not immediately put a stop to “don’t ask, don’t tell.” Mr. Obama must still certify that changing the law to allow homosexual and bisexual men and women to serve openly in all branches of the military will not harm readiness, as must Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Admiral Mullen, before the military can implement the new law. But the secretary and the admiral have backed Mr. Obama, who said ending “don’t ask, don’t tell” was a topic of his first meeting with the men. He praised Mr. Gates for his courage; Admiral Mullen, who was on stage with the president during the signing ceremony here, received a standing ovation.

While there is still significant resistance within the military to the change in policy, especially within the Marine Corps, at least one proponent — Representative Barney Frank, the openly gay Democrat from Massachusetts — insisted on Wednesday that this latest effort to integrate the armed services will go more smoothly than did racial or gender integration.

“Reality will very soon make it clear that there is nothing to worry about,” Mr. Frank said. He called the signing the biggest civil rights moment in the nation since the signing of voting rights legislation in the 1960s. “If you can fight for your country, you can do anything,” he said.

In the years since President Bill Clinton first enacted “don’t ask, don’t tell” in 1993, some 17,000 service members have been discharged under the policy. While many gay people in the military are now breathing a sigh of relief, the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, which represents soldiers facing charges under the policy, is warning its members that they are “still at risk” because the repeal will not take full effect until 60 days after Mr. Obama, the defense secretary and admiral certify readiness.

“The bottom line is DADT is still in effect and it is not safe to come out,” the organization said.

For Mr. Obama, the ceremony — held at the Interior Department because the White House is tied up with holiday tours — marked yet another in a string of last-minute, bipartisan legislative triumphs, a surprising turnaround in the wake of the self-described “shellacking” his party took at the polls last month. He had already signed a bipartisan tax deal into law, and the Senate

appears headed on Wednesday to approve a new nuclear arms pact with Russia, which will give him a significant foreign policy victory as he wraps up the first half of his term. He looked relaxed and upbeat as he soaked up the energy from an enthusiastic crowd. For the gay rights movement, which has been frustrated with the pace of progress under Mr. Obama, Wednesday marked a celebratory turning point. “Thank you, Mr. President,” someone shouted, as Mr. Obama took the stage, prompting a round of other shouts: “Chicago’s in the house, Mr. President! You rock, Mr. President!” Mr. Obama pronounced himself overwhelmed.

The audience for the ceremony included a who’s who of gay activists, among them Frank Kameny, who was fired from a civilian job as an Army astronomer in 1957 — an act that prompted him to found a gay rights advocacy organization in Washington D.C. and to file a lawsuit which went all the way to the Supreme Court. In 1965 he picketed the White House, in the first ever demonstration there by gays.

Now white-haired at 85, Mr. Kameny also served as an enlisted Army soldier; he signed up in May 1943, he said, three days before he turned 18, and saw “front line combat” in Germany during World War II. He said he was asked if he had “homosexual tendencies” and denied it. “They asked, and I didn’t tell,” he said, “and I resented for 67 years that I had to lie.”

Ugandan Who Spoke Up for Gays Is Beaten to Death

January 27, 2011 By Jeffrey Gettleman
New York Times

NAIROBI, Kenya — David Kato knew he was a marked man.

As the most outspoken gay rights advocate in Uganda, a country where homophobia is so severe that Parliament is considering a bill to execute gay people, Mr. Kato had received a stream of death threats, his friends said. A few months ago, a Ugandan newspaper ran an antigay diatribe with Mr. Kato's picture on the front page under a banner urging, "Hang Them."

On Wednesday afternoon, Mr. Kato was beaten to death with a hammer in his rough-and-tumble neighborhood. Police officials were quick to chalk up the motive to robbery, but members of the small and increasingly besieged gay community in Uganda suspect otherwise.

"David's death is a result of the hatred planted in Uganda by U.S. evangelicals in 2009," Val Kalende, the chairwoman of one of Uganda's gay rights groups, said in a statement. "The Ugandan government and the so-called U.S. evangelicals must take responsibility for David's blood."

Ms. Kalende was referring to visits in March 2009 by a group of American evangelicals, who held rallies and workshops in Uganda discussing how to turn gay people straight, how gay men sodomized teenage boys and how "the gay movement is an evil institution" intended to "defeat the marriage-based society."

