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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 or actions of public officials on issues of importance to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender persons. We reserve the right not to publish any material deemed to be overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist, classist, xenophobic, or homophobic. Unless otherwise specified, all submissions of articles, photographs, graphics, and advertisements herein are the property of Mountain Pride Media, Inc. and any re-publication or broadcast without written permission is prohibited. We are not responsible for the return of unsolicited materials. All contributions are donated to Mountain Pride Media, Inc. for our use including, but not limited to, publishing in print and electronic (Internet, Web, etc.) versions, advertising, marketing, and archival purposes with appropriate attribution to the original author. No assumptions should be made about the gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation of any contributor or any person named in these pages. *Out in the Mountains* is not responsible beyond the printing of corrections for errors in any submitted materials. Writers' guidelines are available on request. All materials submitted must include a name and a contact number. However, within the pages of the newspaper, articles may appear anonymously upon request, and strict confidentiality will be observed.

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Voting, Green Living and the ACLU

November is a time of transitions. Here in Vermont, we are beginning to get serious cold weather, the leaves are gone; we must get ready for winter. It is the time of elections for us at the state and national levels, and the results will help determine the direction we take from here: whether toward increasing repression and violence, or instead toward healing and peace. And it's the time of holidays, families and feasting and remembering the good things we have.

There isn't much more to be said about voting, except to urge everyone to vote!! Vote early by mail, or make sure you can get to the polls on November 7 to cast your ballot. Voting is our right, and we all need to exercise it, every chance we have. It's up to us to make sure we continue to have the right to vote, the right to speak out and to live our lives in a free and open manner.

Thanks to observant reader Tammy Higgins for bringing the following to our attention: *Green Living, A Practical Journal for Friends of the Environment*, a quarterly with offices in Randolph, has managed to offend us. In a somewhat humorous column titled "Fear Factor - Vermont!" the author kids us with the statement that Vermont has a lot to be scared of, including "Coyotes, black ice, mud, cluster flies, head lice, school budgets, Act 250, tent caterpillars, maple thrips, Quebec drivers, identity theft, gay marriage, and Yankee Nuclear."

While amused by the list, I also wonder, for about the thousandth time, WHAT is it people are so afraid of? Referring to gay marriage, I mean. I can only say, *Green Living*, I didn't expect to find this in your otherwise progressive magazine. It's really our community that has reason to be afraid: of harassment, of ostracism, of rejection by family members, of internalized homophobia, of losing our jobs or homes. It's the old case of putting the shoe on the other foot. It's kind of like our not-fairly-elected president crying "terrorism" while carrying out terrorist activities (and would it surprise you to know that Nobel Peace Prize recipient and former South African President Nelson Mandela, during his 27 years of imprisonment by the white majority government, was labeled a "terrorist" by those officials?).

While we're on the subject, sometimes the very groups that promise to fight on our behalf may be guilty of stepping on our rights as well. The past few years, the American Civil Liberties Union has been the subject of increased scrutiny as it has allegedly bent its own ideals to go along with some U.S. poli-

cies to detect "suspected terrorists."

Recently, a group of ACLU supporters, by the name of Save the ACLU, stated that the organization must recognize its failures and replace its national leaders. The group has accused those leaders of attempting to "impose gag rules on staff, subject staff to email surveillance, ... and purge the ACLU of its internal critics," among other things.

Allen Gilbert, executive director of ACLU Vermont, told OITM that the ACLU has "undergone a phenomenal growth spurt since 2001," due largely to people's fears of loss of civil liberties under the current administration. He said the resulting "growing pains," combined with the strong personalities of ACLU leaders, seem to be at the heart of the conflict.

It's hard to say exactly what's been going on at ACLU headquarters. It is a fact that the ACLU has engaged in some questionable fundraising practices, such as asking donors for credit card numbers over the telephone.

The ACLU is important to all of us, and I hope it will continue as a beacon for human rights for a long time to come. It has long been a supporter of LGBT rights, including bringing the first lawsuit in support of same-sex marriage in 1972. More recently, the ACLU's successes include advocating on behalf of California HIV-positive inmates' rights to spousal family visits; in Arkansas, for the right of households with gay members to be foster parents; and in Georgia, affirming the right of gay high school students to have their own social club.

It's important for supporters to hold the ACLU, and all organizations, accountable. Unless civil rights organizations hold to their ideals, they, too, can become part of the problem. Just like elected officials.

Unless we all act, and vote, and talk to others about the need to preserve our freedoms, our right to sit down to a holiday dinner with our chosen loved ones may not be so easily taken for granted. We have the right to fight for what is ours; the right to live our lives without fear of violence or bias towards us. We also have the right to speak up when someone offends us - even if offense was not intended.

By engaging ourselves in the process and working together, we can make a difference.

Please have a safe and happy November. We'll see you here again next month. ▼

Lynn McNicol, Editor