



# Buffalo / Niagara

PO Box 617  
Buffalo, NY 14207

716-883-0384

PFLAG@bfn.org  
www.PFLAG-buffalo-niagara.org

*We meet because we have learned that someone very close to us is Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Transgendered.*

*We try to help one another deal with this information in a positive manner.*

*Although we do not agree at all times, we try to be understanding.*

*We offer help to those who seek it, but do not force ourselves on others.*

*We strive to maintain anonymity while sharing on a level that is comfortable for all of us.*

*We encourage all to attend meetings for their own benefit as well as that of the group.*

*It is our hope that when each of us reaches a point of understanding and acceptance, we realize that this is when others need us the most.*

## Buffalo Monthly Meeting

**Sunday, February 16, 2011**  
2:30–5:30 PM

The February meeting will include a panel of LGBT couples discussing their relationships as well as some time for discussion. As always, newcomers will be offered the alternative of meeting privately with a PFLAG parent.

Kenilworth United Church of Christ  
45 Dalton Drive  
Tonawanda, NY 14223

The church is located two blocks west of Niagara Falls Boulevard at the corner of Decatur Rd and Dalton Dr. Decatur runs off of Niagara Falls Boulevard about 0.8 miles south of Sheridan Drive and about 0.8 miles north of Kenmore Ave.

Our meetings are in the library, which is near the parking lot entrance. The facility is handicap accessible.

## New Parents Meetings

**These meetings are scheduled as needed. Please call the helpline.**

Held at a location convenient to those involved.

This self-help one-on-one meeting deals with the concerns of parents and family members who have recently learned that a loved one is Lesbian or Gay.

**Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Buffalo/Niagara, is a non-profit, all volunteer, community-based organization not affiliated with any ethnic, religious, economic, or political group. Membership is open to all. PFLAG membership lists are kept confidential and mailings are sent in plain envelopes.**

## Queer Journeys Programs

Queer Journeys is a cable access program sponsored by PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara and coordinated by Camille Cox and Babs Conant. The programs are based on documentaries on GLBT issues. This program only airs in Buffalo, on Mondays at 6:30 pm and Tuesdays at 1:00 am on Time Warner Channel 20.

The schedule for the next two months is:

Feb 7: Maybe We're Talking About a Different God / The Preacher's Son

Feb 14: Mom, Dad, ... I'm Gay

Feb 21: Making History in Massachusetts

Feb 28: Safe School Program for Youth in Massachusetts

Mar 7: A Little Respect

Mar 14: Choosing Children, Pt 1

Mar 21: Choosing Children, Pt 2

Mar 28: Our Brother, Dan

A description of the storylines can be found at:  
[www.PFLAG-buffalo-niagara.org/video\\_project.shtml](http://www.PFLAG-buffalo-niagara.org/video_project.shtml)

## Can You Help With The Newsletter

It is time consuming to find interesting things to share with our members. We want to have a content filled newsletter but that's hard to do within the time available. You can help. When you're reading the news and you see something that would be interesting to our members, just send an email with the information to [pflag@bfn.org](mailto:pflag@bfn.org)

### Lifetime Members

Frank Carnevale & James Pilc

Mary Hewitt

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### Sponsoring Members

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Shawn Cribari

Loretta & Richard Gucwa

Tom Gregg

Paula Welch Jack

Donald Kreger & Ron Ehmke

Jeffrey McConnell & Fred Dansereau

Mark Meyer

Roger Seifert & Dennis Stuart

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and if you're reading on-line most sites have a button that easily allows you to share the article with us.

## Let It Snow???

Buffalo winter weather sometimes requires cancelations of meetings or events. PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara is registered with WIVB and WGRZ for posting cancelations of our meetings. So, if the weather outside is frightful, check those stations to see if our meeting is canceled.

## HRC Applauds Illinois Civil Unions Bill Signed Into Law

The Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) civil rights organization, applauds Illinois Governor Pat Quinn for signing into law the "Illinois Religious Freedom Protection and Civil Unions Act." Couples may begin obtaining civil unions and enjoying the state-level rights and responsibilities of married couples on June 1, 2011.

