

just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

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COMMENTARY

Choose your battles

As the United States prepares for war, the sexual minorities community mobilizes for health

Words of war, threats of war, fear of war. It's everywhere. In fact, there's so much ineffectual and numbing prelude to war that soon people might simply stop listening to it all. I myself think that this is all part of the bigger plan. And surely there is some sort of a bigger plan, right? Are these people, our fearful leaders, really as dazed and confused as they appear to be? The plan must be to wear down the foes and the opposition with mundane and endless banality. Terrorist warnings, duct tape, Tom Ridge and Homeland Security. Yup, it's all the equivalent of inept foreplay leading up to really bad sex. Bad sex with the added bonus of a painful social disease. The disease of power. The disease of control.

The concerns, the divisions, the debates touch us all. There are those who think the sexual minorities community should unite in a stand against the war. Others, those more practical and pragmatic, realize our community couldn't unite in an attempt to flee a burning building, let alone reach consensus on an issue of such scope as a call to war. Do we want our groups and organizations speaking out for us, joining coalitions, taking stands against, or in some cases for, war efforts? Or do we prefer our leaders to stay focused on the specific battles germane to our cause?

Chicago columnist Paul Varnell writes, "for those of us who care deeply about gay and lesbian equality it is also important to remember that gay concerns do not disappear during times of uncertainty and conflict." He and others urge us to not allow our mission of attaining full civil rights to be lost in the greater hue and cry. Locally, Basic Rights Oregon voted to endorse the statement of "Win Without War," a coalition united in the cause to promote disarming Iraq without war. This would appear to be a benign action overall—but is it what we expect of the time, energy, dollars and focus of community-funded organizations?

While talk of war swirls about, many Americans take their escape in popular entertainment such as the current crop of reality television shows. The most recent celebration of poor taste, *Married by America*, seems designed to mock and denigrate the very fundamental rights that gay men and lesbians are denied. We cannot marry—yet they can mock institutions and traditions that they so freely take for granted. Which is the more significant battle for our community to take on? The war against Iraq or the war against stupidity, the war for our rights? Perhaps we can do both—or do we need to prioritize?

Battles are fought on more than the international level. In Portland and across the United States, health activists, community leaders

and partners are coming together to bring awareness, education and information to our community via National LGBT Health Awareness Week from March 17 to 21. At a meeting March 20 in Portland, a committee will be seeking input from all of us as to needs, concerns and interests. Issues include sexual health, mental health, substance abuse, cultural competency, transgender health, domestic violence and, of course, my personal favorite, obesity.

Fair warning: The rest of this column is about obesity; it's about me. It is really damn personal and, again, might well piss off a lot of you. Run now if you must—or if you can.

It's been a year now since I wrote of my concerns about overweight gay men and lesbians in general and my own battles specifically. In the past year I've had great success and I've also seen failure. But failure can be a bittersweet opportunity to try again another time, and even in failure there can be victory.

A year ago I set a weight loss goal. I've reached and maintained goals set and adapted and embraced new attitudes and behaviors—and now I begin the next phase. It can be done. I know it can because I'm doing it—and you can, too. But first you have to set aside comfortable old excuses and weary whining. And I know that these are not easy to give up. So don't look at what you perceive as losses—rather, look forward to what you'll gain. Health, mobility, energy, vitality—these will be your rewards.

I could write a book and go on Oprah, but I'd rather use the time working in my yard—so here's my message of success, albeit the short version.

Look at yourself. Look at what you're eating. If you're fat, you can't eat that stuff anymore. See, it's easy. You've got to find the right fuel for your body. It's a chemistry thing. Which means there might be a dichotomy between your emotional, intellectual and spiritual desires and your physiological needs. One woman wrote in last year to say she was vegan, rode her bike everywhere and was still overweight. A possible solution is for her to ride out to Saylor's Old Country Kitchen and have a nice steak. Her diet is not a match for her body. It's the wrong fuel. What becomes her priority? That is her decision, her call. But she shouldn't say she can't lose weight—it's more that she chooses not to.

I'm running out of room, so this discussion will have to continue later. Last year I literally worried myself sick waiting for the calls, letters and tirades to come in after I wrote my column. This year I'm stronger and firmer yet in my convictions. Obesity is a major health issue in our community. It does not have to be. It is one of the truly winnable and controllable battles we face. Come on—let's all win. Please. ☐

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REFLECTIONS

10 years ago in just out... Vol. 10 No. 8, MARCH 1, 1993



• More than 700 African American gay men and lesbians gathered in Long Beach, Calif., during President's Day weekend for the sixth annual National Black Gay and Lesbian Conference sponsored by the Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum.

• Shoppers at Nature's Fresh Northwest are leaving with more than groceries these days. As part of the Stand Up Portland project, Nature's shopping bags feature "10 things I can do every day to celebrate diversity."

• *Calyx*, a Corvallis-based journal of art and literature by women, recently was awarded \$73,315 from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Publishers Marketing Development Program.

• A group called the Gay Men's Community Project is organizing to see what gay and bisexual men in Portland need. It is waiting for more community input before deciding on its focus, but one possibility is a referral service to help gay

and bisexual men sort through the more than 100 organizations in Portland.

• Oregon Gov. Barbara Roberts has introduced a bill to the state Senate that would establish an 11-member Human Rights Commission.

• "Learning to Love Your Body: Self-Acceptance for Large Women" is a one-day workshop led by licensed massage therapist Mara Nesbitt. Stop fighting your body with diets and guilt; join in a day of information, encouragement and celebration.

• Portland Police Chief Tom Potter will address the Portland Area Business Association at its monthly meeting.

• Calling all Nike dykes. Tired of wondering about that sweet thing down the hall? Or that buff woman in the locker room? Interested in meeting other lesbians who work for Nike? Just do it.

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