The Americans involved said they had no intention of stoking a violent reaction. But the antigay bill was drafted shortly thereafter. Some of the Ugandan politicians and preachers who wrote it had attended those sessions and said that they had discussed the legislation with the Americans.

After growing international pressure and threats from a few European countries to cut assistance — Uganda relies on hundreds of millions of dollars of aid — Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni, indicated that the bill would be scrapped.

But more than a year later, that has not happened, and the legislation remains a simmering issue in Parliament. Some political analysts say the bill could be passed in the coming months, after a general election in February that is expected to return Mr. Museveni, who has been in office for 25 years, to power.

On Thursday, Don Schmierer, one of the American evangelicals who visited Uganda in 2009, said Mr. Kato's death was "horrible."

"Naturally, I don't want anyone killed, but I don't feel I had anything to do with that," said Mr. Schmierer, who added that in Uganda he had focused on parenting skills. He also said that he had been a target of threats himself, recently receiving more than 600 messages of hate mail related to his visit.

“I spoke to help people,” he said, “and I’m getting bludgeoned from one end to the other.” Many Africans view homosexuality as an immoral Western import, and the continent is full of harsh homophobic laws. In northern Nigeria, gay men can face death by stoning. In Kenya, which is considered one of the more Westernized nations in Africa, gay people can be sentenced to years in prison.

But Uganda seems to be on the front lines of this battle. Conservative Christian groups that espouse antigay beliefs have made great headway in this country and wield considerable influence. Uganda’s minister of ethics and integrity, James Nsaba Buturo, who describes himself as a devout Christian, has said, “Homosexuals can forget about human rights.”

At the same time, American groups that defend gay rights have also poured money into Uganda to help the beleaguered gay community.

In October, a Ugandan newspaper called Rolling Stone (with a circulation of roughly 2,000 and no connection to the American magazine) published an article that included photos and the whereabouts of gay men and lesbians, including several well-known activists like Mr. Kato.

The paper said homosexuals were raiding schools and recruiting children, a belief that is quite widespread in Uganda and has helped drive the homophobia.

Mr. Kato and a few other activists sued the paper and won. This month, Uganda’s High Court ordered Rolling Stone to pay hundreds of dollars in damages and to cease publishing the names of people it said were gay.

But the danger remained.

“I had to move houses,” said Stosh Mugisha, a woman who is going through a transition to become a man. “People tried to stone me. It’s so scary. And it’s getting worse.”

On Thursday, Giles Muhame, Rolling Stone’s managing editor, said he did not think that Mr. Kato’s killing had anything to do with what his paper had published.

“There is no need for anxiety or for hype,” he said. “We should not overblow the death of one.”

But that one man was considered a founding father of Uganda’s nascent gay rights movement. In an interview in 2009, Mr. Kato shared his life story, how he was raised in a conservative family where “we grew up brainwashed that it was wrong to be in love with a man.”

He was a high school teacher who had graduated from some of Uganda’s best schools, and he moved to South Africa in the mid-1990s, where he came out. A few years ago, he organized what he claimed was Uganda’s first gay rights news conference in Kampala, the capital, and said he was punched in the face and cracked in the nose by police officers soon afterward.

Friends said that Mr. Kato had recently put an alarm system in his house and was killed by an acquaintance, someone who had been inside several times before and was seen by neighbors on Wednesday. Mr. Kato's neighborhood on the outskirts of Kampala is known as a rough one, where several people have recently been beaten to death with iron bars.

Judith Nabakooba, a police spokeswoman, said Mr. Kato's death did not appear to be a hate crime, though the investigation had just started. "It looks like theft, as some things were stolen," Ms. Nabakooba said.

But Nikki Mawanda, a friend who was born female and lives as a man, said: "This is a clear signal. You don't know who's going to do it to you."

Mr. Kato was in his mid-40s, his friends said. He was a fast talker, fidgety, bespectacled, slightly built and constantly checking over his shoulder, even in the envelope of darkness of an empty lot near a disco, where he was interviewed in 2009.

He said then that he wanted to be a "good human rights defender, not a dead one, but an alive one."

Kobe Bryant fined \$100,000 for gay slur

April 14, 2011 By Edecio Martinez
CBS/Associate Press

LOS ANGELES - Kobe Bryant has apologized to a president of a gay rights organization after having been fined \$100,000 by the NBA for using a derogatory anti-gay term in frustration over a referee's call.

