

When the Maine Legislature Comes Out

According to press reports and eyewitness accounts, the majority of the Maine Legislature in March "outed" themselves by donning pink triangles and rainbow flag stickers. The legislators were outraged that a conservative Christian group opposed to gay marriage had posted on its website a request for "tips, rumors, speculation and facts" about the sexual orientation of legislators, lobbyists, and state officials.

According to one legislator, whose account was passed

along on a campus directors listserve, "I happened to be at the Maine Statehouse today quite early. The Republican caucus arrived for a meeting. Many were muttering under their breaths, 'we ought to all come out.' Seems that the Christian Civic League (do I need to describe its work?) had posted a web site request for tips and rumors about any legislators who might be gay. The Augusta paper, the *Kennebec Journal*, carried the news as a banner headline.

"By late morning, little

construction paper triangles of pink were being donned (with marvelous hatpins) by staff, lobbyists and legislators. It was quite a sight. By midday, the Senate had issued a letter denouncing the CCL with every Senator signing on!

"Every once in a while, things work the way they should ..."

Rep. Larry Bliss, who also works at the University of Southern Maine, added to the story: "In addition to working at USM, I am a State Legislator, so

I was at the State House too. The Democrats hold a majority in both houses, and the Governor is a Dem as well. This year, we passed the budget without any Republicans, and since then, things have been very sour between the parties. But this issue solidified everyone. Even the ultra-conservative legislator who does the bidding of the Christian Civic League (and who goes out of his way to prevent me from even touching him) sent me a note telling me that he respected me as a legislator, and

thought the CCL had gone too far. Now THAT was amazing!"

The director of the Christian Civic League later apologized for his actions and removed the request from the website, according to the reports in the *Kennebec Journal* and *Morning Sentinel*. Some legislators characterized the apology as "too little too late."

Maine has no civil rights protections for gay men and lesbians. ▼

Oregon Court Okays Equal Marriage

Portland, OR – In a case brought by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of nine same-sex couples and Basic Rights Oregon, a Circuit Court judge struck down an Oregon law that prevents same-sex couples from marrying and ordered Oregon to recognize the 3,000 same-sex marriages that have already been performed.

The court did not decide

how Oregon must treat same-sex couples going forward. It gave the state legislature the opportunity either to extend marriage to same-sex couples or to devise a system of civil unions like that adopted by Vermont.

Roey Thorpe, Executive Director of Basic Rights Oregon, said, "While you already know in your hearts that you are married, an

Oregon court has just taken a giant step toward making sure the state treats your marriage just like all other marriages."

This decision answers the fundamental issue of whether or not the state can continue to discriminate against same-sex couples in the marriage laws. The judge found that it could not, saying that it was a violation of the state's equal protection guarantees to discriminate in the rights and obligations of marriage on the basis of gender and sexual orientation. The court's ruling confirms legal opinions by attorneys for Multnomah County and the state legislature as well as the state Attorney General.

In his decision, the judge

ordered the state to recognize the 3,000 marriages that have already taken place in Oregon. He also ordered Multnomah County to stop issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples, but said it should resume issuing those licenses if the legislature does not come up with a remedy for the discrimination within 90 days of the next legislative session, whether regular or special.

"This court rightly recognized that same-sex couples are discriminated against by the state in marriage," said David Fidanque, Executive Director of the ACLU of Oregon.

"But by acknowledging this discrimination, the judge should have also realized that it

cannot be fixed by creating a system of civil unions that does nothing more than highlight the discrimination," Fidanque added. "Where is the equality when same-sex couples are forced to refer to their relationships as 'unions' while straight couples get the preferred and more socially acceptable term of marriage? You can't use the law to say one group of Americans is not as good as another." ▼

This information was received in a press release from the ACLU at press time.

Gay Games Compete for Support

In dueling press releases, both Rendez-Vous Montreal 2006 and the Federation of Gay Games laid claim to support from European gay and lesbian sports groups. In addition, the Chicago Gay Games has scored a coup with the enlistment of tennis legend Billie Jean King to help promote the games.

After the failure of negotiations between the Montreal group and the FGG over financial control, the FGG designated Chicago as the new site for the 2006 Gay Games. Montreal declared that it would continue with planning for a gay and lesbian sports and cultural gathering in 2006.

According to Rendez-Vous Montreal

2006, on March 7, the annual assembly of the European Gay and Lesbian Sports Federation (EGLSF), with a membership of more than 100 sports teams and 10,000 athletes in Europe, voted in favor of withdrawing from the Federation of Gay Games (FGG). Équipe Montréal also withdrew from the FGG in November 2003.

In addition, Rendez-Vous Montreal 2006 inked reciprocal information and promotion deals with EGLSF for various sports events between now and 2006.

"With the European network and support," said Louise Roy, Chief Executive Officer of Rendez-vous Montréal 2006, "our

ability to reach gay and lesbian athletes across Europe has now increased dramatically. Each year, over one hundred sporting events are held under the EGLSF banner, which means that Rendez-Vous Montréal 2006 will enjoy the benefits of an unparalleled and targeted promotional campaign to a pool of over 10,000 people. We now believe that European participation in the Montréal games will meet our original predictions."

Rendez-Vous Montreal 2006 is scheduled for July 29-August 5, 2006.

But according to the FGG's press release, the EGLSF has not abandoned its support for the Chicago Gay Games, even

though the FGG "regrets" the European federation's departure.

"Montreal 2006 omits a key fact from its press release however. At its March 6-7 Amsterdam Meeting the entire EGLSF assembly stressed repeatedly its strong support for the Gay Games, and specifically Gay Games VII in Chicago," said the Gay Games statement. A liaison committee has been formed, and Chicago Games, Inc., says it will have the same access to information and promotion exchanges with the EGLSF as Montreal 2006.

The Chicago Gay Games VII is scheduled for July 15-22, 2006. ▼