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letters

Quite the spin doctor

To the Editor:

If I ever mount a political campaign and find it in serious trouble, I'm going to hire Elizabeth Birch as my spin doctor. She clearly sees 1996 as a good year for gay and lesbian people (guest editorial, Jan. 3, 1997). I don't know what she's on, but give her my address and ask her to send me some.

1996 was the year that 16 state legislatures passed anti-gay laws. That's more than in any single year in history. In Washington, D.C., our national legislature passed the Defense of Marriage Act. While that did spark a debate about gay and lesbian civil rights, it also sparked a debate about states' rights to choose not to honor marriages performed in other states—something that wasn't even an issue until some of our heterosexual counterparts realized that we might actually be able to enjoy one of the same rights that they treat with such cavalier disregard. If its state Supreme Court decided tomorrow that Hawaii does not have a compelling interest in denying the right to marry to same-sex couples, 16 states still would not have to honor those marriages, nor would the federal government. Now we'll have to fight this battle 50 times instead of once.

1996 is also the year that Congress went on record, by rejecting the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, to say that gay men and lesbians should not have legal recourse to defend themselves if they are fired from a job because they are gay. It is also the year that our president turned his back on us regarding the two truly significant issues of concern to our community that he's faced: gays in the military and the Defense of Marriage Act.

While the year did give us the pleasure of watching the meltdown of the Oregon Citizens Alliance, on the local scene our lot pretty much mirrored what happened on the national level. Portland has become a gay- and lesbian-hostile environment, in stark contrast to the years of Bud Clark and Tom Potter. The well-respected Central Precinct Cmdr. Mike Garvey, who is gay and was found innocent of any wrongdoing by a grand jury, was "witch hunted" out of the police force altogether. Lanny Swerdlow was drummed out of his own business, Margaret O'Hartigan got slammed by the chief of police, the Sexual Minorities Roundtable proved its lack of worth by saying nothing about any of this, and Mayor Vera Katz was re-elected by a landslide.

For me to agree that 1996 was a good year for gay men and lesbians would take more than rose-colored glasses, I would need to take up some serious involuntary S/M, or take whatever Elizabeth Birch is on.

Gregory Franklyn
Portland

Help avert a tragedy

To the Editor:

Yesterday I received an urgent, personal request from the Hawaii Equal Right Marriage Project. Thanks to the courageous and committed HERMP team, headed by activist-lawyer Dan Foley, Hawaiian lesbian and gay couples are about to win the 175 to 250 rights and protections that go with marriage. These rights are especially important to couples facing life-threatening illnesses like breast cancer and HIV/AIDS.

What I didn't know is this: Foley and the others on the HERMP team have conducted this entire history-making endeavor with almost no financial support from the mainland. Our national organizations and millions of individual lesbians and gay men have been quick to celebrate this great victory in Hawaii, but none of us yet has offered any significant financial support to the very people who are making the victory possible.

The one great exception is Lambda Legal Defense Fund, which, through the services of

Evan Wolfson, has provided expert co-counsel and a powerful national campaign to support same-gender marriage, but no significant funding to assist HERMP. When I asked Wolfson if we should help HERMP pay this debt, he answered in one word: "Yes!"

HERMP is facing a severe financial crisis. It is \$60,000 in debt, and the battle is not yet won. This exhausted group of hard-working and multitalented volunteers has won us this incredible victory with no staff, no office, no paid media help and limited support from the small and barely organized lesbian and gay community in Hawaii.

For all these years of legal struggle, HERMP's chief legal counsel, Foley, has donated 20 to 40 hours weekly to this cause. Foley is a heterosexual with a passion for sexual minority rights. He only bills for a token amount of the time he spends on our behalf (yet he has two children, a mortgage, an office and an office staff to support).

If this \$60,000 debt makes HERMP unable to pay him anything, Foley may have to devote his time to other clients and cut back severely on the time he spends making our case with the local and national media and with a whole host of political forces who will eventually determine whether we win or lose our much-needed rights. We cannot fail this man who has not failed us.

It is a disgrace that HERMP is fighting this battle alone when all of us will share in the rights and protections it is about to win. After appealing to the major activist groups on the mainland and receiving almost no financial support, our friends at HERMP shared their heart-breaking dilemma with me. They feel frustrated, cut off and pretty much abandoned by the mainland queer community.

Will you join me in helping them raise the \$60,000 that threatens the victory that is so close at hand?

Today, Gary, my lover, and I are sending a check for \$500 to HERMP from our own limited funds to help show Dan Foley and the people of HERMP that we are grateful for the sacrifices they have made for us all and that we, in turn, are willing to sacrifice a little of ourselves.

Please, send a check today. Be generous. It's tax deductible, but even more, your gift will be an incredible spirit booster to our friends in Hawaii.

Send your check and your cards and letters of support or inquiry to: HERMP (Hawaii Equal Rights Marriage Project), PO Box 11690, Honolulu, HI 96828.

The Rev. Mel White
Via e-mail

A rare time made better

To the Editor:

The recent holiday concert by the Portland Gay Men's Chorus was pleasant and followed the by-now-familiar pattern of a "serious" music first half followed by a "fun" second half. The entire concert was generously sprinkled with guest soloists and ensemble numbers.

The surprise of the evening came with the encore. The conductor invited former chorus members in the audience to come on stage for the last number. In a season already awash in nostalgia, the chamber was flooded with the stuff as a surprisingly large number of men stepped on stage to substantially enlarge the chorus. When they began to sing, the effect was stunning. Instead of the previous pleasant, adequate sound, the stone church reverberated with the glorious energy, majesty and, yes, magic of many male voices vigorously raised in song that has been the reason for being for choirs for lo these many centuries.

Grand pianos, sopranos, dance troupes are all wonderful in their place, but are no substitute for large numbers of voices. This was one of those rare times when more is better.

John Terrill
Portland