This "marks a tremendous step towards equality for all families in Illinois," said HRC President Joe Solmonese. "HRC commends Governor Quinn for his commitment to ensuring civil unions became law. Congratulations to Rep. Greg Harris, lead sponsor of the bill, who fought for years to ensure civil unions would become a reality, and thank you to Equality Illinois and the ACLU of Illinois for their tireless efforts on behalf of the LGBT community."

The new law will permit both same-sex and opposite-sex couples to enter into civil unions and receive the same benefits, protections, and responsibilities under Illinois law that are granted to spouses. Couples who enter into a civil union will not receive any rights or benefits under federal law. Illinois still does not permit same-sex couples to marry. The law explicitly allows religious entities to choose not to solemnize or officiate civil unions.

In addition to Illinois, twelve states have laws providing an expansive form of state-level relationship recognition for gay and lesbian couples. Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont and Washington D.C. provide marriage to same-sex couples under state law. New York and Maryland recognize out-of-jurisdiction same-sex marriages, but do not provide marriage licenses to same-sex couples in the state. Five other states – California, Nevada, New Jersey, Oregon, and Washington – provide same-sex couples with access to almost all of the state level benefits and responsibilities of marriage, through either civil unions or domestic partnerships.

Colorado, Hawaii, Maine and Wisconsin provide gay and lesbian couples with limited rights and benefits, not all rights provided to married couples. An attorney general opinion and subsequent court ruling in Rhode Island resulted in limited recognition of out-of-jurisdiction marriages of same-sex couples. California recognized marriage for same-sex couples between June and

November of 2008, before voters approved Proposition 8, which purports to amend the state constitution to prohibit marriage equality. Couples married during that window remain married under California law, but all other same-sex couples can only receive a domestic partnership within the state. The state will recognize out-of-jurisdiction same-sex marriages that occurred before November 5, 2008 as marriages and those that occurred on or after November 5, 2008 as similar to domestic partnerships.

For an electronic map showing where marriage equality stands in the states, please visit: [www.HRC.org/State\\_Laws](http://www.HRC.org/State_Laws).

## Iowa Senate Democrats Vote Down Push for Gay Marriage Ban

By Jason Hancock

A motion by state Sen. Kent Sorenson (R-Indianola) to suspend the Senate's rules to allow a vote on a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage was defeated on a party-line vote. Sorenson asked all 50 senators to call up Senate Joint Resolution 8, a bill that would amend the Iowa Constitution to specify that marriage between one man and one woman is the only legal union valid or recognized in the state. Senate President Jack Kibbie (D-Emmetsburg) said "no," but agreed to allow a vote on whether to suspend the rules and override his objection. Twenty-six Democrats voted "no" and 24 Republicans voted "yes." The motion was defeated.

Danny Carroll, chairman of the controversial Christian organization The Family Leader, told supporters in an e-mail that Sorenson was planning to "file numerous amendments and use any other tactic at his disposal" in order to force a vote on same-sex marriage.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Gronstal has vowed to never allow such an amendment to come up for debate. Gronstal told The Des Moines Register that despite claims by Republicans that this was a vote on marriage, it was only a vote on Senate rules. "It is not a vote on the constitutional vote, but I understand that people can lie and say it is," Gronstal said.

Sorenson has kept his focus of late on overturning the Iowa Supreme Court's unanimous 2009 ruling that found the state's ban on same-sex marriage violated the equal protection clause of the constitution. Last year, in an interview with Focus on the Family's magazine, Sorenson called the debate over same-sex marriage "my generation's defining moment. This is what our kids are going to be reading about," he told Focus on the Family. "It's up to us to do what's right."

Last month, Sorenson told a radio audience that he was convinced he could force a vote on marriage, even though Secretary of the Senate Mike Marshal has said there is no mechanism whereby senators, even a majority of senators, can override the majority leader.

## Kay Patterson

Licensed Mental Health Counselor

### *Counseling for Change*

5820 Main Street, Suite 203, Williamsville, NY 14221

Phone: (716) 838-1236 Cell: (716) 583-4902



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An Iowa House committee has passed a constitutional amendment, and a public hearing will be held at the statehouse. In order to amend the constitution, the legislation would have to pass this year and again in 2013 before going on the ballot for a popular vote.

