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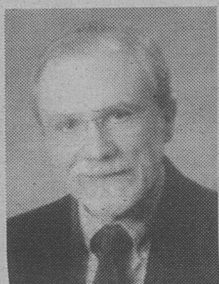
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Mountain Pride Media thanks the following volunteers who recently joined in on our stuffing night:

Ray Remillard, Joe Swinyer, Marie (mais oui!), Lynn McNicol, Kate MacTavish, David Lynch., Tom McGlenn, Ron Bernard, Miguel Rivera, Greg Weaver, Dave Altier, Steve Ekberg, Matt Webb, Jim P., Bob Wolff.

JOIN US AT OUR NEXT STUFFING NIGHT:

Wed. October 26, 5pm

Pizza and soda provided –
conversation optional!

Views: The Way Life Should Be, Almost.

Imagine the ordeal Martin Ripley endured when, due to his sexual orientation, he was subjected to threats and assault at work. "I'm a hard worker and enjoy having a job. But it's been very hard for me to keep a job since I came out nine years ago." Ripley left one job and was fired from two more before finally finding an employer who enforces the company's non-discrimination policy.

Imagine too the profound hurt and hassle Hall Wilkie and Tom Craveiro suffered when they were thrown out of a bed-and-breakfast inn. According to Wilkie, "We tried to salvage our vacation, but finding other accommodations was very difficult at the height of the summer season. My mother and sister are buried here, a place of special importance to us. But we cannot now return there confident that innkeepers will not discriminate against us simply because of our sexual orientation."

And then there is school Superintendent Paul Knowles, who explains, "As a teacher and administrator in the public schools for twenty-six years, I have witnessed and dealt with dozens of blatant verbal and physical attacks against students who have been perceived as, or were, openly gay or lesbian. Not to recognize these students and to provide a safe and supportive school environment for them will continue to place at least ten percent of the high school's population at risk for self-harm and/or potentially life-threatening treatment."

If these incidents had happened elsewhere, perhaps somewhere deep in the Bible belt, they may not have come as such a shock. But this was Maine, home to the color blue in the last four Presidential elections. Home to a Democratic governor and legislature and the nation's first Green Party state representative. Apex of the liberal northeast and welcoming summer playground to millions from across the nation and the globe. The home of my own maternal roots, boyhood, and hearth and home today. According to the first sign you see upon entering the state, Maine is "The Way Life Should Be."

But we are also home to the Christian Civic League of Maine, headed by Michael Heath, who seems intent on advancing the far-right Christian fundamentalist

ron bilancia

agenda in the blue northeast. And, unfortunately, his crowd must be credited with some past success.

The generally welcoming, tolerant, inclusive state of Maine, until recently, was the only New England state that allowed discrimination based on sexual orientation. That changed last March when Democratic Governor John Baldacci signed LD 1196 "An Act To Extend Civil Rights Protections to All People Regardless of Sexual Orientation." He did so with a solid majority including 25 percent Republican support. This law simply adds sexual orientation to its list of protected classes and prohibits discrimination in jobs, housing, credit, lodging, and education.

But Mr. Heath and his CCLM cohorts, as promised, forced a November referendum to repeal the law. Thus the law remains in limbo pending the referendum vote, which Heath and Co. think they can win. Given past performance, they have some confidence.

The issue has a seesaw history here. In 1977 Democratic legislator Larry Connolly introduced the first bill to prohibit discrimination based on orientation. Connolly died in 1987 before any bill was passed or sent to voters. In 1993 the legislature finally passed a bill, but it was vetoed by Republican Governor John McKernan. In 1995 Carolyn Cosby and her Concerned Maine Families group successfully placed a referendum question on the ballot that would have prohibited the state from passing any such non-discrimination laws and also would have invalidated existing local ordinances protecting gays and lesbians from discrimination. That measure was defeated 53 percent to 47 percent.

In 1997 the legislature passed another law, and this time

Independent Governor Angus King signed it. But it was repealed by referendum in 1998. In 2000, rather than passing a bill, the legislature approved going straight to a new referendum to prohibit this kind of discrimination. It was defeated by a very narrow 1 percent margin.

So here we are, back for referendum round four. But this time things may be very different. Where last time Heath and Co. were screaming, "No special rights!," this time they are playing the "gay marriage" card despite the law's expressed same-sex marriage prohibition.

Maine Won't Discriminate, the coalition fighting the repeal, thinks they have learned from the past and have a strong chance to prevail this time. They are better organized with over 30 coalition partners and a huge statewide grassroots effort. They are framing the issue their way: "A NO vote means you are saying NO to discrimination in Maine, period!" Their professional campaign manager is Jesse Connolly, who, as the late Larry Connolly's son, has a deep personal investment in this campaign. Polling data clearly show Mainers' distaste for discrimination, and a clear majority currently favor the law passed last March. Progressive religious authorities are ready to go head to head with the fundamentalists. This time MWD is clearly appealing to the better angels of our nature while the other side appeals to the worst.

I'm convinced that with a lot of hard work we Mainers can send a resounding message to the extremists who want to make their narrow theology *everyone's* public policy. I'm convinced that with a lot of hard work we can definitively tell them that this is not what we are about in Maine, that in Maine, our *moral values* say NO to the specter of discrimination in *all* its awful forms. I'm convinced that with a lot of hard work, Maine, once and for all, will finally become "The Way Life Should Be" for *everyone* who chooses to live in or visit this beautiful state. ▼

Ron Bilancia is an educator from Brewer, Maine and a volunteer member of Maine Won't Discriminate

(www.MaineWontDiscriminate.com).