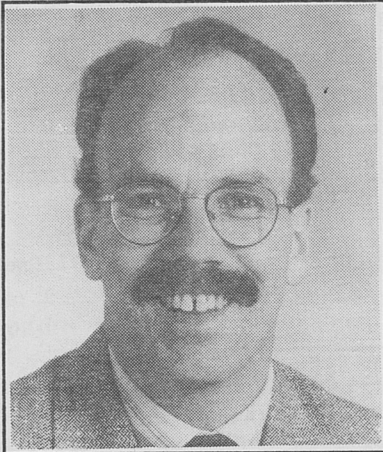


Commentary Voting As an Act of Self Defense

Terje Anderson

In my anarchistic college days I decorated many walls in Montreal with the slogan "If voting could change the system, it would be illegal."



Vote for

**Howard
Russell**
VERMONT STATE SENATE

P.O. Box 555 • Hinesburg VT 05461 • 452-2335

Democrat, for Vermont State Senate

- progressive tax reform
- support for human services and education
- pro-choice
- environmental protection

"It's time to take our place in the Senate."

**Please Vote:
General election Nov. 3**

paid for by Russell for Senate Committee
Sally Conrad, treasurer

I still believe that. But fifteen years later, I also believe that voting and active involvement in the electoral process are absolutely essential for lesbian, gay and bisexual people trying to survive in a heterosexist society. Voting may not change the system, but it can change lives. And for our community, it may save lives.

On any issue from homophobic violence to teenage suicide to AIDS, George Bush and his administration have made it clear that they do not care about our very lives. For us this election is not about simply choosing "the lesser of two evils." It is about making a choice between two candidates for every office who will have a major impact on our lives and our community.

It is about national policy on AIDS. It is about who supports our right to live with protection against discrimination and who believes that protection would grant us "special privileges." It is about who believes women and men have the right to make their own choice over their bodies, whether the issue is abortion or birth control or sexual privacy or access to accurate information about human sexuality. It is about a national effort to address the ignored health needs of women, including the fight against breast cancer. It is about who will continue to lock us out of government versus who will at least let us get our foot in the door. It is about who sits on the Supreme Court well into the next century.

Bill Clinton may not make me happy on every issue. He, and anyone else who could be a serious contender for President in our system, represents a somewhat centrist viewpoint on most issues. But to fail to recognize the important degree of difference between Bush and Clinton on so many issues, one would have to ignore the obvious. Life under a Clinton administration would be different than under Bush, at

least for lesbian and gay people, for women, for working and poor people, for people of color, and for anyone else excluded by the right wing crazies who have captured the national Republican party.

If Bill Clinton wins the election, that doesn't mean we can all stop worrying about everything because our issues will all be addressed. We'll still need ACT-UP and Queer Nation and civil rights lobbyists and gay people running for office and all of the other ways we currently try to influence public policy. But the battles we fight will change. And the people we are trying to influence will be more sympathetic to us. Some of them will even be us.

On a state level, there are plenty of choices to make as well. Find out how your legislator voted on the civil rights bill, or if they aren't in the legislature, how they would have voted. People who supported us deserve our support in return.

Voting does make a difference, because government policy makes a difference. Right now, somewhere in this country, Pat Robertson and his fundamentalist allies are registering someone to vote, or running someone for office, or putting anti-gay referenda on a ballot or trying to repeal civil rights legislation. If you can't get excited about who is running, or angry about what has already taken place in our country, then at the very least you should be frightened by what might happen if we don't vote. Whatever else voting is or is not, it is certainly one of the most valuable tools of self-defense our community has.

Even if you're not out of the closet or ready to go to a Pride March or lobby your legislator, you can have all the privacy you want in the voting booth. By all means, think about all the issues that matter to you; the economy, health care, the environment, foreign policy, education, and the whole list. But also think about your friends, your community and yourself. More than ever, this year we can't afford not to. ▼

TELEPHONE (802) 524-9595

CAROL L. THAYER, M.D.
FAMILY PRACTICE

OFFICE HOURS
BY APPOINTMENT

R. D. 2, BOX 1160
FAIRFAX, VERMONT 05454

Lynn Goyette, M.S.Ed., M.A.C.P.
Feminist Counseling and Psychotherapy

Lesbian & Gay Affirmative
Individual • Couple • Group Work

860-6360

Rm. 3E
Richardson Place

2 Church St.
Burlington, VT