## More NY Support for Legalizing Gay Marriage

Associated Press

A poll showing increased support among New Yorkers for legalizing gay marriage is bolstering a new effort to revive a bill narrowly defeated in the state Legislature just more than a year ago. The Quinnipiac University poll found 56 percent of New Yorkers support legalizing gay marriage. That's almost a complete reversal from 2004, when 55 percent opposed legalization. Regionally, 54 percent of

upstaters, 55 percent of New York City voters, and 61 percent of suburban voters supported legalizing same-sex marriage. Quinnipiac polls in 2009, the latest year the issue was tracked by the pollster, showed 46 percent of voters supported the measure in May, 51 percent supported it in June and 47 percent supported gay marriage in December of that year. None showed support that was beyond the margin of error, as in Thursday's survey.

The Republican-led Senate could take the issue up as early as this spring. The measure has strong support in the Democrat-led Assembly and Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo supports gay marriage. "New York state voter attitudes about gay marriage have shifted dramatically," Quinnipiac poll Director Maurice Carroll said.

The bill was defeated in the then-Democrat controlled Senate 24-38 in December 2009. Thirty-two votes are needed to pass legislation. Six of the senators who voted against the bill are no longer in the Senate. Much of the opposition was based on religious grounds. Supporters framed the issue as a civil right, arguing gay New Yorkers are being denied the same financial, real property and other rights of married couples.

"We look forward to the governor and the Legislature working together to carry out the will of the people and pass this legislation, so loving same-sex couples in New York can finally protect each other and their children just like any other family," said Ross D. Levi, executive director of the Empire State Pride Agenda. Levi said in an interview he sees a "clear and credible" route to passing the bill into law this year.

Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos, a Nassau County Republican, said he won't block the issue from reaching the floor for a vote, though he is personally opposed to gay marriage. The bill isn't yet scheduled for committee votes that could bring it to the floor. The Republican majority's priority is now economic recovery and Cuomo's budget proposal said Skelos' spokesman, Scott Reif.

Quinnipiac questioned 1,436 registered voters from Jan. 18 to Monday. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.6 percentage points.

## **Pentagon to outline training for gay ban repeal**

Lolita C. Baldor & Pauline Jelinek, The Associated Press

Pentagon leaders rolled out a plan that is expected to give the military services about three months to train their forces on the new law allowing gays to serve openly, officials said. The plan outlines the personnel, recruiting and other regulations that must be changed. It describes three levels of training for the troops, their commanders and the key administrators, recruiters and other leaders who will have to help implement the changes.

Under that training schedule, full implementation of the law could begin later this summer. Once the training

is complete, the president and his top military advisers must certify that lifting the ban won't hurt troops' ability to fight. Sixty days after certification, the law would take effect.

Word of the plan comes after President Barack Obama told the nation in his State of the Union address that the change was in sight.

Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell said senior defense and military leaders will provide an update on how the Pentagon is proceeding on the implementation of the new law, which ended the Pentagon's 17-year-old "don't ask, don't tell" policy and will allow gays to serve openly for the first time in history.

Morrell declined to say more, but officials familiar with the plan described it on condition of anonymity because it has not been finalized or made public.

Details have been scarce as the military has scrambled to pull together the dozens of legal and policy changes that must be made by all the services in order to put the new law into effect.

The changes affect how troops are recruited, trained and discharged, as well as how same sex partners will be treated in terms of various health and other benefits.

Some will be easy to implement. For example, recruits will no longer be turned down because they are gay.

But others involving benefits, housing and the execution of the training program will be more complex.

According to officials, the training will be broken into three categories. One will be for administrators and other leaders who will have to be able to answer detailed questions about the new policy. The second will be for senior commanders who will have to enforce the policies and also be on the lookout for signs of unease or problems among service members.

The third group will be the general training for the troops. That is the one that is expected to be the most difficult to complete because service members are scattered around the world, and many are in various phases of deployment to war or heading home.

In his State of the Union speech Tuesday night, Obama declared that, "Starting this year, no American will be forbidden from serving the country they love because of who they love." He added, "It is time to leave behind the divisive battles of the past. It is time to move forward as one nation."

Although Obama did not describe any specific time frame, Pentagon leaders have repeatedly said they will move quickly but carefully to implement the law.

Advocates for gays have called for quick action.

