

Commentary by David Curtis

What ERA means for Vermont's lesbians, gays

In November, 1986, Vermonters will have the opportunity to vote in referendum to determine whether the Equal Rights Amendment will become part of the Vermont Constitution. The amendment, if approved by the voters, will provide that the State of Vermont will not discriminate against any person on the basis of sex.

I suggest that it is incumbent upon lesbians and gay men throughout the state to support and work toward approval of this amendment with enthusiasm. I do so for two basic reasons. First, it is essential to support any effort that will end discrimination of any kind in our state and, second, because the issue of gay rights is becoming a part of the ERA discussion, and that issue should not be allowed to sidetrack the fundamental question of whether the ERA should be adopted.

As persons who have been subjected to overt and subtle forms of discrimination for centuries, lesbians and gay men must be particularly sensitive to discrimination against other groups and must work to prevent that discrimination whenever it occurs. This should be true whether the discriminatory act is against blacks, orientals, Jews, women or any other groups. It is through making common cause with other groups and minorities that lesbians and gay men will be able

to deal with the discrimination based upon sexual orientation.

Some (primarily those opposed to the ERA) have suggested that adoption of the ERA will legitimize the "gay lifestyle" and will, in effect, be a gay rights bill. While I certainly think that would be a positive result, the fact is that the ERA is gender based. It is intended to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex (gender) and not sexual orientation. The issue of sexual orientation is a "red herring" created by the opposition to the amendment which

appeals to the homophobia in our society and is solely a device to defeat the ERA. Gay men and lesbians have an obligation to the women in our society to prevent that from happening.

Women have been struggling for centuries to achieve equality. The Vermont ERA will not be the solution to that problem, but it will be a step along the way. It is important that the ERA pass and become a part of our constitution. Gay rights must not

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Living positively, living gay

By Dave L.

As gay men and lesbians we have two options: we can buy into much of what society believes about us or we can recognize and act upon the freedom we have to be individuals and define our lives in our own manner.

A study of lesbian and gay psychologists revealed some disturbing data -- the gap between one's awareness of homosexual feelings and the acquiring of a positive gay identity was 15.7 years for gay males and 15.9 years for lesbians. If we buy into society's negative views of us, we pay the heavy price of loss of identity or integrity. All the drugs and/or alcohol will not make us non-gay or non-lesbian. All the prayers in the world will not change us. An inability to accept ourselves makes it difficult or impossible for others to accept us, and we expend tremendous amounts of energy trying to be someone we are not. For most of us, our homosexuality is not a choice -- it is a discovery.

Being positively gay begins with self-acceptance, self-understanding and knowledge. It is perhaps best explained by looking at three areas of our lives -- the physical, intellectual and emotional. In the physical area, do we accept ourselves as we are or do we buy into the media and the advertisers' presentations of who we should be? If we do the best we can with what we have physically, we're taking steps toward self-acceptance and self-confidence. Do gay men know what safe sex is and do we practice it? If we do not have this information, do we

know where to get it? Do we have the latest information on AIDS? Do our personal physicians (especially, for women, gynecologists) know we are lesbian or gay?

In the intellectual area, how much do we really know about homosexuality? What are our legal rights? What were the Stonewall Riots and what do they mean to us? How well would we score on a gay/lesbian IQ test? There is an ignorant world out there waiting to put us down; what do we do to counteract this ignorance? Do we keep up to date on what is happening locally and nationally in gay and lesbian issues? Do we discuss these issues with friends? Are we familiar with the wide variety of excellent lesbian and gay literature available?

In the emotional area, how do we deal with our anger? Anger at hiding, at the ignorance that surrounds us, at not being able to be who we are because of a very real fear -- of losing jobs, friends, family. Do we have emotional support systems? Do we talk, feel, trust? How do we deal with our own homophobia? As a gay man, I must learn to say, "I am what I am. I am not a faggot; that is a stick of wood. I am not a queen; that is a female monarch. I am not a sissy, a fairy, a queer. I am a man who is attracted physically, intellectually and emotionally to other men, and that's OK."

Self-acceptance allows us to accept others and to be accepted by others. If we carry negative self-images into a relationship, we will eventually destroy it. We need to look at our lives closely. Are we positive about our bodies, our minds, our emotions? If not, what can we do? We can join support groups, create reading groups to stay informed, participate in lesbian or gay events, think. To us, homosexuality is not a problem. We are not sick, perverted, or any of the other negative adjectives a non-gay and non-lesbian world sometimes assigns us. We can be -- and many, many of us are -- healthy, well informed, happy people who are lesbian or gay. And we like it!

Purpose

The purpose of 'Out in the Mountains' is to serve as a voice for lesbians, gay men, and our supporters in Vermont. We wish the newspaper to be a source of information, support and affirmation for lesbians and gay men. We also see it as a vehicle for celebration of the goodness and diversity of the lesbian and gay community.

Editorial Policy

We will consider for publication any material which broadens our understanding of our lifestyles and of each other. Views and opinions appearing in the paper do not necessarily represent those of the staff.

This paper cannot, and will not endorse any candidate for public office. We will serve as a vehicle for informing our readers about the views of candidates and actions of public officials on issues of particular concern to lesbians and gay men.

We will not publish any material which is overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist or homophobic.

All materials submitted must be signed and include an address and/or phone number so we can contact the author should we need to consider editorial revisions. However, within the pages of the newspaper, articles can appear anonymously, upon request, and strict confidentiality will be observed. No revisions or rejections of materials will occur without dialogue with the author.

We welcome and encourage all readers to submit materials for publication and to share your comments, criticisms, and positive feelings with us. This paper is here for you.

The deadline for submitting material for each issue is the 15th of the month prior to publication.

Materials should be sent to 'Out in the Mountains,' Box 438, Hinesburg, VT 05461.

'Out in the Mountains' is published by the Out in the Mountains collective: Elizabeth Mae, Howard Russell, David Ryan, Suzi Shira, Philip Roberts, Linda Wheeler, Terje Anderson, Gilles Yves Bonneau, and Antonio Baio.

Correction

The caption under the photograph of Euan Bear and Phyllis Schlafly had several omissions. It neglected to identify Bear as a Vanguard Press reporter and Glenn Russell as a Vanguard Press photographer, and it should have said that Schlafly denied supporting capital punishment for homosexuality, not capital punishment per se.