NBA Commissioner David Stern announced the disciplinary action Wednesday, saying the distasteful words used by Bryant should never be tolerated.

The five-time NBA champion guard cursed and used a homophobic slur when referee Bennie Adams called a technical foul on him Tuesday night in the third quarter of Los Angeles' win over the Spurs. He also punched a chair and threw a towel during the outburst.

Gay rights groups condemned Bryant's actions and demanded a full apology after Bryant issued a statement explaining his words came out of anger. Bryant has 15 technical fouls this season.

"Kobe Bryant's comment during last night's game was offensive and inexcusable," Stern said, according to TMZ.

He added: "While I'm fully aware that basketball is an emotional game, such a distasteful term should never be tolerated... Kobe and everyone associated with the NBA know that insensitive or derogatory comments are not acceptable and have no place in our game or society."

On Wednesday, Bryant said his comments were out of frustration and not meant to offend.

"What I said last night should not be taken literally. My actions were out of frustration during the heat of the game, period," Bryant said in a statement issued through the Lakers. "The words expressed do NOT reflect my feelings towards the gay and lesbian communities and were NOT meant to offend anyone."

TMZ reported that Bryant said he planned to appeal the fine during an interview Wednesday with ESPN Radio.

The nation's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender civil rights organization, Human Rights Campaign, issued the following statement: "For better or worse, Kobe Bryant has created a teachable moment for the millions of fans -- many of them young -- who saw that outburst on the floor," said HRC President Joe Solmonese in a statement. "And the right thing to do now is to apologize and take responsibility for suggesting that the worst thing you can do to someone is to scream out a gay slur. This kind of homophobic outburst has dangerous consequences, even more so when it comes from a celebrity in the national spotlight."

Bryant later apologized for his actions on the phone to Solmonese, reports TMZ.

"I applaud Kobe Bryant for his swift apology. We had a very sincere conversation in which he expressed his heartfelt regret for the hurt that his words caused," Solmonese told TMZ.

Uganda's "kill the gays" bill shelved again

May 13, 2011 By Barry Malone
Reuters

KAMPALA - A Ugandan bill that mandated the death penalty for gays who are "repeat offenders" appeared to have been shelved again on Friday when it was not debated in parliament after provoking an international outcry.

Parliament speaker Edward Ssekandi dissolved the house on Friday and said there was not enough time to debate the bill. A new parliament is to be sworn in on Wednesday.

"I think we expected that this would happen," an lawmaker who did not want to be named, told Reuters. "The pressure had been too much over the last two years. It had to disappear."

The bill was also due for a hearing on Wednesday but did not appear on the order paper that day either.

Uganda's anti-gay movement won notoriety when the legislation was originally introduced in 2009.

U.S. President Barack Obama denounced it as "odious" and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni to express her strong concerns.

It was quietly shelved under such pressure but activists feared it would be passed after Museveni's February election victory. But the bill now appears to have been mothballed again after foreign activists increased campaigning this week, fearing it would be pushed through at the last minute.

"This was a dangerous bill and there is a lot of tension and riots in the country," Ugandan gay rights campaigner Bishop Christopher Senyonjo said after the parliamentary session ended.

"We feared that they may use this opportunity to do anything to anybody. This bill must never see the light of day as the mob could use this to inflict terrible crimes against people."

Many Ugandans resent the international attention, saying that while most people do not agree with homosexuality, those who backed the bill were a minority.

The bill could be reintroduced in the next parliamentary session, though a number of MPs told Reuters this was unlikely in view of the sustained criticism from foreign governments.

Though homosexuality is illegal in many African states, Uganda has recently earned a reputation as the "world's homophobia capital", to the frustration of many in the country.

David Kato, one of the country's most visible gay campaigners, was beaten to death with a hammer earlier this year after he was featured in an anti-gay newspaper that "outed" people it said were gay and called for them to be killed.

A man confessed to the murder after being arrested. Police said he had killed Kato after the activist made sexual advances.

Gay rights activists told Reuters at the time they feared police were covering up a motive of homophobia to protect the Western aid upon which the east African country relies.

