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*Amya*  
MISS CHARLOTTE USofA 1998-99

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Tuesday

\$1.75 Beer

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Wednesday

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Thursday

\$4.00 All You Can Drink Draft

DJ Mike Plays Hot Sounds

Ashley's Fun House Show @ 1am

Monday

\$1.00 Beer

\$1.75 House Drinks

## lesbian notions

### The gay voting bloc

by Paula Martinac  
Special to Q-Notes

According to "Out and Voting," a new study by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), out lesbians, gay men and bisexuals now constitute a voting bloc that can have a measurable impact on elections, especially the upcoming mid-term races. Our self-identified voting numbers have increased from a little more than one percent of all voters in 1990 to five percent in 1996. Obviously, this is good news and an important juncture in our political history. But though the report answers a lot of factual questions, it raises others about the nature of lesbian and gay politics.

Some of these questions are as old as the lesbian and gay liberation movement itself: What are "gay issues?" Is the lesbian and gay movement a movement for social change, civil rights or a balance of the two? Does lesbian and gay leadership, which will use our votes as bargaining chips with candidates, have the same political priorities as the rank and file? Does our community hold lesbian and gay candidates to the same standards as we do straight candidates?

Being a voting bloc means that both parties will be courting the gay vote and that there will be a chance for our leadership to negotiate on gay issues. A bloc has the power to "reward" those candidates who take its issues seriously. Understanding this, the Human Rights Campaign has published a pamphlet to help candidates learn about lesbian and gay concerns — like ENDA, domestic partnership and gays in the military — and the question of who treats the gay vote seriously may help decide a number of this year's races. In New York state, for example, the incumbent Republican senator, Alphonse D'Amato, is wooing lesbian and gay leaders while his Democratic opponent, Rep. Charles Schumer, is not. It's been rumored that some lesbian and gay groups may endorse D'Amato — and not just the Log Cabin Republicans. While D'Amato does have an above average voting record on gay issues, his record on other progressive concerns like health and education has been poor. Schumer, however, has a better all-around voting record on progressive issues and deserves the allegiance of lesbians and gay men committed to social change.

I'm not convinced that the way "gay issues" get defined by our leaders is necessarily the way many individuals in our community would define them. One of the interesting things that I learned about lesbian and gay voters from "Out and Voting" is that we don't seem to just think "gay" when we vote. When Democratic lesbian and gay voters were asked in exit polls which issues were important to them and influenced their votes, they most often named health, education and AIDS — social issues that affect everyone but have specific meanings for lesbians and gay men. This suggests to me that many in our community are concerned about broad social change instead of just gay-specific issues like "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

With this in mind, lesbian and gay voters need to be aware of candidates' voting records on important social issues and not be swayed by lesbian and gay organizations that may have different priorities than we as individuals do. The endorsements that lesbian and gay organizations publish at election time may be helpful but don't always tell the whole story of why a particular candidate is being "rewarded" (which may sometimes just be a matter of political expediency). As voters, we need to check other sources, such as the congressional voting scorecards published by groups like, say, the American Association of University Women (for feminist issues) or the Public Interest Research Group (for consumer and environmental issues) to get a bigger picture on candidates whose records may be good in one area and reprehensible in others.

We also have to hold lesbian and gay candidates to the same standards as straight ones and not get carried away with the "historic" nature of their candidacies. We're still too often hung up on a kind of "Harvey Milk mentality" — that every aspiring lesbian or gay politician is a hero. I've been relieved to hear some voices of dissent questioning the strong support that the congressional candidacy of Margarethe Cammermeyer has gotten in the lesbian and gay community. Running a campaign that emphasizes patriotism and military valor is problematic from a progressive stance, regardless of the candidate's sexual orientation.

The NGLTF report can point lesbians and gay men toward several important goals: as a movement, to further mobilize our voting forces; and as individual voters, to pay attention to where candidates stand on the social issues that matter most to our lives. And finally, of course, to get out and vote. ▼

[Paula Martinac is the author of seven books. Her latest is The Lesbian and Gay Book of Love and Marriage. She can be reached care of this publication or at LNcolumn@aol.com.]

### Take Our Latest Q-Poll

OutCharlotte just completed its fourth annual cultural festival. How is the event doing thus far?

Great	Okay	Poor
I have enjoyed each year's festival immensely.	Like most things, OutCharlotte has good & bad points.	OutCharlotte does not offer events that appeal to me.

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