"For years, experts have said that a swift repeal process, accompanied by strong leadership, is the best way to repeal 'don't ask, don't tell,'" Aaron Belkin of the Palm Center, a California think tank, said Wednesday. "In promising ... to implement the repeal of the ban this year, President Obama has demonstrated leadership and committed to the path that has been proven to be best

not only for gay service members, but for all of those who currently serve.”

The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, however, wants officials to hurry along certification that the change won't hurt military effectiveness.

“We think there should be certification from the president, (Defense) Secretary Robert Gates and (Joint Chiefs of Staff) Chairman Michael Mullen in this quarter,” the group said in a statement Wednesday. “We need to make ‘Don't Ask’ repeal a reality sooner rather than later.”

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## Gay marriage could move forward in some U.S. states

By Chris Michaud

A handful of U.S. states are poised to take up the issue of gay marriage afresh, due largely to incoming lawmakers who may tip the balance in favor of the controversial measure. In Maryland, New York and Rhode Island in particular, the legalization of same-sex marriages is moving ahead, organizers and supporters say.

“We have the numbers,” said Maryland state Sen. Richard Madaleno Jr. “We've never been in a better position.” The November 2010 election brought a “significant shift,” especially in the Senate, said Madaleno, one of Maryland's seven openly gay legislators, three of whom are newly elected.

Even more important, Maryland's Senate Judicial Proceedings committee, which has prevented gay marriage bills from reaching a floor vote, has several new, sympathetic members, said Morgan Meneses-Sheets of Equality Maryland, an advocacy group. Majority leaders of both houses plan to co-sponsor gay marriage measures. Gov. Martin O'Malley, whose opponent was against gay marriage, has pledged to sign such a bill,

Nationwide, after the Congressional vote to repeal the “Don't ask, don't tell” policy which expelled thousands of gay people from the U.S. military, gay rights advocates are pushing ahead on marriage. “The work of persuasion, of personal conversations, of talking to lawmakers and mobilizing against a well-funded anti-gay opposition” are among the primary tasks for the lobbying group Freedom to Marry, said founder Evan Wolfson. “With the freedom to marry within reach this year in states such as New York, Maryland and Rhode Island, now is the time to have those conversations and move marriage forward,” he said. Nearly half of the states have amended their constitutions, however, to prohibit marriage between same-sex partners or defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman, rendering gay marriage beyond reach any time soon.

In New York, where newly-inaugurated Gov. Andrew Cuomo strongly supports gay marriage, lawmakers remain divided but advocates say the prospects are improved with the popular governor's backing. “Its chances only get better,” said Democratic Sen. Thomas

Duane, the state's only openly gay senator, who has said he would introduce a gay marriage bill and push for a vote by summer. “Public support grows every time the issue is debated.” Although not a supporter, Dean Skelos, leader of the majority Republicans in the Senate, has said he would not block such a bill coming to the Senate floor for a vote so legislators can make their positions known, according to the Empire State Pride Agenda. Put to a so-called conscience vote, gay marriage has a better chance this year than it did in 2009, said Democratic Sen. Malcolm Smith of New York City, when the Assembly approved it but the Senate did not. “It is premature to make predictions or attempt head counts based solely on prior votes, but there is reason to be confident,” said Ross Levi of Empire State Pride Agenda. One of the most vocal opponents, Bronx Democrat Sen. Ruben Diaz, would not comment on prospects for passage. “There are more pressing issues facing the state,” such as the budget and overhauling ethics laws, Diaz said.

Gay marriage is legal in Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Iowa and the District of Columbia, although a bill to revoke it was introduced in Iowa recently. In California and New Jersey civil unions, which mimic but do not provide all the legal benefits of marriage, are being challenged in court.

The states of Washington, Oregon, Hawaii, and Illinois have broad domestic partnership or civil union provisions. Several states, including Pennsylvania, Minnesota, North Carolina and Indiana do not deal with the issue, neither granting nor denying it.

The fresh battles come with passionate opposition. In Maryland, Republican Sen. Allan Kittleman said he would introduce a bill legalizing civil unions, drawing heat from fellow Republicans. Maryland Delegate Don Dwyer, who opposes civil unions and gay marriage, said he “can't wait for the debate.” Should gay marriage pass, he said he is confident of a referendum which “will drive the conservatives to the polls,” where he predicted it would be defeated.