Chaz Bono changes gender in the spotlight with surprising grace

May 18, 2011 By Sarah Hampson
Globe and Mail

The only child of Sonny and Cher talks about his relationship with his mother and his gender transition

In an ironic twist of fate, he lives up to the virtues implied by his original name, the one he hates, and not just because he was a girl.

Chastity.

"I always hated that name," Chaz Bono says. "I'm happy it's gone."

Still, there is one overriding quality to the exchanges he has in conversation about his new book, *Transition: The Story of How I Became a Man*, and the documentary, *Becoming Chaz*, an astonishing and brutally honest film, that calls it to mind.

That is a surprising grace. There's a clarity about him - a purity, if you will - in the sense that he's unequivocal and unabashed; calm and sure. If there was turmoil or fear before this point in his life - which he says there was - it's nowhere in his thoughtful answers, in the calm of his self-acceptance or in the bright, sudden smile he produces in moments of awkwardness.

Everything about the story of Chastity Bono, that blond little girl the world saw on her parents' seventies TV hit, *The Sonny & Cher Comedy Hour*, who grew up to be Chaz Bono, now legally a man, after having undergone transgender treatment and surgery, has the feel of a modern Greek tragedy, rife with mother-daughter tension, ego and finally, a stunning redemption.

Becoming Chaz, which made its debut at the Sundance Film Festival this year, has been met with enthusiastic applause. Moving and at times hard to watch - especially the part about surgery to remove his breasts - it puts a very human, emotional face on an often-misunderstood struggle.

"It has been great for me to see people react," the 42-year-old says over the phone from Los Angeles, where he lives with his fiancée, Jennifer Elia, who is also featured in the film and book. "When I decided to do this, I [had] finally reached a point where I stopped worrying about what other people thought."

But what one thinks is an unexpected insight into the nature of identity and the power of truth.

In the film, Mr. Bono unwittingly outshines his famous mother, Cher, who comes off as laughably solipsistic, eliciting giggles from the audience in one sequence where she remains speechless, eyes blinking, in an interview about her transgender son, her beautiful face a mask of her well-documented cosmetic procedures.

It's hard not to note the strange parallels and conflicts of their relationship. If her only child with her late first husband, Sonny Bono, is injecting himself with male hormones to become who he feels he really is, she has injected herself with age-defying agents to become who she no longer is. She appears to be the one out of touch with her authentic self. On the other hand, they both use body manipulation to create the self they crave - in his case, a man, and in hers, a babe on the eve of her 65th birthday.

"I've never thought about that," Mr. Bono replies with a voice so relaxed, he could be reclined on a sofa, stroking one of his hairless cats. "For me, it's really clear cut. This is a very difficult process for parents to go through ... My mother loves me. My mother has never rejected me. It's just been a process of her understanding it and becoming comfortable with it."

Here then is the high road, lined with compassion and deference, which he takes at every step. It's clear - most powerfully in the documentary, where emotions that might never be expressed in an interview or in print flash across the faces of those involved - that the mother-child relationship was a difficult one.

He was always marginalized because of his parents' celebrity. "I got a little bit lost in the shuffle," he allows. And yet that fame has governed his identity. "It did affect the course of my life, but, uh, I kind of look at it from a more metaphysical sense. I signed up for this before I stepped into this life, and there's a reason for it all." Notoriety as the child of Sonny and Cher is what denied him "the luxury to be able to transition privately so I really wanted to be able to tell my story, because if I didn't, other people would." Such an offensive defence is also why he wrote two previous books, *Family Outing: A Guide to the Coming-Out Process for Gays, Lesbians and Their Families* and *The End of Innocence*.

Even so, a mother like Cher raises difficult questions. With her hyper-sexualized midriff-baring femininity wasn't she a formidable example of what it means to be woman for a girl who never felt like one? And didn't that make their relationship fraught? "It was the expectation that she had about what her quote, unquote daughter would be like, and I didn't fit into that, so for her that was the difficult thing," he says, adding that he knew at 13 that he was a lesbian but still struggled with his gender. But couldn't some of his defiance to speak so openly about his gender confusion be seen as some comment on mother-daughter rivalry? "I wasn't rebelling against my mother or defying my mother," he says without missing a beat. "I was simply taking care of myself."

