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# Massachusetts court rules ban on gay marriage is unconstitutional

By Jennifer Peter  
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON — In the nation's most far-reaching decision of its kind, Massachusetts' highest court declared Tuesday that the state constitution guarantees gay couples the right to marry — a ruling celebrated with a popping of champagne corks and the planning of spring weddings.

"Without a doubt, this is the happiest day of our lives," said Gloria Bailey, who with her partner of 32 years was among the

seven gay couples who had sued the state in 2001 for refusing to issue them marriage licenses.

In its 4-3 decision, the Supreme Judicial Court gave the Legislature six months to rewrite the state's marriage laws for the benefit of gay couples.

Although courts in other states have issued similar rulings, some legal experts said this one goes further in its emphatic language and appears to suggest that gay couples should be offered nothing less than marriage itself — and not a lesser alternative such as civil unions,

which are available in Vermont.

The ruling was another milestone in a year that has seen a significant expansion of gay rights around the world, including a U.S. Supreme Court decision in June striking a Texas ban on gay sex. Canadian courts also legalized gay marriage over the summer.

"We declare that barring an individual from the protections, benefits, and obligations of civil marriage solely because that person would marry a person of the same sex violates the Massachusetts Constitution," Chief Justice

Margaret Marshall wrote.

The decision prompted complex legal questions about the next step and about when the nation's first gay marriage licenses will be issued, if ever.

Republican Gov. Mitt Romney denounced the ruling but said there is little the state could do beyond pursuing a constitutional amendment.

But the soonest a constitutional amendment could be put on the ballot is 2006, potentially opening a window of a few years in which gay marriage licenses could be granted.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Justice Department to check reliability of police armor

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department launched an intensive review Tuesday of the reliability of police body armor, which officials say has lost strength over time and put officers' lives in danger.

The initiative will focus on vests made with the bullet-resistant material Zylon, manufactured by Toyobo Co. Ltd. Japan and used in many types of body armor.

Chuck Canterbury, president of the Fraternal Order of Police, said in a letter Monday to Attorney General John Ashcroft that the company acknowledged Zylon may lose 20 percent of its strength in just two years. The vests carry a five-year warranty.

Ashcroft said in a statement that the review is intended "to ensure the reliability of bullet-resistant vests worn by officers as they patrol our streets and keep our communities safe."

### Analysis: Hispanics less likely to save money regularly

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hispanics are less likely to save regularly than Americans overall because they are typically younger, have lower incomes and are less proficient in English, an analysis suggests.

The lack of savings contributes to a gap in net worth between Hispanic and American households, said Stephen Brobeck, executive director of the Consumer Federation of America.

The federation and Freddie Mac said Monday they were joining with Hispanic groups to create a program known as "Hispanic America Saves," an expansion of a program known as "America Saves," which has enrolled 13,000 people to develop savings goals and plan to achieve them. Hispanic America Saves will provide information in English and Spanish, a newsletter and advice from registered financial planners.

### Man stuffs nine rattlesnakes in mouth in world record stunt

WHISKEY FLATS, Texas (AP) — A man stuffed the mouths of nine live rattlesnakes in a record of eight.

"I have to break my own records. Heck, there's nobody else who can do it," Jason Bibby told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram for its online edition Tuesday. "I think I could do 10 or 13, but probably no more. My mouth is only so big."

Bibby, 52, has performed snake stunts for television shows and other events. This time it was for the 50th anniversary of the Guinness World Records book, which is due in September.

In a field behind his home in Whiskey Flats, a community about 25 miles southwest of Fort Worth, Bibby banded nine snakes together by their rattles and wedged their tails into his mouth. He leaned forward from the waist and held still for 10 seconds, the snakes dangling down.

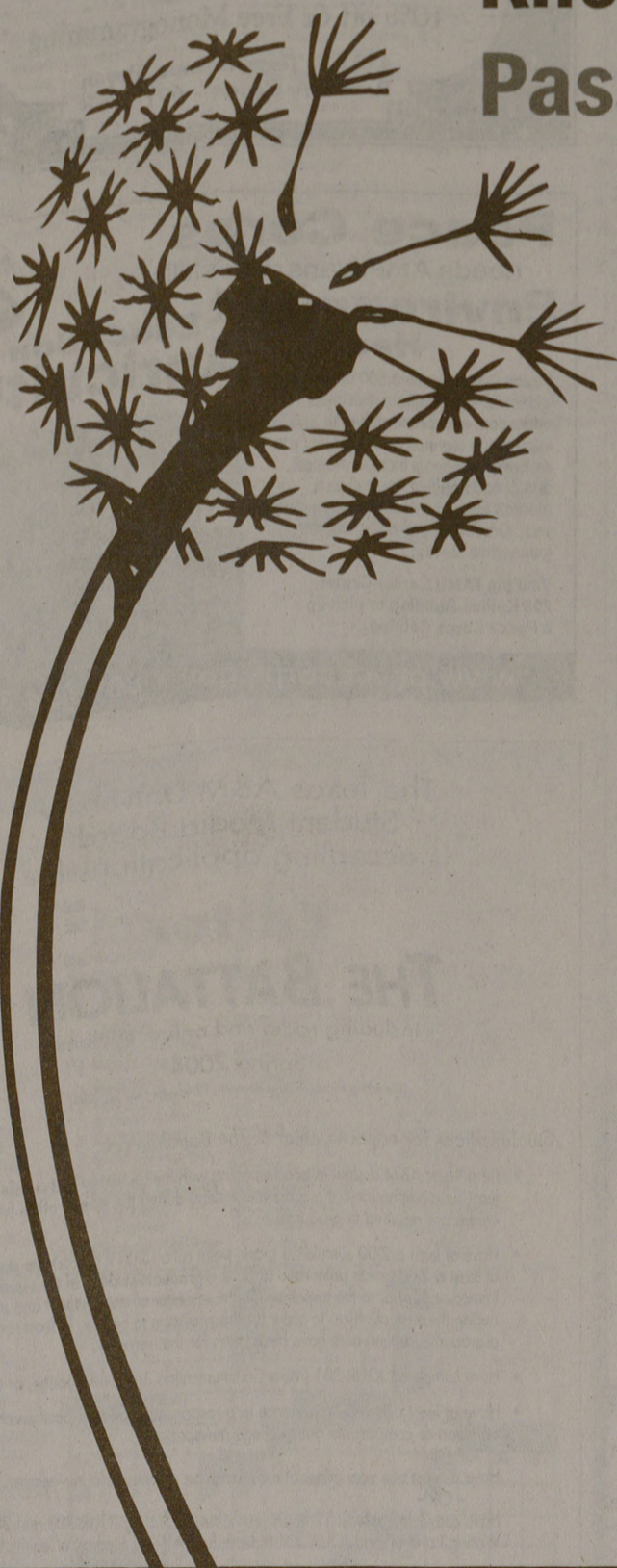
For the record to be official, Bibby said, each snake has to be at least 26 or 27 inches long. Each weighs at least 1.5 pounds.

### National Press Club honors Tom Brokaw

NEW YORK (AP) — Tom Brokaw says he's not going to spend his last year as NBC's top anchor collecting awards, but he's honored to make an exception for the National Press Club.

The Washington institution will give Brokaw its Forster Estate Award for Lifetime Achievement at a dinner Wednesday in Washington.

Brokaw, 63, will be replaced on NBC's "Nightly News" November by Brian Williams. He said he's still trying to figure out what to do next.



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