

## guest editorial

### Stop the March Madness

I've spent a great deal of time pondering the recent turn of events that now has us grappling with what to do about the proposed Millennium March.

Because I was a national co-chair of the 1993 March, people have frequently asked for my opinion on this situation. I've taken time before responding publicly because I understand how casually critical some people can be and I have worked hard not to be one of those who would rather attack our own than focus on our enemies.

But now I've come to realize that there is much more at stake here than hammering out the logistics of a march. In fact, what is at stake here is the very heart of our movement.

Currently, a huge segment of grassroots community leaders and many national groups believe that this march is ill-timed, strategically weak and coordinated by people out of touch with the important work happening outside of Washington, DC. And yet, rather than set up a structure for meaningful dialogue to balance pros and cons and evaluate the strategy of such a march, edicts are delivered via press release.

The Human Rights Campaign, the largest group involved in advocating for the march, has publicly apologized for the ham-fisted manner in which it has approached the issue and that is good. However, it is not enough to say "sorry" and continue to move forward on the same misguided course.

In the past, a critical mass of support has been established before committing the enormous resources that marches require. Now, it appears, instead of doing the work of building broad-based support for such an effort, the movement is being hijacked — strategy and coalition-building thrown out the window.

We must decide whether this is a movement for social and political change that will continue to build and grow and grapple with the tough issues. Or will we be a product to be packaged and shaped according to the dictates of the latest focus group. We can't replace courage with marketing.

There is without a doubt tremendous power

in marching on Washington. My first March in 1987 was a significant turning point in my life. But this debate is not about the value of marches. It is about whether we best serve this movement by going to Washington in 2000, a major election year, and how we decide when and if the time is right.

Three times in the past two decades we've come to Washington, DC and the community was told go home and build. Well, we've built and built and built and back home is where it is all happening.

For over a decade, the idea of a march on the 50 state capitals has been gaining steam and for the first time there exists enough organizations to make this a powerful event. To truly have a strong national presence that isn't merely a paper tiger, building local and state networks that can gain ground at home and feed the national effort is vital.

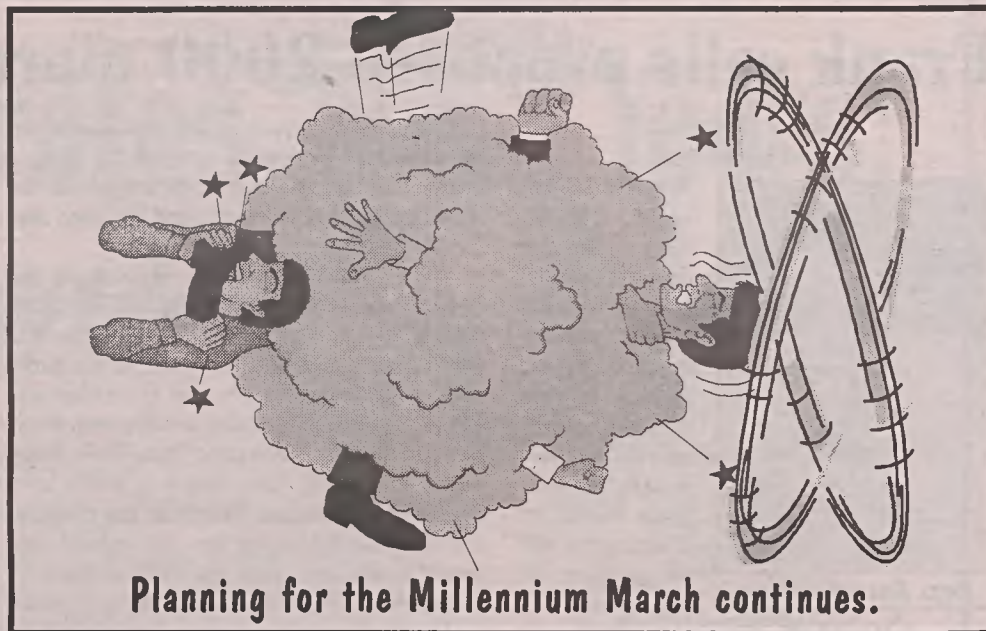
Talk to young people who are coming out. While they are thrilled to see Ellen and Martina and Greg and other celebrities, what they really want to see are people in their own communities who have lives similar to the ones they imagine for themselves.