In doing so, he has eclipsed his mother, who appears to be hanging onto her fame with endless farewell tours and outlandish get-ups, none of which suggests grace. The gender transition - he has so far avoided genital surgery because he is not convinced about the results - has made him comfortable in his body for the first time. It was when he was a young woman, trying to make it in the music business, with streaked blond hair and make-up, that he was full of artifice. He gained weight as a direct result of not liking his female body, he explains. "I've already lost about 20 pounds since the beginning of the year." How's that for redemption? Here he is, newly famous for his brave honesty, in a world of celebrity that thrives on illusion.

'Don't say gay' bill passes Tenn. Senate

May 20, 2011 By NBC News
NBC

Students protest and 'Star Trek's' George Takei offers a work-around

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — A bill passed Friday by the Tennessee Senate would forbid public school teachers and students in grades kindergarten through eight from discussing the fact that some people are gay.

The measure has prompted student protests and even a humorous suggestion for foiling it from former "Star Trek" actor George Takei.

Opponents deride the measure as the "don't say gay bill." They say it's unfair to the children of gay parents and could lead to more bullying. Supporters say it is intended to give teachers clear guidance for dealing with younger children on a potentially explosive topic.

In Nashville, student groups have been protesting the bill for weeks.

"I've said it multiple times: This is the civil rights movement of our time," said Brandon Holt, a high school senior, NBC station WSMV of Nashville reported, "and if we don't take advantage of our opportunity to stand up for what we believe in then we have lost that opportunity and this is something that we all feel so strongly about."

The bill only applies to elementary and middle schools and the language was changed somewhat shortly before being passed in a 19-11 vote, but the sponsor says the intent is the same.

"There's more than one way to skin a cat," Republican Sen. Stacey Campfield of Knoxville said after the vote. "I got what I wanted."

The original version said no elementary or middle schools could "provide any instruction or material that discusses sexual orientation other than heterosexuality."

Under the proposal, any instruction or materials at a public elementary or middle school would be limited to age-appropriate lessons about the science of human reproduction.

Campfield said the language is appropriate because "homosexuals don't naturally reproduce," and he said it's necessary because the state's curriculum is unclear on what can be taught.

However, a critic said the new wording could create other problems.

Sen. Roy Herron, D- Dresden, said it "may inadvertently prevent the teaching of ethics, morality and abstinence."

The bill isn't likely to be taken up by the House before lawmakers adjourn this spring, but the sponsor there has said he would push it forward in 2012 when the General Assembly comes back for the second year of the session.

Passage would make Tennessee the first state to enact such legislation, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. In 2003, Washington defeated a proposal similar to Tennessee's, as did California in 2005 and 2006. A Louisiana law forbids the use of sexually explicit materials depicting homosexuality in sex education classes.

Meanwhile, Takei has come up with a proposal for the "Don't Say Gay" bill: "Any time you need to say the word, 'gay,' you can simply say, 'Takei.'"

KNBC of Los Angeles said Takei offered some examples in a YouTube video posted Thursday.

"You could safely proclaim you support Takei marriage. If you're in a more festive mood, you can march in a Takei Pride Parade. Even homophobic slurs don't seem as hurtful if you say, 'That's sooo Takei.'"

The suggestions go on, but Takei wraps with a few pitches for "It's OK to be Takei" merchandise.

Takei, aka Sulu from "Star Trek," has a record of activism. He also rallied against California's Prop 8, which defines marriage as between only a man and woman. He married his longtime partner in 2008.

Dozens detained in failed Russian gay pride march

May 28, 2011

Reuters

MOSCOW, May 28 (Reuters) - Dozens of people were detained by police in the Russian capital Moscow on Saturday after gay rights activists and their opponents clashed at the sixth straight attempt to hold a gay pride parade.

Gay rights activists had hoped that Moscow's new mayor, Sergei Sobyenin, would finally allow parades after years of being refused permission by the authorities.

Gay rights activists who gathered near the Kremlin walls were met by far right groups who attacked them as soon as they raised their rainbow flags and posters. The police swiftly intervened.

A separate meeting of gay activists near Moscow's government was broken up by police after about 20 minutes.

Russian news agencies said about 40 people had been detained.

Homosexuality was decriminalised in Russia in 1993, although much of Moscow's gay scene is still largely underground because prejudice against gays runs deep.

In October the European Court of Human Rights fined Russia for banning homosexual parades in Moscow, in what gay rights activists described as a historic victory.