

National

Ottawa unlikely to expand homosexual rights, say MPs

By Bob Cox

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OTTAWA

The federal government is unlikely to follow Ontario's lead in expanding homosexual rights by extending pensions and other benefits to same-sex partners, say influential Conservative MPs.

"I see a profound discordance looming between the provincial legislation, particularly in Ontario now, and what the federal government will have," Al Johnson, a Calgary MP who heads the Tory family caucus, said Friday.

"Because I don't see the federal government changing the Income Tax Act and all that sort of stuff as the minister in Ontario (Attorney General Howard Hampton) suggested would have to be done."

Earlier this week, an Ontario human rights tribunal ruled the province must pay survivor pensions to the same-sex partners of

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its gay and lesbian civil servants.

The ruling effectively recognized homosexual couples to be the same as heterosexual couples for the purposes of defining marital status.

The NDP government promised to change dozens of laws to give same-sex partners the same rights as opposite-sex partners in areas such as adoption, child custody, wills and estates.

The ruling also said the federal Income Tax Act needs to be changed so it treats pensions the same for homosexual and heterosexual partners.

Justice Minister Kim Campbell made proposals to Conservative MPs earlier this year to change the federal Human Rights Act to prevent discrimination against homosexuals.

But even those proposals would not have extended spousal benefits to same-sex couples, said Johnson.

MP Rene Soetens, the Ontario Tory caucus chairman, said any move to change the Income Tax Act to accommodate pensions for same-sex spouses would be opposed by a "substantial majority of the Ontario caucus."

The Conservative government has promised since 1986 to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Whopping majority favor equal rights for gays

By LIONEL WILD
The Daily News

Rights are rights and homosexuals are human beings, say Hotliners.

It's as simple as that.

We had 150 people respond to Monday's *Daily News Hotline* question, "Should homosexuals be protected by human rights legislation in Nova Scotia?" A whopping 71.3 per cent of you — 107 people — said that protection of homosexuals and lesbians should be included in an amended provincial Human Rights Act.

"All people should be protected by human rights legislation," said Bev MacKay of Halifax. "The fact that gays and lesbians

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are not protected is something that has been taken away.

"This is not something we are giving them. It is something that has been taken away from them that every human being has a right to: equal rights."

The lobby group Lesbian and Gay Rights Nova Scotia (LGRNS) last week charged Premier John Buchanan with holding up legislation providing for protection for homosexuals.

The fact we posed Monday's question was offensive to some callers. "It's a sad and serious statement in the fact you're asking this question," said Andrea Currie of Halifax. "We have to take a hard look at ourselves."

A principal argument arising from the question was whether homosexuals were asking for equal rights or special rights. In a nutshell, the pro-rights lobby contended that gays and lesbians are seeking the same protection from job and housing discrimination to which heterosexuals, blacks or natives are entitled.

The anti-rights proponents — 43 people, or 28.6 per cent of our sample — argued that including sexual orientation in the Human Rights Act amounted to giving

gays special rights.

"To me they're not really people," said Peter Hurst of Dartmouth. "They're different."

The spectre of AIDS cropped up in some of your responses, and most often were symptomatic of homophobia (hatred or fear of homosexuals). One such response — and there were a few of them — went along the lines, "They should be persecuted even more."

But the AIDS issue was raised in a different light by Father Michael MacDonald of the Nova Scotia Persons with AIDS Coalition.

"If gays and lesbians were assured of civil rights and protection under the law according to human rights legislation, then

people may feel a little more secure about seeking testing (for AIDS)," said MacDonald. "A lot of people are very hesitant and in fact refuse to be tested for AIDS precisely because of the insecurities connected with being associated with the gay population."

Of our 150 respondents, 92 of them — or 61.3 per cent — were women. A big majority of those women — 76.1 per cent — said homosexuals should be protected by human rights legislation.

The 58 men who called made up the remaining 38.7 per cent of the sample. A slightly reduced majority of men — 63.8 per cent — felt homosexuals should have their rights protected.