

ARE YOU HIP TO

Fayston Frowns on Citizen Initiatives

■ Renfrew convinces Town Meeting to oppose state-wide ballots that would frustrate the progress of marriage proponents

BY VIRGINIA RENFREW

This year, as my family has for five generations, I attended my Town meeting. I live in the town of Fayston. One of my goals for the day was to have my town vote against supporting the Citizens Initiative. You may ask what the Citizens Initiative is; that was the question of the people at my town meeting. The Citizens Initiative proposed in Vermont would enable groups of special-interest citizens to have their issue on a statewide ballot for a vote during an election. If the majority votes in favor of the issue, then the legislature must take it up and act upon it in 20 days.

When the issue came up, my State Representative, Bruce Hyde, stood up and attempted to explain how this would be good for Vermonters, as it would give citizens a voice in the legislature. Fortunately, I had done my homework prior to the meeting and raised my hand to explain what this really meant.

Other states that have Citizens Initiatives find that it is special interest groups, often financed with out-of-state money, that organize and sponsor the Initiatives, not ordinary working women and men. This Initiative would open the door to those well-financed special interest groups who would be able exert their influence on the legislative process. One of the many problems with the Citizens Initiative is that it is often one minority group going after another minority group while the majority stays home and does not vote.

The state of Maine has a Citizens Initiative process and a Popular Referendum process (which achieve similar goals). Last month, using the Popular Referendum process, Maine repealed a law that banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in credit, housing, employment, and public accommodations. This happened as a result of the efforts of well-funded (by largely out-of-state funds) and well-organized special interest groups. Only 30% of the citizens voted. They repealed this law by a 51%-49% vote. With such a low showing at the polls, only 15% of Mainers were able to repeal a law that had been passed by the Legislature.

Here in Vermont, the Initiative is very popular with those who dislike Act 60, Bernard Rome followers, the new group TIP, and the group POST. Bernard Rome was hailing the vote on the initiative as a great success. He said that it showed that Vermonters want this process. I hate to tell Mr. Rome, but not all Vermonters were given the opportunity to vote on this issue. Is this really the Vermont way?

Vermont has 243 towns, yet only 57 towns had the question on their agenda, less than one-quarter of the towns. Forty-two towns voted in favor of the Citizen Initiative. Many of the towns voted by Australian Ballot, which means there was no discussion. I called half the towns that supported the Citizens Initiative to find out the percentage of voters that attended town meeting. The percentage ranged from 8% to 45%. Most were around 20%. The fact that so few Vermont towns had this issue on their agenda, and so few people attended those meetings, shows that the majority of Vermonters did not have the opportunity to be involved with this process.

At my town meeting, I told my neighbors that, if the only reason they wanted to support this was because of their dislike for Act 60, they were opening a door they really would not want to open. If they disliked Act 60, or any other law that was passed or defeated, come election time in November, they could express their sentiments by voting and electing new legislators.

As I reminded my neighbors, we elect and/or re-elect our legislators every two years to represent our interests in the legislature. Every two years, we have an opportunity to let them know whether we believe they are doing a good job representing us. Our legislative process and legislature, made up of citizens from around the state, are sensitive to the needs and interests of the citizens.

The vote was then taken and my fellow townspeople overwhelmingly (almost unanimously) voted against the Citizens Initiative.

The court should not redefine marriage

Beyond One Man & One Woman

• BECAUSE THE CONSTITUTION BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE •

Vermonters Do Not Want Same Sex Marriage!

Gay rights advocacy groups are trying to force the legalization of "same sex marriage" by doing an end run around Vermont's citizens.

By challenging Vermont's marriage laws in the courts, they hope to win a battle that they know they would lose in the legislature and the voting booth.

This challenge is part of a carefully planned campaign by both outside and local groups to change the entire United States, starting with Vermont.

Their strategy is not new. It is failing in Hawaii as their attention is now turned toward Vermont. In Hawaii, the legislature has put a proposed State Constitutional Amendment on the ballot to continue to allow the people and their elected representatives to define marriage. This became necessary because the Supreme Court of Hawaii has tried to take that power away.

Take It to the People is a Vermont citizen group that considers marriage too important an issue to be taken away from the people. Vermonters are fair-minded people. They should be the ones to decide not just the five judges on the bench of our Supreme Court. In separate polls by Mason Dixon Political Media Research in September 1996 and Directions in Research in November 1997, a majority of Vermonters disapproved of same sex marriage.

"Vermont history & tradition has limited marriage to one man & one woman."

Vermont Attorney General Brief

"It is a biological fact that marriages require opposite-sex partners."

Vermont Attorney General Brief

"We hold Vermont's marriage laws do not discriminate against homosexuals."

Judge Linda Levitt Ruling

Vermont already extends health benefits and is the only state to allow adoption privileges to the gay/lesbian community.

Where are we now?

