

HA Typical of "Ex-Gay" Groups

I read with interest about Andre's efforts at starting a chapter of Homosexuals Anonymous in this area. I think it should be noted that the founder of Homosexuals Anonymous, Colin Cook, was asked to leave his "ex-gay" ministry for having sex with men seeking counseling from him. As far as I know, he is still claiming he is "ex-gay" and engaged in ministry.

However, that is typical of "ex-gay" ministries. Many of their leaders may act straight but inside they are still gay. They live lives based on denial. That's why these ministries speak of "struggling" with homosexuality. It is not surprising that a few get caught, like John Paulk of Exodus International, in gay bars and cruising areas.

"Ex-gay" ministries claim many "victories" over homosexuality, but there are no real statistics to back those claims. According to one "ex-gay" leader (who is straight by the way), they don't have the time to crunch any numbers. On the other hand, there are plenty of ex-ex-gays whose lives were traumatized by these ministries and [who] have since spoken out against them, including many founders and leaders of "ex-gay" ministries. The two founders of Exodus International, Michael Bussee and Gary Cooper, wound up falling in love and leaving the organization, proclaiming that they never once saw an "ex-gay." Frank Shears was a viciously anti-gay crusader in Vancouver, BC and former director of Exodus International who was sick of struggling and came out as a gay man just before he died of AIDS. Rev. Craig Buxton, a Methodist minister, headed a chapter of Homosexuals Anonymous before he accepted the fact that he was gay. It is little wonder that many of the current leaders of "ex-gay" ministries are straight.

Much of this information I gathered from Evangelicals Concerned, an organization founded by Dr. Ralph Blair who has spent nearly 25 years exposing "ex-gay" claims. They can be reached at www.ecinc.org. There is also a web site called ExGay Nomad which also has information regarding these ministries (members.aol.com/exgaynomad/index.htm).

The tragedy about Andre is that he and others like them are so filled with self-loathing and homophobia that they must get involved with organizations that confirm those negative feelings. Only when they learn to love and accept themselves can they truly be the person God or some such higher power wants them to be.

Michelle "Mikki" Thomas,
Burlington

While not all "ex-gay" groups are organized on the 12-step model, it should be noted that none of the 12-step groups keeps statistics on those who attend its meetings. Other behavioral modification programs do keep statistics. — EB

Shumlin Has Best Chance

The upcoming race for Lieutenant Governor presents a difficult choice for our community. Both Anthony Pollina and Peter Shumlin would support our issues. For me, the more pressing question is who has the best shot of actually getting into office.

Assume for a moment that the Republicans maintain their majority of House seats. If Shumlin and Pollina split the liberal vote, neither one will get the 50% needed to win outright. Come January, the decision is made by the legislature. I can't imagine them voting (in secret, let's remember!) for either Shumlin or Pollina. That very likely scenario would put Republican Brian Dubie in the leadership role of the Senate.

Last session it was the Democratic Senate that put a stop to legislation repealing civil unions, restricting access to abortion and many efforts to water down environmental laws. Next session may well see the start the process to add a "defense" of marriage provision to our constitution. Who wants Republican Dubie (who supports DOMA) in charge of that debate?

I spent a lot of time in the State House during the civil unions debates. It was the Democrats who stood up for us and suffered losses as a result in the 2000 elections. Some of my Progressive friends say there's no difference between Democrats & Republicans. If you believe that, especially with GLBT issues, you must have had your head in the sand these past few years! Need some proof, imagine for a moment, Governor Dwyer. Please, vote and vote wisely.

Chuck Kletecka
Waterbury Center

Pollina Has Real Compassion

I had the opportunity to work with both Anthony Pollina and Peter Shumlin this past year. It was during the hearings for the medical marijuana bill. It did not take me long to see which one plays the game of politics and which one truly cares about seriously ill Vermonters.

In June, I recognized 20 years of HIV infection as a result of a blood transfusion. I have been treated for HIV with drugs since 1988. I have also experienced severe side effects from most of these drugs. Mostly, I suffer from nausea and vomiting and severe rashes.

I am very fortunate to have survived this disease for this long, and I pray I will continue living in relative good health for many more years. However, the use of marijuana, for medical purposes, is one of the reasons I am doing as well as I am today. It allows me to ease my nausea and vomiting, allowing me to eat well and retain what I ingest. When all my attention is not consumed by the nausea, I am able to be a better mother,

wife, sister, daughter, business owner, and citizen of Vermont.

Peter Shumlin misled us to believe that he supported the medical marijuana bill that came to the Senate after it passed the House. On February 15, 2002, he stated in the Rutland Herald that he thought it was "a thoughtful bill." However, Peter Shumlin, while holding a high position in the Senate, essentially ensured that this bill died. When a group of consumers got together to hold a press conference about the lack of understanding around this issue in the legislature, Peter Shumlin scheduled his own press conference 30 minutes before ours to "outdo" us in opposition to the House bill. He tried to push a version of the bill (he termed it a "compromise", but it was really a political move) which would have resulted in forcing seriously ill patients to deal with drug dealers — a position that was totally unacceptable to consumers. Is this the way he intends to operate as Lieutenant Governor — trying to outmuscle and outwit vulnerable Vermonters? After the show he put on last legislative session, it wouldn't surprise me one bit.

It takes true leadership to make difficult decisions. Allowing patients to improve their quality of life through the medicinal use of marijuana, when a doctor and patient together determine whether the benefits outweigh the risks, would be a true act of leadership. Bowing to political party pressures (when the majority of Vermonters understand and support the need for medical marijuana) is an act of cowardice, not leadership.

