

Nominating New Hampshire as the State Next Door to the Gay-Friendliest State

by Ernie McLeod

I wasn't sure what to think when I opened the last issue of *OITM* and spotted the headline "Nominating New Hampshire as the Gay-Friendliest State."

After being thankful that my chair was low to the floor, I guessed the April Fool's edition of *OITM* had arrived late this year. But, no, September was clearly printed in the header. Then I thought maybe the headline was intended in an ironic way, something like "Nominating Keanu Reeves as the Best Actor Ever." Or that maybe those pranksters, the Log Cabin Republicans, were at it again, tossing out one of their amusing oxymorons such as "George W. Bush — Compassionate Conservative," in which case I was prepared to laugh and laugh!

But, it seemed this commentary was actually nominating New Hampshire as the GLBT-friendliest state in the union, beating out even California, New York, and Massachusetts!

I did find it curious that Vermont was left off this short-list of gay-friendly states, what with our progressive laws (most of them on the books for some time now), predominantly liberal political representation at state and federal levels, not to mention the recent colorful response to the nut-cases from Kansas, and, oh yes, that minor marriage case pending before the Supreme Court.

I found it especially curious since the article was published in *OITM*, which, unless I'm mistaken, is a Vermont newspaper. (Although I've encountered people as close as Montreal who have no idea Vermont exists, one would presume all New Hampshire residents are at least mildly aware there's something between them and New York.)

I tried to imagine the psychology behind such a glaring omission. After much consideration, I decided Vermont's absence from the article was a) a gross and negligent oversight, b) a deliberately snotty, unneighborly gesture, c) the case of the lesser desperately trying to overshadow the greater

by irrationally pretending that the greater does not exist (an example of this syndrome would be Mariah Carey squinting past Aretha Franklin — no easy task — on "VH1 Divas Live"), or d) a provocation designed to raise the blood pressure of GLBT persons throughout the Green Mountain State.

Don't get me wrong, I am more than pleased that New Hampshire is catching up to Vermont in terms of gay-friendly legislation — more power to everyone working hard to get those laws passed!

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And I do admit to being surprised that New Hampshire is passing such laws. Long ago I had, not entirely fairly it seems, written off New Hampshire as Vermont's evil, upside-down political twin. I stand corrected. New Hampshire's lavender horse got a late start out of the gate, but if it's finally gaining on Vermont's pink pony; I say go for a photo finish! In short, I am tickled lavender and pink for New Hampshire, especially for all its GLBT citizens, and I salute Sen. Trombly and the other jockeys who rode that horse as fast as it could canter.

Still, even with all these recent legislative successes, I wonder what happened to the New Hampshire that refused, year after year, to adopt the Martin Luther King holiday? What happened to the New Hampshire that boasts one of the most stridently conservative "mainstream" newspapers in the country? What about the New Hampshire that elects, time after time, senators and representatives who are certainly not pals of the GLBT community? I'm thinking of Rep. Charles Bass, of Rep. John Sununu, of Sen. Judd Gregg, and, especially, of Sen. Bob Smith (not to be confused

with the Bob Smith who penned "Openly Bob"). Does this New Hampshire no longer exist?

Just to make sure I wasn't making any presumptions about the voting records of the aforementioned elected officials, I consulted two Web sites that keep track of such things, the Christian Coalition, and the Human Rights Campaign.

The results? All of New Hampshire's federal politicians got high marks indeed on the CC's 1998 scorecards: Rep. Sununu and Sen. Smith each scored a perfect 100 percent

(gold stars for them!); Sen. Gregg finished close behind at 91 percent; Rep. Bass came in at an above-average 75 percent.

Vermont's politicians, on the other hand, fared poorly: Sen. Jeffords and Sen. Leahy each scored a sorry nine percent, while Rep. Sanders received a big fat goose egg.

The HRC, shockingly enough, had an almost opposite report. In Vermont, Sen. Leahy and Sen. Jeffords scored 100 percent, while Rep. Sanders received 88 percent (did Bernie have a bad hair day at some point during that Congress?).

In New Hampshire, Sen. Smith — give the man points for consistency! — scored an unambiguous zero percent, with Rep. Sununu coming in at 12 percent, Sen. Gregg at 33 percent, and Rep. Bass at 38 percent.

Of course, Bob Smith is the type of senator (not to mention presidential candidate) any state would be proud to call its own: pro-flag burning amendment, pro-prayer in schools, ditto the NRA interpretation of the second amendment, anti-abortion, and,

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Op-Ed

Out in the Mountains

Seeking Courage and Common Ground to Stem Anti-gay Violence

By Chuck Colbert

When the Rev. Jerry Falwell has dinner next month with 200 gay people, the table talk will be anti-gay rhetoric and violence.

This unusual gathering resulted from the efforts of the Rev. Mel White, a former ghost writer for Falwell and author of *Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America*. White asked Falwell: Can we talk? "Mel sincerely wants to lower the rhetoric on both sides. That is exactly what we want," Falwell told the Lynchburg, Va., *News & Advance*.

No doubt about it: anti-gay rhetoric and violence abounds. The murders of Billy Jack Gaither (Alabama) and Matthew Shepard (Colorado) and that of Private First Class Barry Winchell (Fort Campbell, Ky) exemplify an increasingly hostile climate. This dinner discussion — a hopeful sign on the political and spiritual landscape — holds a reconciliatory potential for stemming a shameful national trend: Ugly, inflammatory rhetoric and its companion, violent actions and in some cases homicide against people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, or even perceived to be so.

At a recent academic forum at Northeastern University in Boston, Father Robert Nugent, the priest whom the Vatican ordered to cease a 28-year gay-affirming ministry, had plenty to say about violence. "One of my road-show sound bites," Nugent told 400 people, "was homophobia is manifested from silence to violence."

"Silence is a kind of violence," he said, adding "We can't restrict violence just to physical violence. Emotional and psychological violence is also an issue." For gay Roman Catholics like me the Church's violent language is four words: "intrinsic evil," used to describe homosexual orientation and "objective disorder," used to describe homosexual acts.

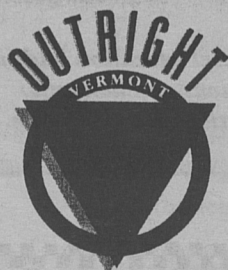
In an apparent effort to impose a hard-line dogma of chastity — mandatory, life-long celibacy for gays — this contemptible language prevails in the 1994 version of the *Catechism* and other texts, including a revision to the US bishop's essentially gay-positive 1997 pastoral letter, "Always Our Children."

Most recently, the Vatican Catholics have insisted that Father Nugent and his ministerial partner Sister Jeannine Gramick sign a written "profession of faith" containing words like "intrinsic evil," "depraved," and "intrinsic disorder." Such language, especially in a pastoral setting, is at best arcane and irrelevant. At worst it's counter productive, insulting, and enraging. One priest told me: "It's

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