Marriage bills were introduced this month in the House and Senate in Rhode Island, a heavily Roman Catholic but relatively liberal state, where polls show a majority of residents favor what advocates call “marriage freedom.” Newly elected Gov. Lincoln Chafee, whose predecessor vowed to veto gay marriage, voiced support at his inauguration, stressing the potential economic benefits. But the Senate in Rhode Island is presided over by Sen. Teresa Paiva Weed, a gay marriage opponent.

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## A Gay, Hispanic Hero

By Mary Elizabeth Williams, Salon.com

It didn't take long after 20-year-old political intern Daniel Hernandez emerged as the hero of the recent mass shooting in Arizona for the cynics to figure out the angle. As a poster on Free Republic remarked, “Look shortly for

the leftist media to push the 'Gay, Hispanic-American Intern saving the Liberal Congresswoman's life from the Tea Party' angle." Well, Freepers, here it is!

It's not quite that simple, of course. However we try to understand the causes of the tragedy in Arizona and the political rhetoric of violence, it seems clear that there's considerably more to the disturbing story of shooting suspect Jared Lee Loughner than can be explained by pointing to a few wry Sarah Palin quips. And if simply being gay and Latino were grounds for heroism, Ricky Martin's face would be on the \$10 bill.

Daniel Hernandez is, by any measure, an extraordinary young man. He had been interning in Gabrielle Giffords' office only five days when an event at a local Safeway thrust him into the international spotlight for his quick thinking, bravery and competence in the wake of unimaginable violence. On the "Today" show Monday, Matt Lauer explained how Hernandez drew upon his high school training as a certified nursing assistant to check on the pulses of other shooting victims before noticing the severity of Giffords' wounds and, as he puts it, prioritizing her. He put her upright and held her in his lap as he applied pressure to staunch the blood. "I could tell she had a severe gunshot," he said. "I just tried to do my best until emergency medical services could arrive. My focus was on making sure I was doing everything I could to take care of her." Even when the ambulance arrived, he stayed with her, because "I saw my job then as not taking care of her medical needs but taking care of her emotional needs. I tried to comfort her and make sure she knew she wasn't alone. I let her know I was going to try to contact her parents and her husband."

In the two days since the shooting, Hernandez has emerged in interviews as a graceful presence with a no doubt promising future, with considerably much more going for him than his status as a minority. So why should the sexual orientation of this eminently competent, compassionate person keep coming up in this tale? Why is his ethnicity, and the fact that he grew up speaking Spanish and attending dual language schools, of any consequence? Hernandez never asked to be the face of a movement. He doesn't represent any one group any more than Jared Lee Loughner is your typical white guy. And that's exactly why it matters.

It matters because guys like Arizona Sen. John McCain, who described the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell" as "a very sad day," still think that orientation has an effect on whether or not a person can ably serve in the military. It matters because the notion that two people of the same sex can love each other and build a life together is still considered in many parts of the country, including Arizona, a threat to what is laughably referred to as "traditional marriage" -- as if heterosexuals have really mopped up the floor with this whole commitment thing. It matters because last week, when Arizona banned a Tucson district's Mexican-American studies program,

state's Attorney General Tom Horne referred to it as "propagandizing and brainwashing." It matters because just last year Arizona enacted a law that would not merely allow but require immigration officials to determine the immigration status of anyone "where reasonable suspicion exists" that the person might be in the country illegally, and "reasonable suspicion," as many civil libertarians pointed out, might just boil down to having a darker shade of skin or speaking Spanish.

That's just Hernandez's home of Arizona. And though Pima County Sheriff Clarence Dupnik scathingly referred to his state as "a mecca for racism and bigotry," violence, racism and bigotry aren't confined to any one ZIP code -- they exist all over this great land of ours. They exist just as surely as Hernandez shows that kindness and bravery are alive and well in Arizona.

It's still far too easy for a small-minded yahoo to champion discrimination based on orientation and race, and it's just as easy for another small-minded yahoo somewhere else to believe the red states are indeed "meccas of racism and bigotry." If any good can come out of something as unfathomably horrible as Saturday's mass shooting, let it be that it shakes up a few preconceptions. That it shows the world that a hero can be gay or straight, can speak English or Spanish or both, and that stupid laws can exist in places full of good people. And anyone who has any doubt of what kind of person deserves to serve next to him in battle, or stand before their community and declare their love, or go to school, or walk down the street without being asked for paperwork needs to hear that and remember that, again and again until it sinks in. Yes, the "gay Hispanic American" saved a life on Saturday, and yes, it does matter.

