

Federal bill recognizing same-sex spouses defeated

BY ERIN FITZPATRICK

OTTAWA (CUP) — A private member's bill that would have changed the definition of the word spouse to include same-sex couples in all federal laws died in the House of Commons last week.

The proposed Bill C-239 was introduced by Bloc Quebecois member of parliament Real Menard.

"I'm convinced that there's something very discriminatory in our treatment of same-sex partners," Menard said after the bill died on the House floor last Tuesday.

The Canadian government needs to accept that there are men who love men, women who love women, and that those people are in real, authentic relationships that deserve to be recognized."

In 1995, the government passed Bill C-33, which effectively outlaws discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. However, about 70 federal laws remain that still define spouses as a heterosexual couple.

"We've already recognized that we can't discriminate against gays, so the next step is to recognize their relationships as legitimate," Menard said.

Because it was a private member's bill, Menard's initiative

was not voted on, but only debated in the House of Commons for an hour.

Private member's bills are only put to a vote if the MP behind them can convince an all-party committee or the entire House that the issue merits a vote.

Both the Reform and Liberal parties opposed the bill.

Reform MP Eric Lowther defends his party's position.

"We look at the benefits that

"It's also a question of justice. We pay taxes, we pay into benefit plans like the Canada pension plan, and we shouldn't be denied equality."

are there today for couples, and largely those benefits are there in recognition of the social contribution that couples make in procreation, and the rearing of the next generation of Canadians," he said. "That's in the public interest."

If the government is going to change the word spouse to include same-sex couples, Lowther said, it should first determine how the public interest would be served by such a move.

The effort to have same-sex couples recognized as spouses, however, didn't die with Menard's bill.

New Democratic Party MP Svend Robinson, who supported the bill, says he plans to re-

introduce it himself in the near future.

"It's a question of basic equality and fairness," Robinson said. "Gay and lesbian people are involved in committed loving relationships — I myself have had

the good fortune of being involved in one for almost five years. And we're saying that our relationship should be recognized as equal, especially when opposite-sex common law relationships are recognized."

But it's about more than just recognition, Robinson says.

"It's also a question of justice. We pay taxes, we pay into benefit plans like the Canada pension plan, and we shouldn't be denied equality."

Med students protest rising tuition

BY CARLA TONELLI

TORONTO (CUP) — Recent tuition fee increases in Ontario are hitting medical students hard and threaten to keep people with limited funds out of the field, students say.

About 400 medical students from across the province briefly laid down their stethoscopes last week to picket in front of the Ontario legislature against tuition fee hikes.

"People will be filtered out of the programs from the front end due to high tuition fees," Jeff Kwong, a medical student at the University of Toronto, said at last Tuesday's protest.

"We're really concerned about accessibility, especially to the population from the lower socioeconomic demographic."

Kwong points out that first-year tuition for the University of Western Ontario's medical school was \$10,000 in 1998, up from \$5,489 in 1997. He says the difference speaks for itself.

"We're not being greedy —

we're just worried people won't apply because tuition is so high," he said.

The medical students are calling for a re-regulation of tuition.

Last spring, Ontario's Progressive Conservative government deregulated tuition fees for all professional and post-graduate programs, removing the province's long-standing cap on how much universities can charge students in faculties like law and medicine.

As a result, tuition rose by an average of 62 percent at Ontario's five medical schools between the fall of 1997 and the fall of 1998.

David Kaplan, vice-president of U of T's medical society, says he's concerned high student debts will taint the professions of new graduates who attempt to pay off \$100,000 loans in 10 years.

"It will affect the way we practice medicine," Kaplan said, pointing to the current structure whereby doctors are not paid for time spent counselling patients on prevention methods.

He fears this will affect quality of care. "The more patients you see, the more money you make, the quicker you pay off your debt," he said.

The Ontario Medical Association, which represents 24,000 physicians in the province, says it shares students' concerns about the possible effects the fee hikes will have on the profession.

In particular, association president Dr. William Orovan says he fears the medical field may lose 30 years of progress in increasing the representation of women and people from rural areas.

"I think doctors are very supportive of students opposed to the tuition increases," he said. "Increases of this magnitude certainly have a negative impact."

The association is considering establishing a financial aid initiative for medical students.

"Because of the interest on the part of professionals, which has been significant, we feel we want to move in this direction," Orovan said.

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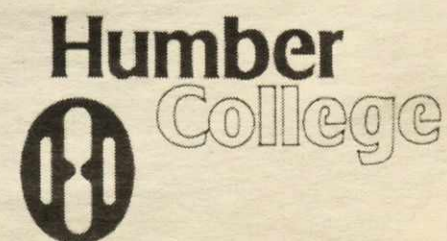
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