

Winter storm warning

The forecast calls for a right-wing backlash—with a slight chance of pain

Greetings and a belated happy new year to you all. Thanks are definitely in order to Roey Thorpe, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, who capably stepped in and filled this space for me in the Jan. 9 issue. Her remarks were right on target as she wrote about the challenges ahead of us for 2004. I especially concur with her admonition to pay heed to the force of a right-wing backlash—a backlash that could hit us with all the force and fury of a certain recent and infamous Winter Blast storm.

The current presidential administration will use the alluded-to taunt of an "anti-gay marriage" amendment as a divisive tool to deflect focus from its other failed policies and efforts. The gay marriage issue has all the potential needed to fire up emotions and release a storm of anger, hurt and misunderstanding. Gay marriage will become the weapon of mass destruction that the Bush administration has been seeking these past many months. The target of this weapon: the tired, broke, worried, reactionary voter.

One of the first things that we as a community need to do is to stay educated and informed. We must prepare offensive strategies rather than be forced, under attack, to take the defensive. As a united force we have voting power and, equally importantly, we have the individual and combined abilities to impact other voters, people whom we come into contact with each and every day of our lives. We have the power to influence voters.

In the next issue of *Just Out* we're going to provide you with some history and research on just what it takes to amend the U.S. Constitution. It is not an easy process, and were it to actually start it would become a battle waged for years—in state after state after state. Do you know how many states it takes to ratify an amendment to the Constitution? Do you know the framework of the process? We will demystify it for you. Before the battle, before victory, comes knowledge.

Another storm of another nature blew in as the result of a headline in the last issue of *Just Out*. In reference to the alarming increase in the spread of syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases, our headline stated that Cascade AIDS Project was calling on Multnomah County to regulate activities in men's sex clubs. In a letter on Page 4 of this issue, executive director Thomas Bruner denies that his organization has gone so far as to call for regulation and chides *Just Out* for overzealous

wording. He says it would have been more appropriate for us to have stated that CAP is calling on clubs and patrons to self-regulate. I myself feel that in view of the increase in traceable sexually transmitted diseases and the undeniable conclusion that this increase is the result of unsafe sexual practices and that these same practices lead to the spread of HIV, it is more than reasonable to call for accountability. Accountability and regulation, it must be noted, are not the same thing.

If you don't see, or won't see, unsafe sex as an issue of morality, or as an issue of conscience, or simply good plain sense, how about taking the cold, harsh stance that it's also a matter of money and funding and tax priority? Taxpayers in Oregon and Multnomah County are being asked to take on more and more funding burdens. A portion of these moneys go to treatment, education and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. If one chooses to practice unsafe sex, is there not risk of disease and illness? Can this point be argued? With disease and illness often comes financial hardship. With financial hardship comes a need for public services. Public services are funded by taxpayers. And for this reason we, the taxpayers, have a right to ask for certain behavioral accountability.

As this issue is being read, voters are sitting down to cast their votes on a statewide funding measure. There is undeniable concern about the passage of Ballot Measure 30. Should it fail, there likely will be additional cuts in health care funding. Somewhere, someone is going to lose funding for medication, funding for home health care, funding for the services that provide needed quality of life for those suffering from illness and disease.

Isn't the risk of one day finding yourself in this position cause for consideration of accountability? The decision is yours to make. Not CAP's, not Multnomah County. It's yours. May you make it well.

Finally, in closing, I draw your attention to the ever-so-slightly redesigned look of this page. "Page 3," a commentary, defined by Webster's New World College Dictionary as "a series of remarks or observations, usually connected in a loose narrative." And this is what this column, now called "Page 3," is: my remarks, my thoughts, my observations—all subject, of course, to your scrutiny and approval, or not. So now it's your turn; talk back at marty@justout.com. j

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REFLECTIONS

5 years ago in *just out*... VOL. 16 NO. 6, JAN. 22, 1999



• With the future of Phoenix Rising Foundation up in the air, there also are questions about the fate of the Sexual Minority Youth Recreation Center, among many other services.

• Mourners grieve for a pioneering Eugene lesbian activist, community leader, bookseller and friend. Izzie Harbaugh is a woman whose presence here is sorely missed. The 71-year-old's unexpected death has saddened many and left a huge void in the Eugene community.

• This month marks the first anniversary of the "new" It's My Pleasure and the Sacred Grounds coffeehouse in Portland. It was one year ago that It's My Pleasure owner Holly Mulcahey made the bold move away from bustling Southeast Hawthorne Boulevard to the shop's current locale at the intersection of Northeast 64th Avenue and Sandy Boulevard.

• Tammy Baldwin made history when she was sworn into Congress on Jan. 6 as the representative from Wisconsin's 2nd Congressional District. An out lesbian, she is the first openly

gay nonincumbent ever to serve in the U.S. Congress.

• President Clinton's State of the Union address seemed to have something for everyone—including a bone for gay men and lesbians. "Discrimination or violence because of race or religion, ancestry or gender, disability or sexual orientation is wrong and it ought to be illegal," said the chief executive during his Jan. 19 address. "Therefore I ask Congress to make the Employment Nondiscrimination Act and the Hate Crimes Prevention Act the law of the land."

• Motherlode plays tunes from its fifth album, *Circle on the Sand*, Jan. 23. The title song of this new CD celebrates the lives of women turning 50.

• In early January, the Georgia Commission on the Holocaust called for the deletion of two paragraphs that discuss the treatment of gay people in Nazi concentration camps from guides mailed to middle and high school teachers.

• The Human Rights Campaign plays host to a fund-raising gala Feb. 13 with U.S. Rep. Dick Gephardt, U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, politico David Mixner and queer comic Bob Smith.

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