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## Obama Nominee for Judge Could Be First Openly Gay Man on the Federal Bench

By Benjamin Weiser, The New York Times

President Obama has nominated a former Clinton administration lawyer to be a federal judge in Manhattan; he could become the first openly gay man to serve on the federal bench in the United States.

The lawyer, J. Paul Oetken, 45, is a senior vice president and associate general counsel of Cablevision. He is one of two openly gay men whose nominations are pending to the federal courts. The other is Edward C. DuMont, a lawyer who has been nominated to the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington. Mr. Oetken was originally recommended to the White House in September by Senator Charles E. Schumer, who described him as having "sterling legal credentials" and a "distinguished career in private practice and public service."

His nomination on Wednesday came about a year after Mr. Schumer recommended that the president

nominate Daniel S. Alter, a former assistant United States attorney in Manhattan, who is also openly gay, to the same court. But Mr. Alter was not nominated. He has said he believes it was because of statements attributed to him relating to the use of the term "Merry Christmas" and to the Pledge of Allegiance, which he denied having made.

Senator Schumer said on Thursday that Mr. Oetken fit his three criteria for federal judges: legal excellence, moderation of views and diversity. "I am looking for people who fit the three criteria, and I was shocked to learn there were no openly gay male judges on the entire federal bench." Mr. Oetken "fit the bill," he added.

Mr. Oetken, a graduate of the University of Iowa and Yale Law School, was a law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun and worked in the Justice Department and in the White House counsel's office. Before joining Cablevision, Mr. Oetken was in private practice in New York.

If confirmed by the Senate, Mr. Oetken, who lives in Manhattan, would fill the slot previously held by Judge Denny Chin, who has been elevated by President Obama to the federal appeals court in Manhattan.

Mr. Schumer declined to comment on the matter involving Mr. Alter, whose recommendation he announced last February at a dinner of the Human Rights Campaign, a national gay rights group. At the time, he called Mr. Alter "a brilliant attorney," adding that he would be "a history-maker who will be the first openly gay male judge" nominated to the federal bench. Mr. Alter, a graduate of Columbia and Yale Law, was an assistant United States attorney and later national director for civil rights for the Anti-Defamation League. Mr. Alter declined to comment on Thursday, but told *The New York Law Journal* in October that his nomination appeared to have run into trouble because of "certain false attributions" to him of statements that he denied making. The *Washington Blade* had earlier reported that Mr. Alter, while working for the Anti-Defamation League, was quoted in a news service article as recommending against merchants using "Merry Christmas" instead of a more generic greeting and in remarks in a magazine suggesting the group favored legal challenges to the use of "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Alter told *The Law Journal*: "Neither of the quotations attributed to me are accurate nor in any way reflect my personal views." The White House has declined to comment on the issue. Last summer, 66 of his former colleagues in the United States attorney's office wrote to Mr. Schumer, urging the senator to fight for his nomination. "We stress that if Mr. Alter's nomination were derailed by these false allegations, the loss to the federal judiciary and to the public would be significant," the letter said. The signers included two former United States attorneys, James B. Comey and David N. Kelley; Mr. Comey was later a deputy attorney general in the Bush administration.

Another of the signers, Gideon A. Schor, said on Thursday that the failure of Mr. Alter to be nominated "was crushing." "It was a real loss, I think, for the public and the bench and the lawyers and the parties," he said, adding, "For all of our sakes, I hope he gets another chance."

## Is British Columbia (B.C.) Canada ready for an openly gay party leader?

Gary Mason, *The Globe and Mail*

After the caucus coup that felled New Democratic Party (NDP) Leader Carole James last December, attention quickly shifted to potential successors. Mike Farnworth's name was on most everyone's list.

Since arriving on the provincial scene in 1991, the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain had crafted an enviable political résumé. He served in various cabinet posts during the late 1990s, often being sent in to clean up messes left by others. He would be a victim of the great Liberal landslide in 2001, but returned to the provincial scene in 2005 and became one of Ms. James's chief lieutenants. He was named NDP House leader and was easily the party's most able communicator.

