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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of Out in The Mountains (OITM) is to serve as a voice for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, and our supporters in Vermont. We wish the newspaper to be a source of information, insight, and affirmation. We also see OITM as a vehicle for the celebration of the culture and diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities here in Vermont and elsewhere.

Editorial Policy

We will consider for publication any material that broadens our understanding of our lifestyles and of each other. Views and opinions appearing in the paper do not necessarily represent those of Out in The Mountains. This paper, as a non-profit organization, cannot and will not endorse any political candidates. We reserve the right not to publish any material deemed to be overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist, classist, xenophobic, or homophobic.

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editorial

Not Just Semantics

For the Vermont lesbian and gay community, gubernatorial candidate Peter Clavelle has just whiffed on his first hard pitch.

Last month during a community access TV show taping in Franklin County, Burlington's bipartisan mayor was asked whether he would sign a gay marriage bill if one arrived on his desk as governor. His answer: "I don't know."

He said he didn't know why such a bill would be necessary or what the difference would be between the current civil unions and marriage. He said he needed to get more information and that he was getting conflicting advice from within the gay and lesbian community.

Of course, there he was, in Franklin County, whose more conservative residents were infamous for shouting down speakers at a forum on civil unions four years ago. It was difficult to tell whether his waffle was political avoidance of an issue certain not to endear him to the county's conservative ethnic Democrats, or whether it was sincere personal confusion.

A political calculation might weigh conservatives against queers and find there are more conservatives than there are gays and lesbians who vote. A candidate might decide that he should not alienate the group that brings the most votes and/or influence to the table. That kind of equation trades off one group's long-term equal rights for another group's immediate votes – the kind of math that gives politics and politicians a dirty name.

If your confusion is personal and sincere, Mayor Clavelle, here's how to get to the answer: give up social security survivor benefits, filing joint federal taxes,

spousal privilege in federal courts, federal prison visitation rights, immigration priority for a nonresident spouse, the right to name your spouse as your next of kin at an out-of-state hospital, even the right to buy a family pass to national parks, and agree to pay income taxes on the health insurance benefits that cover your spouse. Do all that, then see if your answer is "what's the difference?"

According to a 1997 General Accounting Office report commissioned in connection with the Defense of Marriage Act, there are 1,049 federal laws affecting married partners, spouses, widows, widowers, and survivors, covering everything from buying a first home together to qualifying for food stamps. Vermonters and out-of-staters with civil unions are invisible with regard to these provisions.

If you and your spouse Betsy Ferries are not willing to have only what we've got, then what we've got is obviously not equal.

These issues are federal issues, and a politician could argue that state marriage/civil union laws have no impact on federal policy, a stand that is ignorant at best, disingenuous at worst. With a relationship labeled "civil union," Vermont's gay and lesbian couples (and all the out-of-state couples who came here to be civilly united) don't even get a seat at the federal table – or perhaps more accurately, in the federal courtroom. Because it's only with standing as married couples that we can challenge the federal Defense of Marriage Act, President Clinton's signing of which was far more shameful than anything he did with Monica Lewinsky.

The struggle now going on in Massachusetts makes the difference

between civil unions and marriage very clear. "Separate is seldom, if ever, equal," wrote the state's high court. The folks who worked hardest on *Baker v. State* and the legislation that grew out of the Vermont Supreme Court ruling in that case had to stifle their disappointment in order to celebrate the significant gains represented by civil unions. They have always been clear that civil unions are a first course, not the whole meal, a politically palatable compromise, not true equality.

San Francisco's Mayor Gavin Newsom, a straight man and a Democrat, gets it. He did for California gay men and lesbians what you say you will do for Vermonters with high prescription drug costs: he broke an unjust law to enact true justice. He directed his county's clerks to issue marriage licenses, even though that act is prohibited by California law. He didn't wait for permission, just as you say you won't wait for permission to get low-cost Canadian prescription drugs.

So, how is it, Mayor Clavelle, that a compassionate, bright, pragmatic, socially aware liberal like yourself doesn't get it that separate is not equal and that the issue is about civil marriage and legal rights, not religious doctrine? That what's at stake is not just semantics, but equality?

Euan Bear
Editor

Production notes:

Green Landers cartoonist Stuart Granoff is taking a break this month, but will return in the April issue. And both Spiritual Essence columnist Pippin and The Stars Are Out astrologer Glo Daley have completed their series this month. Spiritual Essence will continue as an occasional column by various writers, and next month we welcome a new advice columnist, Lavender Lizzie. Enjoy!