



STIFF UPPER LIP

FURTWANGLER

BRET FURTWANGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST

■ Editorial

Bill puts gay couples one step closer to equal rights

Last Friday, the Oregon Senate voted 19-10 to approve SB1000. This Senate Bill would outlaw forms of sexual discrimination and allow gay couples to engage in civil unions, giving these couples similar rights to married, heterosexual couples.

A statement about SB1000 summarizes that it "prohibits discrimination against persons in specified areas of law based on sexual orientation." It is upsetting that there was not already a law in place to assure that a person's civil rights are not reduced based on who they are sexually attracted to. SB1000 speaks well of the State of Oregon because it proves that at least some of our lawmakers truly abide by the idea of liberty and justice for all.

Unfortunately, SB1000 must still pass in the Oregon House of Representatives (where the majority is Republican) before it can become law. Although two Republicans joined Democrats in the Senate to favor SB1000, most Senate Republicans voted against the bill. According to an Oregonian article, most of those dissenting Senators promoted the argument that SB1000 was against the will of Oregonians, because state voters had already prohibited gay marriage. It is likely that House Republicans will make their decision in that same manner.

The reasoning of naysaying Republicans in the Senate was flawed, and House Republicans will hopefully evaluate that point before coming to their own conclusion about SB1000. The Oregon constitution may define marriage as one man and one woman, but that amendment would in no way conflict with prohibiting employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. As far as most of us are aware, the will of Oregon has never been to overtly treat non-straight Oregonians as though they are second class citizens. It is unfair for Senate Republicans to cite the will of the people as a reason to deny SB1000.

Even if the majority of Oregonians do not want gay marriage legalized (a sentiment which we hope will prove malleable), many of those same people remain in favor of civil unions, such as those made famous in Vermont. Surely the religious right can agree that civil unions (which ensure fair benefits for certain types of life partners) are the best way to create functioning couples and families for which marriage is not an option.

The call to action for our House of Representatives is this: Surprise us. The young liberals who make up a majority of the University are increasingly frustrated with Republicans who vote with their bibles instead of their brains. House Republicans must put their partisan views aside and see that to deny SB1000 is to deny the humanity of numerous U.S. citizens.

The call to action for the rest of Oregon is this: Create a bond of solidarity with all of your fellow Oregonians. This means heterosexual Oregonians lobbying for SB1000, or even refusing to get married until true marriage is available to all. If even a portion of us do not have equal rights, equality for all is impossible.

OREGON DAILY EMERALD LETTERS POLICY

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■ In my opinion

A pot policy that WORKS



AILEE SLATER
FURTHER FROM PERFECTION

Sometimes you have to see it to believe it. Hippies of the United States have rallied around the idea of decriminalized marijuana for decades, but few have the experience to say whether such a policy would actually work. Taking a trip to Vancouver, B.C., was proof enough for me: The United States' current laws on marijuana need to be seriously reevaluated.

During sightseeing expeditions in Canada, my friends and I decided to visit Vancouver's New Amsterdam Cafe, an establishment whose logo has a giant pot leaf in the middle of it. Like a few other Vancouver locations, New Amsterdam has a policy of "tolerating" marijuana smoking. This, coupled with Vancouver's notarized statement that local police should not waste their time prosecuting small amounts of marijuana, creates a certain atmosphere within the cafe.

In brief, New Amsterdam is like none other; standing in the cafe doorway alone was enough to become pleasantly buzzed.

The cafe was warm, dark and ultimately an experience in comfort. Patrons chatted, sipped coffee and smiled freely as they passed joints and glass pipes around the tables. The music was loud, but the atmosphere was laid back. No one got on top of the counters and did body shots; no one puked all over the floor. The scary, exciting depravity of the bars from our previous night of vacation had been replaced with low-key enjoyment in a slightly unusual situation.

Vancouver police stay true to their unspoken agreement not to bother marijuana users within the cafe. The best part of this agreement is that it is perfectly possible for New Amsterdam to run without police intervention. Imagine a similar situation wherein cops promised to avoid prosecuting minors at a bar. It would be impossible to do so, because even those legal users at

a bar create situations (drunken fights, sexual harassment) wherein police intervention is necessary. Not so at a pot cafe. The mood is friendly and relaxed rather than uproarious and violent.

The relations between genders is likewise remarkably different when comparing New Amsterdam to any other place where substances and social interaction are the main purpose of the establishment. At bars, the women in our group were continuously privy to the sexual advances of men. Sometimes these advances were appreciated and reciprocated; more often, they were not. We found ourselves leaving dance floors and clubs simply to escape the man who would not leave us alone, refused to let go during a song or trailed one of us around demanding to buy us a drink. These kinds of advances were relentless and only created uncomfortable situations and ruined nights of merriment.

At New Amsterdam, however, there was no such sexual tension. When a girlfriend and I approached two men and introduced ourselves, they shook our hands immediately and engaged in cordial conversation. The four of us discussed our homes, our schools, our lives, without once turning the conversation sexual. Whereas the dynamics of alcohol caused men to befriend women only to rub against them, the dynamics of marijuana created a social situation that truly was social rather than sexual. The smoke clouding up the cafe was a breath of fresh air.

New Amsterdam was the equivalent

of an upscale lounge. Yes, most customers were using mind-altering substances. But like a 40-something executive entertaining a gin and tonic with lunch, the cafe smokers were committing a basically innocuous act.

After New Amsterdam, it is mind-boggling that the U.S. government can sleep at night having criminalized marijuana to the nth degree. How alcohol is legal and marijuana illegal is question enough, to say nothing of the fact that other drugs such as cocaine are regulated even less than marijuana. Perhaps it is the image of the businessman who sips liquor versus the image of the hippie who pokes smot and doesn't ever get a job. The government seems to defer to that image every time a marijuana debate emerges, and apparently our society has not grown past its goal to protect capitalism based on mental pictures regarding which drug hurts society the most.

I don't envy the government's responsibility to create law. It is often hard to know what will work and what will not, so creating regulations without an empirical example of utopia is certainly a difficult task. Vancouver, B.C., took a chance on de-regulating marijuana, and it worked. Police have more time and money to prosecute rapists and murderers, and young people looking for a fun night out (topped off with a little bit of mind alteration) can choose a cafe over a bar. If it worked there, it can work here.

How about it Oregon? I'd say we're ready for a revolutionary stand on marijuana, but the truth is this: Because we already know de-regulation worked in Canada, de-regulation of marijuana in the United States would not be revolutionary at all. It would just be the implementation of a policy that has already proven itself to be a damn good idea.

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