

CANADA HOUSE COMMITTEE BARS VOTE ON MARRIAGE

26.11.2004, 1.00pm

OTTAWA - A Canadian parliamentary committee on Thursday barred a vote by the elected House of Commons on a bill which sought to legislate the definition of marriage as the union of a man and a woman. Opponents of the bill blocked a vote on it on the grounds that it was unconstitutional. This prompted its Conservative author, Member of Parliament Rob Moore, to decry the committee move as "a terrible affront to democracy".

The Supreme Court of Canada is currently mulling whether excluding gay marriages is unconstitutional, but Moore had introduced the bill anyway on the grounds that it is Parliament that should be deciding complex social policy questions.

In the end, the governing Liberals joined the Bloc Quebecois and the leftist New Democrats to defeat the Conservatives 7-4 on whether Parliament would be allowed to vote on Moore's bill.

"The rights in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms -- they're not negotiable ... I'm fed up," the Bloc's Michel Guimond said. Guimond pointed out that in six of Canada's 10 provinces and in one of its three northern territories the traditional definition had been ruled unconstitutional, and that was the law in those provinces. But Moore countered that in the other six provinces and territories marriage remained a union only of a man and a woman, and it was therefore impossible to declare clearly that his bill was unconstitutional.

One of Moore's aims had been to force legislators in the current minority Parliament, elected in June, to take an early stand on the issue before another election is triggered.

"The Liberals have at every turn tried to deny democratic input on this issue," he said.

Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin, who favors gay marriage, has promised a vote on an eventual government bill once the Supreme Court has rendered its opinion.

- REUTERS

Your PSAC Ontario Council Representative
for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgendered
Members is JOHN ROSS
Call (W) (519) 751-2584 (H) (905) 768-3756

PO Box 325 Hagersville, ON N0A 1H0