In July of 1997, three same sex couples filed suit in Chittenden County, trying to force Vermont to legalize "same sex marriage."

There are two parts. They claim first that, properly interpreted, the marriage statute authorizes the State to marry them. Second, they claim that, properly interpreted, the Vermont Constitution guarantees them the right to get married.

The Attorney General has fought back hard, and in December 1997 the lower court threw out the case on both counts. Now the three same sex couples are taking their case directly to the Supreme Court, over the heads of the people.

This is how it started in Hawaii. As a result, Hawaii was plunged into seven years of bitter, divisive controversy between the courts, the legislature, and the people.

Vermont can do better.

We have a strong tradition of grassroots democracy and self-government. If necessary, Take It to the People will support a Constitutional Amendment that will preserve the power of the people to define marriage.

The question of marriage is a question for the people!

TIP

Take It to the People

P.O. Box 4147, Burlington, VT 05406 • Email: VermontPeople@iname.com
Paid Political Announcement

The above 2-sided, color announcement was distributed in four daily newspapers across the state. TIP is soliciting donations and volunteers. Their email address is VermontPeople@iname.com.

Community groups respond to threatening paid political ad

BY MICHAEL C. ALBERO

February 27th, 1998 — It was an ordinary Friday morning for countless Vermonters. After rising from bed, preparing for work and sending the children off to school, many sat down in the kitchen to enjoy a cup of coffee, while glancing through the morning newspaper. Among the different sections and typical circulars was a special advertisement from Take it to the People, a newly established anti-gay rights organization. Yet, the statements contained in their flyer are ancient in origin and have only served to mobilize the GLBT community into action through series of emergency town meetings.

As a result of the recent assault by the Radical Right, many community agencies, including the Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights (VCLGR), are merely continuing their work and looking for more opportunities in which to

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the community responds:

Dear Take it To The People:

This letter is written in response to your recent notice tucked into the pages of the *Times-Argus*. This broadside proclaims:

THE COURT SHOULD NOT REDEFINE MARRIAGE BEYOND ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN

-Because The Constitution Belongs To The People Vermonters Do Not Want Same Sex Marriage!

However, I am a Vermonter, I believe the Constitution belongs to the people, and I absolutely support 'same sex marriage.' Furthermore, I know many other Vermonters who agree that gays and lesbians deserve the right to marry. Therefore, I speak not just for myself, but also for my friends and family in Vermont and elsewhere, because this issue is important to all of us.

Contrary to the Vermont Attorney General's brief, there is no such thing as a "biological fact that marriages require opposite-sex partners." A fact, according to my dictionary, is "1. anything done; an act; a deed, 2. a thing that has actually happened or is true; a thing that has been or is, 3. reality; truth; actuality; the state of things as they are." It is, for example,

a fact that history and tradition have until recent years, limited marriage to one man and one woman. It is also a fact that history and tradition have, until recent decades, encouraged the oppression and enslavement of women, people of color, people with disabilities, etc. My grandmothers and probably yours too, fought hard to force the legalization of women's right to vote: did they do 'an end run around' the established citizens of the time? You bet they did! Did the supporters of civil rights in this country do 'an end run around' the prevailing bigots of their day? Of course they did! They took their arguments to the streets, to the legislature and to the courts. People, impassioned by an idea whose time has come, use whatever means are necessary to reach other people who are resistant to the idea.

Historically, traditionally, marriage was the state and/or church-sanctioned union of a man and a woman, often arranged by the couple's families without regard to the desires of the man and the woman. But, thankfully, times change. Marriage today is more about the human desire for committed intimacy that is companionship. The marriage ceremony is a formal acknowledgment that two persons care so much about each other that they intend to commit their lives to practicing that care. Maybe they will have children, maybe not. Maybe the woman will take the man's name, maybe not. Maybe they will live together in the same house, sleeping in the same bed for the rest

of their lives, maybe not. Maybe they will, eventually, divorce. But, maybe not!

It is a fact that marriage practices have changed and will continue to change.

Vermont marriage laws, like all marriage laws that fail to recognize gay and lesbian citizens, will eventually change to reflect reality. The reality is that the union of two persons, regardless of their gender, committed to lifelong intimacy is an event worth celebrating. Most gay and lesbian citizens, just like most heterosexuals, want to marry and create families; it is time for our public institutions to recognize their right to do so.

Sincerely,
M. Corbin Gould

To the Editor:

Take it to the People? More like Hatred from the Steeple. These right wing hate-mongers do not speak for Vermonters, no matter how much funding they use to support their lies.
Cheryl Carmi

[this is her letter to TIP:]

Though your words and plans frighten me, it gives me great satisfaction to know that your hatred and hypocrisy will condemn you to a hell far worse, and of far greater duration, than the one your actions would create for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Vermonters. No amount of lies, rhetoric, or Biblical ci-

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