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Editorials

Gearing up for a Right fight

Throughout the ages, battles have been waged and people have been persecuted in the name of religion—The Crusades, The Spanish Inquisition, the Salem Witch Trials—and now the Religious Right has gotten around to us. With leaders such as Pat Robertson, Pat Buchanan, Jerry Falwell and Donald Wildmon, to name a few, homosexuality has become the focus of their organized intolerance. Set aside the fact that gays are asking for no more than the most basic of human rights because the Right's moralistic attack runs much deeper. We have been handed the task of proving the merit of our very existence before even being granted the opportunity to ask for anything more.

Our right to live our lives as our sexual orientation dictates is being challenged on ballots across the country. And while no such political maneuvering is currently transpiring in our area, there's no reason to doubt that it could. If, and more likely, when it does, our community needs to be prepared. We cannot afford to react to anti-gay propositions; a plan of action should be in place long before the threat manifests itself.

We have devoted a special section in this issue of *Q-Notes* to anti-Right activism. Hopefully, this information will better prepare our region for an action similar to Colorado's Amendment 2 or Oregon's Measure 9 or Lewiston, Maine's Amendment 2. We need to know our legal rights before we have cause to use them. We need to know the strength of our community before it's tested. We need to know the power of our opponents before we face them.

As individuals, there is probably not much we can do on our own. But as organized groups of individuals, we begin to build power and strengthen our voice. We've already seen the effectiveness of some of our national organizations, but their resources are being stretched thin as more and more anti-gay initiatives erupt across the country.

Very soon, the responsibility for combatting these initiatives will have to come from smaller, more localized groups. And we can learn from our attackers.

The Religious Right is not a single entity with a master plan. It is comprised of regional, state and city/county groups of individuals who have adopted the arguments and agenda of a few national religious organizations. And the strategy is working.

It was not Pat Robertson nor Jerry Falwell who defeated sexual orientation protection in Charlotte and Raleigh. It was local ministers, their very vocal followers and groups which had been originally organized for other purposes (anti-abortion, anti-pornography, etc.) And to offset their efforts, we would be wise to do the same.

But that will not be easy. Because existing law keeps many of us from being open about our sexuality, it will also keep many of us from joining any group which might place us in jeopardy of losing job, home or security. Unfortunately, sacrifices will have to be made.

More and more homosexuals will have to relinquish their anonymity for the greater cause. And that will not happen overnight, which is why we need to form activist groups now. The longer they exist, the more it can be shown that they are effective, and the more varied their agenda, the more willing will be the timid to exercise their constitutional and political rights as human beings.

Organizations of several types are needed. In addition to those which are very visible and very vocal, groups working behind the scenes are equally as vital. And existing groups (social, sport, artistic, etc.) can participate as well in non-threatening ways by offering financial support, encouragement, or through whatever means that will not jeopardize its members.

There's something each of us can do, if we simply choose to do it.

Speaking For Myself

A Personal Opinion

Health reform and AIDS

by Donna E. Shalala



Donna E. Shalala

In 1987, John McGann lost his health insurance. Not because he didn't pay his premium. Not because he lost his job—and not because his employer dropped health coverage from its benefit package. McGann lost his insurance because he had AIDS.

McGann died in 1991 without ever regaining his insurance. But his fight, taken eventually to the Supreme Court, taught us that we need to reform our health care system so that people with life-threatening diseases such as AIDS don't face this greatest of personal crises without the protection of health insurance.

Since the epidemic began 13 years ago, thousands of people with AIDS and other life-threatening or chronic diseases have systematically been excluded from the private insurance market. In particular, women and children and minority group members are constantly confronted by obstacles to insurance coverage.

Profit-conscious insurance companies have used both crude and sophisticated methods to keep those people from getting coverage. For example, many insurers require individuals and employees of small companies to submit to HIV antibody screening tests. Others refuse to sell insurance to entire communities where AIDS is prevalent. Some invoke pre-existing medical condition clauses to refuse coverage. And a growing number of insurers impose unrealistic lifetime limits on insurance coverage or specifically limit reimbursement for AIDS-related services. Employers, worried about the cost of

their insurance policies and the risk of losing coverage for all their workers, have gone along with these limits. Some, like McGann's employer, the H & H Music Co., have even chosen to self-insure in order to gain an exemption from state insurance rules.

