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VERMONT'S NEWSPAPER for LESBIANS and GAY MEN

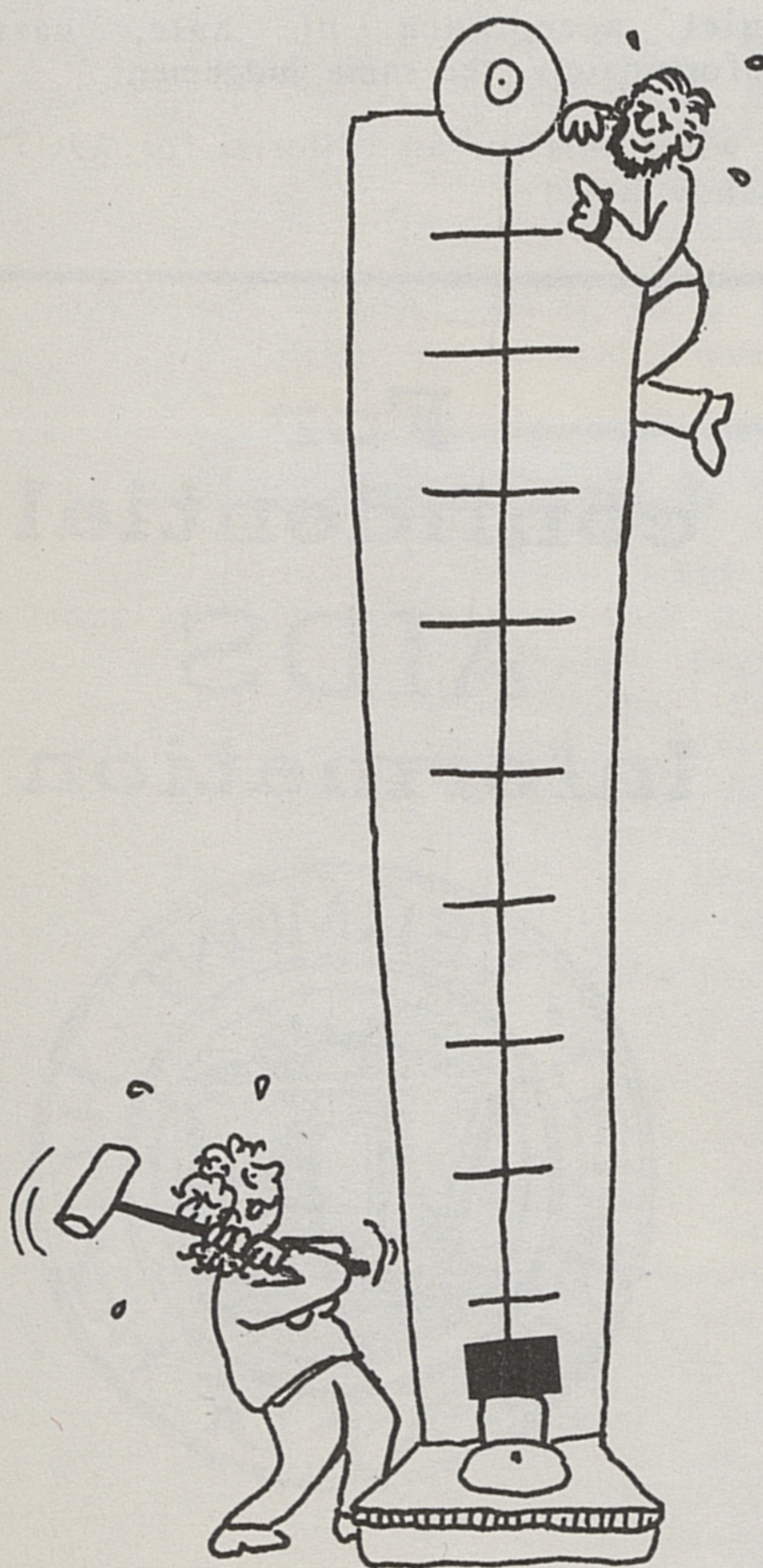
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***** HAPPY NEW YEAR *****

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- _____ \$300 - yes I'll underwrite a whole issue.
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Is Now the Time?

Commentary by Howard Russell

Discussions have begun over the last several months regarding the possibility of introducing a lesbian/gay civil rights bill into the Vermont legislature this year. These discussions have been happening informally as well as at the statewide Lesbian/Gay Coalition meetings and at meetings of a special legislative subcommittee which is an offshoot of the statewide coalition (see accompanying article).

Aside from the numerous logistical questions, there is a more important question which must be asked and that is, "Is this the right time?" Lesbians and gay men have just been through a battering by the homophobia accompanying the recent ERA campaign. We have seen our foes attack full force and we have seen our allies retreat under this onslaught. Are we ready to pick up where they left off? Do we have the energy and commitment to continue the offensive?

If we choose to go ahead we must do so with the full knowledge that there will be a personal toll that each one of us will pay for this effort. There will be letters-to-the-editor which will undoubtedly say some awful things about us. There will probably be an increase in the harassment and perhaps violence that each of us experiences personally. You can't push against these kinds of longstanding oppressive limits without some kind of backlash. I don't say this to scare anyone but to be honest about what I think all of us need to expect. Conservative elements in this state, and beyond, will do their best to make us pay dearly for daring to challenge the oppression that they see as good and just.

So, if I am right, introducing and fighting for this bill is going to put us through some real hard times. Is it worth it? Should we do it now?

To the first question, I believe the answer is unequivocally yes. We, as lesbians and gay men, fully deserve to have our rights guaranteed to us by law. We deserve freedom from unjust discrimination in employment, in housing, in public accommodations, and in all areas where others are protected. We will fight this battle not only for ourselves but for those who follow us.

Should we do it now? There are reasons I have discussed which dictate caution. Yet there are also reasons why now seems exactly the right time.

We have a governor who supports lesbian/gay civil rights and she should be on our side in this struggle. We have what will probably be one of the most liberal legislatures in the history of this state. We have legislators who will sponsor and fight for this bill. And we have a lesbian/gay community that emerged from the homophobia-filled ERA campaign not only feeling battered, but also feeling angry. This anger can energize us in demanding and securing change.

Forcing change will be painful and costly no matter when we do it. But tolerating the oppression has a much higher price tag. The daily barrage on our dignity, our feelings of self-worth and our ability to love who we choose is priceless.

It is not an easy decision, but it is a very important one. Should we go ahead or should we wait? You deserve to have your voice heard in this decision. Join us at the February 1, 1987 special statewide coalition meeting and help us decide. Ho to see you there.

ERA Campaign Obscures AIDS Facts

Now that the election is over we can all let out that deep breath we have been holding in and get back to our lives, right? For some of us that will not be so easy to do. There were targeted victims of this year's season of political distortions. Not all of these victims were able to defend themselves. Some of the most notable were the persons with Human Immunodeficiency Virus(HIV) infections: A.I.D.S. and A.R.C.

At some point during the debates a connection was made between A.I.D.S. and the E.R.A. This connection continues to

COMMENTARY Keith Goslant

baffle me. The end result, however, was the segregation of another minority, the deepening of confusion and a validation of fear and anger.

The issues surrounding H.I.V. infections have been somewhat confusing: Who is at risk? Is it a problem for only specific groups? Do these groups put "innocent" victims at risk?

None of these questions were addressed or answered during the E.R.A. campaign.

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