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steppin' out



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

editorial

The road to equality

Faced with the backlash against civil rights and social freedoms, we must remember the gains we have made

by Renée LaChance

For every step forward on the road to equality there are multiple waves of backlash. It's an exponential relationship.

As Hawaii seems on the verge of legalizing same-sex marriage, 18 states whip into a frenzy to legislate against such marriages—Washington among them.

While gay and straight teachers network together to eradicate homophobia in more than 600 schools nationwide, in Utah a school board feels so threatened at the prospect of having to allow the formation of a gay and lesbian student group that it bans *all* student groups.

It has always been a challenge to be a gay man or lesbian in the United States, but now verbal gay-bashing is being elevated to an art form in the ultra-right's "culture war." Pat Buchanan foams at the mouth while venting his homophobic rhetoric state by state. When he won the New Hampshire primary, I began mentally packing my bags to leave the country. There is no way I could live under an administration that would "put the Bible first and the Constitution second."

Yes, he actually said that. Has anyone told Buchanan that that sentiment is in direct violation of the Constitution?

As if that wasn't bad enough, all of the Republican presidential candidates—in their first (and possibly only) unified act—hopped up on the gay-bashing bandwagon driven by Buchanan. Before the Iowa primary, the Republican Party held a rally where every Republican presidential candidate signed on to a Gay Marriage Referendum (dubbed by gay-rights activists the "Contract Against Homosexuals"), vowing to oppose the legalization of same-gender marriages.

The gay and lesbian group Log Cabin Republicans is finding itself hard pressed to endorse any of the GOP presidential candidates. Log Cabin officials have thus far balked at choosing from a field of candidates that is overwhelmingly opposed to equal rights for gay men and lesbians. They will not make a decision on whether to endorse a candidate until after the Republican National Convention, which convenes on Aug. 10 in San Diego. They are, however, advocating that people vote against Buchanan if they are Republican or live in a state that allows cross-party voting in a primary.

We can only hope that the fighting within the Republican Party on issues other than legalizing same-sex marriage will cause a political meltdown, and that no clear platform or candidate will emerge from the ashes. In the meantime, faced with the Republican backlash against civil rights and social freedoms, we must remember the gains we have made on the road to equality for all.

In this moment, I'm having a difficult time remembering them.

Oregon's presidential primary is March 12. Ballots have already been sent out. For those of you puzzling about the early primary, the Oregon Legislature voted last session to change our presidential primary from May to March so that Oregon would be seen as a contender. Legislators felt we were being slighted, since each party's nominee was often already decided by the time Oregon held its primary.

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