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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

## New Year, New Challenges

This issue marks the completion of 19 years of OITM as the voice of (sometimes a "forum for") Vermont's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. January also closes out my third year as the editor. It's been quite a ride.

Between the now-voided San Francisco marriages last February, the legal recognition of same-gender marriages in Massachusetts in May, the political conventions and the elections, we've seen the fulfillment of the old curse, "May you live in interesting times."

### Inclusion

The immediate new challenge for us in Vermont this New Year is to ensure that all the people represented by our alphabet soup – the Gs, Ls, Bs, and Ts – are protected from arbitrary harm based on something as innate and personal as sexual orientation or gender identity – who we love and what we look like. We have, for the most part, achieved that protection for the Gs, the Ls and – by extension – the Bs. We are not quite there yet for the Ts, our transgender colleagues, family members, friends, and lovers.

With support, the help of allies, and our work in presenting our truest selves to the people who hold the votes, we have a chance at making explicit the intent of our nondiscrimination law: that no one should be denied access to housing, loans, a hotel room, a driver's license, medical care, or a job based on their genitalia, the genitalia of their beloved, or on whether the gender noted on their documents matches how some segment of society thinks they "ought" to look.

It's not complicated, and there's some support from the Attorney General's office. Last spring in the case of job discrimination and harassment suffered by a transgender Hardwick police officer, they said his treatment was discriminatory under the "sex" and "sexual orientation" provisions of the law. But let's make it perfectly clear. There is no place for bigotry or discrimination against anyone under the rainbow flag in Vermont.

A gender identity and presentation nondiscrimination bill will likely be introduced in the Vermont legislature this session. Please call your Representative and Senator and ask for their yes votes.

### Health Care

Another challenge lies in ensuring access to health care for all Vermonters. One proposal reportedly being enthusiastically endorsed by Governor Jim "Bush Lite" Douglas for state employees is Healthcare Savings Accounts. It's a federal program under which employees put a percentage of their pre-tax pay into an account that can then be used for medical expenses, including meeting the typically much higher deductibles on accompanying traditional insurance policies. In some cases, the employer would match a percentage of the employee's contribution. IBM already offers such accounts to its employees, and Blue Cross Blue Shield has been advertising them as part of its Vermont Health Care Plan.

There are several concerns, including cost shifting from employers to employees using these plans, saving employers as much as \$600 per employee per year, according to one source. But the problem that concerns us most is that as a federal program tucked into the so-called Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003, HSA funds are not available for the gay and lesbian partners of employees whose companies use the plan. The funds are available for the expenses of straight married spouses. Even when we have committed relationships recognized in a civil union, we are legal strangers under the HSA law, our families do not exist. The law discriminates against same-gender couples. Gay men and lesbians already bear a discriminatory tax burden by being federally taxed on employer-paid health care premiums that cover our spouses. It is one more shortcoming of civil unions compared to marriage.

The State of Vermont should not endorse or promote discriminatory healthcare plans, and state employee unions should not accept them as part of their contracts. Blue Cross and other insurance companies should not make money selling these discriminatory policies. At the very least, employers – including the state – should recognize the unfair tax burden lesbian and gay workers face and structure plans to offset such taxes. Of course, the better solution would be to get the federal government to recognize civil unions or to outlaw marriage discrimination against same-sex couples. And the ideal would be for everyone, regardless of marital

or employment status, to have access to quality health care.

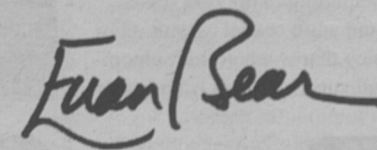
### AIDS Prevention

Then, of course, there's the not-new challenge – outlined in Ric Kasini Kadour's article in this issue – of how to change the direction of Vermont's AIDS services funders at the Vermont Department of Health. It is unclear whether VDH is under federal pressure to put a larger percentage of AIDS prevention funding into intravenous drug users – who may be more acceptable to the Bush administration's appointees at the CDC – than into serving men who have sex with men, who have shown marked increases in new AIDS diagnoses in Vermont, or whether that's their own idea.

Perhaps Vermont CARES had the right idea: CDC money, even when administered through our own Department of Health, comes with too many strings and encourages dependence on – and addiction to – federal dollars. When federal authorities campaign on discrimination and hatred of gays and delete lifesaving and risk reducing information from official websites, that's going to filter down into funding priorities.

But more to the point is that the state Department of Health needs to recognize and serve the gay community in proportion to its health needs and not in lockstep with the ideology of an anti-gay federal Administration.

We have the resources for meeting and mastering these challenges – and my New Year's wish is that we will have the energy and the will to do so together as a community. ▼



Euan Bear  
Editor

**Our 20th year begins next issue!  
Write us with memories, ideas, or thoughts on what the paper has meant to you!**

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