People have called marches on DC glamorous and media sexy events. That is perhaps our biggest problem. Too many people are wondering how they can become the Martin Luther King, Jr. for our movement when we are in desperate need of a million Rosa Parks. We're mistaking style for real substance.

I have yet to hear a cogent, persuasive argument for a national march in 2000. I'm open to it. If convinced, no one would work harder to bring folks to it. But right now I believe our priority is back home. We need massive voter identification efforts so we can start winning elections for ourselves and our supporters. We need to lobby our elected officials in their home districts. We need to build our memberships and fundraise for the referendums we continue to face on the local and state level.

Those of us who believe that our movement should not be strong-armed have a responsibility to speak up instead of accepting this as a "done deal." For HRC's own good, for our community's benefit, we need to make clear that this march will not go on as it is now conceived. HRC is the wealthiest and largest gay organi-

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## letters

### Lift, don't separate

A crossdressing friend recently told me of what was, for "her" an "unsettling" experience while visiting a gay nightclub in Charlotte: she was laughed at. She had tricked herself out in her most seductive, beautiful outfit, only to be found "lacking" by several people at the club — and the subject of ridicule. She's damned attractive, too.

To make matters worse, some of the people who laughed at her were wearing studded dog collars and leashes, had spiky hair, every available inch of skin was covered with tattoos, had piercings in their eyebrows, navels, noses, ears, lips, nipples (and probably their clitoris and penises), looked like Charles Manson wannabe's...in general, those people who are rather freaky looking themselves.

Most of the "laughers" were on the young side. As we all know, many of the patrons of Charlotte's gay bars can be oh-so-cool, denigrating those who do not meet their high standards of what is hip and "in."

I accept that many crossdressers are pretty "different" looking, especially to those who are unfamiliar with who and what we are — and are not.

Gay bars were initially started by those who wanted to provide a safe haven for gays and lesbians, as well as a place to party with people who were of a like mind. (Cruising was an added "benefit.") Eventually, bisexual and transgendered people were drawn to those clubs, too — also seeking safety and friends.

The point here is that most clubs which cater to lesbians and gays, also enjoy patronage from bi's and TGs — from just-out-of-the-closet crossdressers, to post operative transsexuals...and everything in between.

For any GLBT bar hopper to make fun of anyone in an GLBT bar is to make fun of themselves. As I once wrote for Scorpio's first newsletter: GLBT bars welcome everyone. The patrons should, too.

It matters not if you are gay or bisexual, a lipstick lesbian or diesel dyke, a leatherman or a swishy sissy, a professional female impersonator or an amateur drag queen hooking on the

corner, a rich crossdresser or an out-of-work transsexual...even boring straight people are — or should be — welcome at gay clubs. All gay clubs.

No one should ever laugh at another patron in any bar, straight or gay, especially if someone else might find you freaky looking, too.

When I visit a GLBT club, I always expect to encounter a friendly crowd, regardless if I am one of the cool people or not.

Charlotte is fortunate in that there are so many establishments which welcome GLBT business, including several nightclubs and bars. Percentage-wise, I'll bet Charlotte exceeds most other cities across the US in the number of businesses who welcome our business. Thus, if someone doesn't get a warm fuzzy from one club, they will probably search for another.

Can any club owner afford to anger any group of potential patrons, be they G, L, B and/or T? I think not.

To those club owners who want everyone's patronage, tell your staff to attempt to be understanding and supportive; and don't tolerate any of your customers ridiculing any other customer. It's simply bad business to allow anyone to be laughed at in your club.

— Divinity, Charlotte, NC

[The writer is the founder of the Carolina Trans-Sensual Alliance.]

### Courting justice

Just as new medical hope brings the promise of longer, fuller lives for people with HIV, the Supreme Court Justices must ensure that they are not made vulnerable to irrational, illogical and irresponsible discrimination. Seventeen years and millions of dental procedures into the epidemic, not once has HIV been transmitted from patient to dentist.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was intended to protect people from discrimination with health conditions that did not prohibit them from participating in community life. The definition of disability was written in the broadest sense to protect Americans with serious health conditions from irrational discrimination. Asymptomatic HIV-disease is in fact a model example of the kind of health condition for which the ADA was intended.

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# QNotes

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