I had extensive conversations with Anthony Pollina over this issue and he truly gets it — he understands the needs of seriously ill Vermonters and he has a compassion and empathy that is truly lacking in Peter Shumlin.

I know in my heart that Anthony Pollina has the courage and the integrity to listen to Vermonters — to really listen. Anthony was right there with us in supporting this bill — beside us, working with us. I believe that is where he will be as Lieutenant Governor.

Katherine Perera
Hancock

Racine Partisan Urges LGBTQs to Vote

Thank you for interviewing the men who want to be Vermont's next Governor. If we needed any further evidence of how important it is to vote in November, those interviews surely provided it. Clearly, our rights and our futures are at stake as much in this election as they were in 2000. The harsh rhetoric from that election may have been toned down but the underlying homophobia remains.

We need to participate in this election as if our lives depend on it. We need to register and

to vote. We need to volunteer our time and our money to support candidates who are committed to working with us. We need to elect people who value human rights.

The choice for Governor could be no clearer. Doug Racine is intelligent, experienced, thoughtful and compassionate. Doug has consistently been a clear and effective ally for LGBT Vermonters. He has worked with members of our community at every step along the way in our efforts to establish our equal rights. He has heard our issues and concerns and shared his insights and his influence. He has not shied away from our struggles, he has championed them.

Doug Racine's OITM interview shows his understanding of many of the issues that we face and his willingness to clearly and publicly state his commitment to our cause. In the last year he has spent many hours meeting and working with groups from within our community on important issues. He has listened to LGBT youth describe the daily challenges they face and to HIV+ Vermonters outline their physical, economic and social struggles. He clearly wants to work with us as partners on a wide range of important issues for Vermont.

I urge all LGBT Vermonters and our allies to register and to vote. Our rights and futures depend on the outcome of November's elections. We need to elect Doug Racine Governor and we need to send people to the Vermont House and Senate who will work with him and us to build a better future for all Vermonters.

Tim Palmer
Williston

Tim Palmer is the Chittenden County coordinator for the Racine for Governor campaign.

No Needles in Our Back Yard

I am sure many of your readers understand what is meant by "hindsight is 20/20" but for those who do not, let me explain. What is meant by this adage is that though you cannot see into the future, what is in the past is very clear, like perfect vision, hence 20/20. This saying should hold true when it comes to a sure way of preventing blood-borne pathogens from spreading in our population.

Twenty plus years ago a virus was entering our society with very little acknowledgment from government officials. The virus was called the "Gay Related Infectious Disease" or GRID. It was years before scientists finally agreed to call it the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, or HIV. It took many thousands of lives before people understood that it was a disease that could infect any human being, no matter what their sexual persuasion was. It is well

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editor's notebook

Looking over the photos of the candidates for the three political races featured in last month's issue, I felt just a bit uneasy, and finally I realized what was missing: there's not one woman among them.

Why not?

Of course, I'd prefer it not be just *anyone* with either a double-X chromosome or a 'female gender identity presentation.' I can think of a few female faces I'd just as soon not see in a statewide candidates' line-up this year. But you'd think that the Progressives or the Democrats at least could find a strong woman candidate to field in one of the top spots. And who do the Republicans have to replace the totally class act that Barbara

Snelling brought to the Golden Dome?

Which is not to ignore Auditor Liz Ready or Secretary of State Deb Markowitz, both running for re-election.

It's just that this particular collection of photos was all suits and ties, jackets and guys. A little more gender diversity would be a 'good thing.' And no, although I've used a favorite phrase of the tyrant-tycoon of home fashions, I wouldn't want to see Martha Stewart's face in the line-up either.

Of course, there are plenty of other therapists who are gay-friendly and have experience in helping men heal from childhood sexual abuse in Vermont than we

listed in a box with Christopher Kaufman's review of *Men Leaping Upon Mountains*. As often happens at deadline time, I called someone I know, whose contacts happened to be in northwestern Vermont. Christopher Kaufman has helped us correct that imbalance to a degree with the following list (as of press time, we were awaiting call-backs from therapists in the Northeast Kingdom and in the Upper Valley).

Southeastern Vermont:
Michael Gigante — 254-8032;
Maryann Parrott — 258-3069;
Esha Dakavana — 254-6860;
Diane Leardi — 254-7345.

West-Central Vermont:
Kathy Judge — 775-4500;
Catherine Thomas — 775-6400.

Corrections:

▼ We let slip by the misspelling of anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly's name in *Crow's Caws* last month. Not on purpose, honest.

▼ Nor was it intentional that we incorrectly listed the phone number for the anti-gay Homosexuals Anonymous at the end of that news article. The correct number is 862-7545.

▼ I also managed to misspell Leah Wittenberg's last name in the Contributor's list last issue. Sorry Leah.

▼ And in case any other English major with an "I'm-eruditer-than-you" complex wondered, "to the manner born" is the correct spelling for the phrase used in Stuart

Granoff's *Greenlanders* comic last month. The phrase comes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and refers to customs (manners), not riches (manors): Act I, Scene IV. Someone asks about a flourish of trumpets, "Is it a custom?" Hamlet says: "Ay, marry, is't! But to my mind, though I am native here/And to the manner born, it is a custom/More honor'd in the breach than the observance." Granoff not only had it right, but provided the documentation. ▼