As a result, today an estimated 27% of people living with AIDS are uninsured—nearly double the national average. Another 45% rely on Medicaid for their coverage, and 4% get coverage through Medicare. The remaining 24% live in daily fear that their often limited private insurance coverage will either disappear or be priced beyond their reach.

This spotty coverage can lead to reduced life expectancy for those with AIDS who are insured and who cannot avail themselves of medical and preventive treatments. Similarly, among those who are HIV-infected, a lack of insurance can lead to a more rapid acceleration to full-blown AIDS and an inability to take advantage of the research and treatment advances we have achieved.

For a desperately ill person without insurance, the news of a new drug approval or research breakthrough may not be a cause for celebration, but a cruel hoax.

The cost of treating such patients does not go away. Rather it is shifted unevenly to other parts of societies, including inner-city hospitals that are left with the burden of uncompensated care.

This has got to stop. And when Congress enacts President Clinton's Health Security Act, it will stop.

The Health Security Act provides all Americans with coverage that is affordable, portable, and permanent. For people with AIDS, those who are HIV-infected, and those with other life-threatening or chronic diseases, these benefits are of tremendous value.

First, insurance reforms will prohibit exclusion on the basis of a pre-existing condition; bar the use of lifetime or disease-

And now for our list...

Tradition holds that January is the time for us—individually and collectively—to pause for a moment and reflect on our lives; to reminisce about the year that has just ended and to envision the possibilities of the year to come.

Tradition also holds that media outlets use this time of year for list-making, usually in the form of grandiose-sounding but meaningless superlatives: The Twenty Most Exciting People of 1993, for example, or The Ten Cutest Pets On TV.

So, since 'tis the season for list-making, we at *Q-Notes* have done just that:

The Five Most Significant Events of 1993

1. The 1993 March on Washington. Despite incongruent head counts by the U.S. Parks Department and complaints from the gay/lesbian community that the march was everything from too assimilationist to just a bunch of dancing drag queens, flitting fairies, and leather lesbos, the 1993 March on Washington was the loudest noise this community has ever made. No matter what you thought about the March, if you didn't know it was happening, you were probably dead.

2. The Hawaiian Supreme Court Decision on Marriage. When the Supreme Court of Hawaii decided to force the lower courts to prove that the state's best interests were served by denying marriage licenses to same-sex couples, our struggle for equal treatment under the law took a quantum leap forward. Although the verdict is not yet in, at least the Hawaiian judges have moved the discussion from whether or not we should be allowed to

exist to whether or not we should legally marry.

3. Keith Meinhold's reinstatement in the Navy. Although the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals was thwarted by the U.S. Justice Department in its attempt to reinstate all excluded gay and lesbian military personnel, the fact that Meinhold is back at work could be the momentous first strike against the wall of oppression.

4. Amendment 2 ruled unconstitutional. Judge Jeff Bayless, in ruling that Colorado's Amendment 2 was in violation of the U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment, sent a clear message to the Far Right that the millions of dollars they spend trying to nullify our existence might be better spent feeding the homeless or on other forms of Christian charity.

5. Bill Clinton's inauguration. OK, so the man let us down on the "Don't Ask; Don't Tell" thing, but the fact remains that gay men and lesbians are enjoying a prominence and visibility in a presidential administration that would have been unthinkable even a year ago. And despite the Log Cabin Club's whining about how the number of gay and lesbian appointments fall short of a 10% "quota" (which sounds an awful lot like a demand for affirmative action to us), Bill Clinton is the first American president to appoint an openly gay or lesbian person to anything, let alone high-ranking positions in his administration. And his decision to issue a series of directives instead of an executive order to ban discrimination in federal jobs might mean that he has learned something about Washington politics.

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