That Mr. Farnworth is gay isn't entirely a secret. But he is an intensely private person and even reporters who have known him since he first arrived in Victoria know very little about his life beyond the confines of the legislature. He certainly isn't open about his sexuality in the way, say, that gay Liberal MLA Lorne Mayencourt was during his time in government.

So when it came to pondering the many factors a potential leadership candidate has to consider before taking the plunge, one that Mr. Farnworth had to mull was the intrusion into his private life his candidacy would trigger. He was also aware of the questions his candidacy would prompt, among them: Is B.C. ready for an openly gay party leader and potential premier?

He has to win his party's leadership first, of course, but he has an excellent chance of doing that. It should also be acknowledged that NDP leadership candidate Nicholas Simons is also gay but few give him any realistic shot at winning. Gays are no strangers to politics today but gay leaders are. There has been at least one gay premier in Canada, although New Brunswick's Richard Hatfield remained in the closet throughout his career. No openly gay person has ever been elected premier.

While B.C. is widely considered progressive-minded, home of the first openly gay Member of Parliament (MP) in Canada, Svend Robinson, and a jurisdiction where the ascension of a gay premier would seem mostly likely, not everyone is convinced that the province is as open-minded as many perceive it to be.

Dave Brindle, a gay broadcaster, journalist and writer living in Lund, B.C., says he often received calls when hosting his radio show in Vancouver from listeners who

voice their disdain for his sexual orientation. And this, he said, was in a so-called gay-friendly city.

“So the idea of an openly gay leader of one of the province’s political parties, let alone a gay premier, is certainly not going to be welcome,” Mr. Brindle said.

“When you look outside of the urban centres to some of the areas where the NDP draws some of its traditional support – the tough, union-strong mining and mill towns of the Interior and the Coast, it’s going to be a tough sell. Union members aren’t just teachers and government workers, who might be more progressive in accepting a gay leader. There are rednecks in the union.”

Beyond that, Mr. Brindle said, there are some people within certain ethnic groups, particularly the Indo and Chinese community, who are not accepting of a gay lifestyle. He wonders if NDP supporters within these groups can embrace a gay leader.

While Mr. Mayencourt thinks people’s attitudes towards gays have evolved to the point that a person’s sexual orientation isn’t much of a factor in politics, the former Liberal MLA agrees that it stubbornly remains an issue within certain cultural groups.

“Absolutely,” he said. “So the issue will be whether the Indo-Canadian community and the Chinese community can look past this. I think they can. I hope so anyway. Once in a while I still hear on Chinese radio some unflattering comments based on sexual orientation and such but overall I don’t think people care all that much.”

You would expect Spencer Chandra Hebert, an openly gay NDP MLA who represents the riding with the greatest number of gay residents in it, to tilt toward the view that sexual orientation is a non-story in 2011. But he doesn’t.

“It shouldn’t be an issue today but it is,” he said. “Yesterday retrieving messages on my constituency phone someone left a message full of homophobic slurs, things like fag and that and saying that we are worthless people. I was walking down the street holding hands with my partner and someone we passed decided to cross

themselves like we were vampires, like they were visibly trying to ward us off. So that attitude still exists.”

Still, he thinks there are far more people in the province for whom a person’s sexual orientation, even that of a potential premier, isn’t a concern.

Mike Farnworth is aware of all this. He knows there are British Columbians who, for any number of reasons, can’t accept gays. There really isn’t much he can do about that, he told me. He certainly isn’t going to spend energy trying to change their minds.

It’s ironic because Mr. Farnworth so obviously defies the old, outdated stereotype that some still have about gay men. He portrays an image of a somewhat tough, rugged guy whose big issue the past couple of years has been cracking down on crime. He lives in the suburbs with his partner of 22 years, Doug, and not in downtown Vancouver.

Mr. Farnworth said he’s never hidden the fact he’s gay, as some in the gay community have suggested, just he’s never felt it was something he needed to trumpet. He’s never defined himself by his sexual persuasion. He’s never been a proponent of identity politics.

Whom he sleeps with at night shouldn’t matter to a voter. What he does on their behalf should. We may soon get to see if that is true.

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