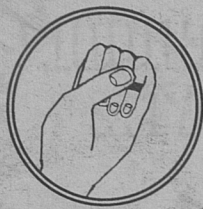


## COALITION



## NOTES

BY VIRGINIA RENFREW  
AND KEITH E. GOSLANT

On November 12, 1998, I attended the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force "Creating Change" Conference in Pittsburgh. It was wonderful to spend four days with more than 2,000 GLBT people. The opportunity to network was well worth the trip. There were so many workshops from which to choose. The ones I attended addressed issues relating to transgenders, citizen initiatives, developing a database, and GLBT in the union, to name a few.

But mainly, I attended the conference to meet with other members of the NGLTF Federation of LGBT Statewide Political Organizations, of which the Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights is a member.

The week of the Conference, the Federation announced the upcoming "Equality Begins at Home Week," which will be held on March 21-27, 1999. Events will take place around the country in GLBT communities and will highlight the challenges and opportunities for change in state government and state organizing.

VCLGR has been invited to apply for a grant to help coordinate the "Equality Begins at Home Week" here in Vermont. To plan the week, VCLGR would like to work with GLBT organizations throughout the state and will contact those organizations to see in what way they would like to participate in the festivities. If your organization would like to plan an event, or are in the process of planning an event, please contact Virginia Renfrew at 496-4333 or renfrew@sover.net.

Another date to mark on your calendar is February 16, 1999. VCLGR will be at the Statehouse for our annual Visibility Day. This year, as VCLGR has done over the past four years, we have reserved the Card Room in the Statehouse and will invite GLBT

organizations and individuals to come and meet their legislators. This is a time for all to come and spend an exciting day at the Statehouse. We hope to see you there.

### The Legislature

When the Legislature reconvenes in January, it will discuss issues having a direct impact on our communities: issues such as revisions to Act 60 and electric restructuring, issues affecting us as taxpayers and citizens. But there will also be legislation affecting personal decisions we make and the protections afforded to us.

The Office of the Attorney General has convened a special task force to look at hate and bias crime prosecution in Vermont. The proposal would give the victim/survivor of a hate crime the option of obtaining a restraining order against an alleged offender. This provision had been proposed in the original bill passed in 1987 but was deleted, as people were unfamiliar with the process of granting such orders. The bill also attempts to establish consistency in penalties and sentencing.

The Department of Health has created a draft proposal on name-specific reporting of HIV. While there is general agreement that Vermont needs more accurate and current information on HIV infections, there is not agreement that a name-reporting system has advantages over one using unique identifiers. There is also discussion about whether the Department of Health has the authority to implement a new system or whether legislative approval is required.

As we wait for the Supreme Court to rule on *Baker v. State*, we will see the reintroduction of Defense of Marriage Act-type bills and possibly citizens' initiatives. The Legislature did not aggressively or actively support these efforts in the last session. But with the arguments having been made before the Supreme Court, our opposition may feel a

greater sense of urgency on this issue and place greater pressure on legislators.

Funding for HIV/AIDS is a concern each legislative session. The Department of Health submits its yearly budget to the Office of Administration to be considered and included in the Governor's budget. We must always be vigilant in ensuring adequate monies are being requested to provide the services we know are needed in direct

client services, prevention, and the medication assistance and insurance assistance programs.

What can you do? Legislators need to hear from constituents; they need to hear from us. They need to hear our support or opposition to specific legislation. They need to know we are watching what they are doing. They need to be thanked when they do something we support. And if there are committee and public hearings, we must be willing to testify. As

in previous years, the Coalition will monitor legislative action. If there are issues of particular importance to you, do not hesitate to contact us for updates. Or volunteer to be a member of the Public Policy Committee and have direct involvement with the legislative process. You can contact me either via the Coalition toll free at (888) 825-4989 or directly at 454-8552, or email: kgoslant@ddmhs.state.vt.us. ▼

## THE TASK FORCE



### REPORT

BY SANDI COTE

The conservative label has always lain uneasily on my shoulders. From my earliest days I've been much more comfortable being called a liberal. Progressive ideas were such a natural fit that some people thought I was radical. In the 1960s, as a white teenager in Alabama, I marched for black civil rights. In the 1970s, I proudly burned my bra and declared myself a free woman; in the 1980s, I found myself part of the anti-apartheid movement. It's not that I was a joiner; I wanted to change what I saw as wrong. My life has hardly been an example of true conservatism. I didn't like the 1950s, and I certainly don't want to go back there!

Somehow, since becoming involved in gay rights, I've lost my liberal label. Not in every situation, of course. To Pat Robertson, I'd still be somewhere to the left of Bernie Sanders on the political scale. But to some in the gay community, I'm somewhere to the right of Pat Robertson because I want to get married. Those who call me a conservative have added another label to me — assimilationist. Am I? Is it my aim to be "digested or absorbed into the system" as Webster's Dictionary defines 'assimilate'?

To me, same-gender marriage is simply an extension of what I've always fought for — expanding society to include the outcasts in order to make the society stronger. I never bought into the "back to Africa" view that some expressed during the civil rights movement. No, I marched with Dr. King's supporters, who said, "We are Americans, too." Was that assimilationist?

# The Assimilated Radical

In a sense, we can never be assimilated into society because we are already a part of it. We don't live in some alternative universe — we live here in America. The problem is that we aren't being treated like other Americans. We are being

*To some in the  
gay community,  
I'm somewhere  
to the right of  
Pat Robertson.*

singled out for exclusion. We were born with the same rights as our neighbors, but we had those rights taken away from us somewhere along the line. Am I being an assimilationist to want those rights back?

With all the rights I've somehow lost over the years, I can make the biggest gain in retrieving them by working for the right to marry. Just think of the possibilities. If marriage were accepted, I wouldn't have to endure the annual 45-minute lecture from my doctor on "safe sex and the use of contraceptives." I could go anywhere in the US and not worry about sodomy laws. I wouldn't have to pack my legal documents on every trip to the beach on the off chance that one of us might need medical care. I could move to Virginia (God forbid!) and be legally allowed to rent a one bedroom apartment for two women. The list is virtually endless!

An anti-assimilationist friend of mine who knows my feminist background recently asked me why I would ever want to buy into the patriarchal institution of marriage. I point-

ed to the sign on my desk which paraphrases Bill Clinton's campaign slogan. "Why not? It's the Equality, Stupid!" Why should we be excluded from choosing for ourselves? We're as capable of deciding whether or not to marry as any heterosexual, so why should they make our decisions for us?

I am a strong supporter of numerous gay rights groups in our community because I believe that any right gained by one of us is a right regained for all of us. I can also see that by the single act of gaining the right to choose marriage, we can eliminate a number of the individual fights we are involved in.

The Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force is working for the rights of all of us from the pre-pubescent questioning teen to the free-love partygoer. Our goals are all-encompassing: dignity for the individual and equality for all of us. Our fight is your fight. Invite us to your group's next meeting and let's see where our goals meet. We're all part of this society. Let's see where we agree instead of how we differ. ▼

*If you would like more information about events or meetings or would like to invite representatives from VFMTF to speak at your workplace, community of faith, civic organization or whatever, you can contact us by calling Wendy Beinner (802) 652-0723, Roberta Garr (802) 223-7620 or Bari Shamas (802) 387-5788, emailing info@vtfreetomarry.org or visiting our web site, <http://www.vtfreetomarry.org>*

Psst! There's more to read in OITM besides Dykes To Watch Out For!

No kidding!

OITM