

letters

"Equal" AND "Different"

Many people are getting hung up on the term "civil union" and are attempting to assert that the term itself means that we are not equal to straight married people.

I disagree with that for a variety of long winded reasons that I won't go into, BUT the main reason that I LIKE the term to be different than "marriage" is because we *are* different from straight married people so why should the term that is used to define a straight union be identical to the term that is used to define a gay or lesbian couple? I mean really, let's use our OWN terminology to define our OWN institutions, rather than mimicking everything straight people do. The fact that the term IS different, differentiates us FROM straight people ... what's wrong with that?

Patti York
Smithtown, Long Island

Misformed on Marijuana

In his April interview with OITM, Gov. Jim Douglas showed himself to be shockingly misinformed about medical marijuana.

Douglas claims, "The FDA has made it very clear that not only does it reserve the right to prosecute people who use it, but also government officials who sanction it." This statement is absolutely false. The FDA does not prosecute users of unapproved medicines, and has neither taken nor threatened any action against the hundreds of state and local officials now administering medical marijuana programs in Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, Oregon and Washington. Such action is simply not in the FDA's job description.

Even John Ashcroft's Justice Department – an agency as hostile to medical marijuana as any organization this side of the Gestapo – has not acted against local offi-

cials who administer marijuana registries and have issued thousands of patient identification cards. Even the Santa Cruz, California City Council – which invited a local medical marijuana co-op to distribute marijuana to patients in the courtyard of City Hall – has not been subject to any prosecution or federal harassment.

Douglas is also wrong when he claims the FDA "decided against" approving medical use of marijuana. In fact, the FDA has never considered the issue. The classification of marijuana as a Schedule I drug – barred from medical use under federal law – was a political decision made by Congress, a decision in which the FDA played no part whatsoever.

States are not required to have laws that match federal statutes, and there is absolutely nothing requiring Vermont to have laws that subject people with AIDS and other serious illnesses to arrest and jail for using medical marijuana. Since Gov. Douglas acknowledges

that marijuana "provides relief to people," he has no reason not to support the medical marijuana bill, S.76, now before the Vermont House of Representatives.

Bruce Mirken,
Director of Communications
Marijuana Policy Project
Washington, D.C.

OOPS Department: You may have noticed an odd lack of apostrophes and quotation marks in the April issue (but wasn't that fun to get full color on the cover?!). Here's what happened. Our office printer blew its fuser (the part that makes the ink stick to the paper) in the middle of layout. Fortunately, *Seven Days* art director Don Eggert responded to a frantic request for help and generously offered his services. However, their copy of our typeface, Times New Roman, was faulty and blipped out the apostrophes and quote marks. Under a time crunch and relieved to have pages to paste up, we didn't catch the glitch.

- EB

Moving Forward on Several Fronts

Four events of note demand mention – and in fact deserve more than that. The first is the signing into law of H.113, the school anti-harassment bill. The bill was passed by the Senate without changes from the House version, and Governor Douglas signed it in mid-April. It defines harassment and outlines a clear process for school staff and administrators to follow in dealing with threats to student learning based on "a student's or a student's family member's actual or perceived race, creed, color, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, or disability."

This bill was supported by LGBT organizations both for "our" inclusion and as allies for the Vermont Anti-Racism Action Team and other organizations who were the prime movers behind the bill. And despite the removal of a school choice provision held to be indispensable by VARAT, its passage is a triumph for all the organizations involved.

The second event was the eighth annual Day of Silence on April 21, a protest organized by the United States Student Association and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) to recognize and make unacceptable the harassment faced by LGBT students. Founded in 1996 at the University of Virginia, the demonstration of the silencing effect of harassment has grown to encompass 2600 schools and universities. Last year then-Governor Gray Davis (remember him?) proclaimed a state Day of Silence in support of the students' goal.

Participants at UVM wore stickers, handed out cards, and sponsored a lunch for supportive students and faculty who could not fully participate for the whole day. These students are our community's future – and it's in good hands.

The third is the energized opposition to SB427 in the New Hampshire legis-

lature. This mini-DOMA refuses recognition to same-sex marriages or any arrangement "that is treated as a marriage or the legal equivalent of marriage" in other states. In addition, it defines marriage as solely involving "one man and one woman as husband and wife."

New Hampshire Freedom To Marry has been organizing opposition to the Senate-passed bill that at press time was awaiting votes in the House Judiciary Committee and on the floor of the House. According to Brian Rater of NHFTM, the chairman of the committee says his gay friends had advised him that they supported passage of an amended version of the bill. Really? We hope Freedom to Marry is successful in defeating the bill, yet another mean-spirited intrusion of Christian fundamentalism into the civic life of LGBT folks throughout New England. When we published in February the account of a woman seeking a potentially life-saving mammogram at a hospital across the river in NH which refused to accept her civil union partner as her next of kin, it clarified for all of us what's at stake.

The fourth event is astounding, something many of us never thought we'd see. While the marriages performed in San Francisco in February and March, and in

Portland, Oregon, and briefly in several other cities may be validated by future court rulings, the marriages that will be celebrated this month in Massachusetts have already overcome that hurdle.

To the justices of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, to the Gay and Lesbian Advocates & Defenders who argued the case, and especially to Mary Bonauto and Jennifer Levi, to the seven plaintiff couples – Julie and Hillary Goodridge, Ed Balmelli and Michael Horgan, Gina Smith and Heidi Norton, Maureen Brodoff and Ellen Wade, Richard Linell and Gary Chalmers, Gloria Bailey and Linda Davies, and David Wilson and Robert Compton – to all the gay and lesbian couples in the Commonwealth: Thank you for leaping over Vermont's lead and showing the rest of the nation the way to full equality. May your marriages bring you joy, dignity, respect and equal treatment in all areas of your lives. ▼

Euan Bear

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Editor

editorial