

QNotes

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viewpoint

Time to put on our marching shoes



George W. Bush is heading to Washington, and now is the time for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender activists — arm in arm with all social justice activists — to be visible and vocal. Right now is the moment when our movement must demand exactly what we want — and we must do it in a way that is powerful.

I concede that Bush will sit in the White House, but I concede no power to his politics. The stench of this election will remain in the voters' consciousness. At one moment in time I might have thought the best we can muster in a Bush administration is to hold the line. I thought we'd dig our heels in the turf and prevent our progress from slipping a decade or so. I don't think that anymore.

I now believe the movement must again reaffirm the power of local organizing. Let us make sure that every person in every city of the country has an opportunity to be politically active. Let us blanket this country with town hall meetings, rallies, protests, pickets, and campaigns. Let us demand that our voices as social justice activists be heard in every part of the media — on talk shows and call-in shows and in print.

Among the many lessons that the Florida vote miscount ought to teach us is the power of local leadership. Who ever imagined the importance of the election boards? Every one of us ought to think about running for an office, being appointed to an office, or helping someone else capture an office. The next major elec-

tion is 23 short months away, and I expect to campaign for social justice every single one of those months.

Recently, I was invited to the Vice President's residence for a holiday party. I encountered a number of GLBT insiders there — from party activists to donors. We should all take a good look; it will be some time before we're truly invited back in. And that's not necessarily a bad thing.

First, we must not give up on the federal level. Advances are possible under a Republican administration. After all, such breakthrough legislation as the Ryan White Care Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act were signed into law by George W.'s father. Of course, it is important to note that these advances only came after national protests were organized, many by ACT-UP. Again, it is time to take to the streets!

Second, we need to take all of the power that the movement amassed inside the beltway and unleash it at the community level. The power of our movement lies in activism — organized, strategic activism in every state.

Third, it made some sense to compromise when we had friends in the White House. Our movement made practical decisions in an effort to win whatever gains were in our reach. But even President Clinton acknowledges that the most famous compromise of all — the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" military policy — was an abject failure.

And so now, our opponents — and sometimes, even our friends — will urge upon us compromise. They will urge us to accept narrow possibilities of progress. But now is the time to be truly visionary. If we are not going to put out an agenda that will truly challenge homophobia, nobody else is going to do it for us.

Coalitions are forming and major protests are on the way. Thank goodness, it will feel empowering to take off our tuxedos and put on our marching shoes. ▾

— Elizabeth Toledo
 Washington, DC

[The writer is the Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.]

letters

Dear Editor:

As a regular business visitor to Charlotte, and former Secretary of the Jacksonville Gay Pride Committee, I was very bothered by the fact that I was refused entrance to The New Brass Rail on Monday evening, December 18 2000, for their advertised Beer Bust. After being admitted on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday with no problem, I can only surmise that this particular doorman/bartender was reacting negatively to my skin color and using any excuse to support his exclusionary policy.

I'm sure the Brass Rail, like all other bars, has the right to refuse service to anyone, but I wasn't inebriated and I knew where this guy was coming from. I've been there before.

It didn't matter that I was a visitor from Jacksonville, Florida. It didn't matter that I'd met the owners and was gladly admitted on all prior visits and that I tipped the bar generously. It didn't matter that I had friends waiting for me inside the bar on that Monday night. It didn't matter that, at this Levi Bar I was dressed in Levis, an Eagle T-shirt, a Letterman's jacket, a biker's cap, and donning eye glasses packaged in a 6', muscular 190# frame ... or that I was a Computer Consultant. It only mattered that I was black, and that's all.

"Oh, it wasn't that!", I hear you all proclaim.

But it clearly was. How do I know? After driving 20 miles to get there, and being turned back, I called the bar from my hotel room. He didn't recognize my voice. I told him that I was just turned away, and he assumed I didn't bring my ID with me and that was the reason I was denied entrance.

When he said that, I decided to write this letter. Of course I had brought my identification with me, and I wrote my name down onto the guest list. His actions showed that he only saw that I was black, and that, from his perspective, I could not possibly add any ambience to the place.

When I told him over the phone who was speaking, he blurted and stuttered out any and every excuse he could think of to justify his ignorance, fear and prejudice. "I'm just doing what the owner wants," he peevishly excused. Baloney. Or, "This is a membership only bar!" Yeah, right. How about for out-of-towners? And of course he didn't offer to sell me a membership, either. I wonder why?

Now c'mon, Charlotte. I know this is the South, but I am quite surprised that this could occur in such an 'enlightened' place. The Brass Rail needs to mention in their newspaper ad that, Warning: The bartender/doorman can refuse admittance to anyone for any reason including bias and prejudice.

"Why, then don't you take your business elsewhere," I hear you ask? Well, it's pretty obvious. See LETTERS on page 10

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