[1991]

MAINE LESBIAN/GAY POLITICAL ALLIANCE

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Premiere Issue

Welcome to our first quarterly newsletter. We hope this issue adequately covers the first session of the 115th Legislature and the action surrounding the Civil Rights Bill for this year. You will also find some useful information herein. There is a list of our officers and board members so you can get in touch with them.

In following issues there will be news of ML/GPA events and issues and feature articles. Look, too for articles about the organizations we have formed coalitions with. Our representatives who attend those meetings will give us an overview.

It's your organization. It's your newsletter. Your participation is invited. Contributions of photos, cartoons, writing, technical or manual skills are encouraged. Some humor would be helpful, too! There are times we just need to lighten up.

For this issue we used our stationery header. Perhaps one of you is interested in creating a banner for our front page or creating a style to enhance our looks. A new "do" (yes, Olympia, we do know a hairdresser!) would give us both style and a sense of continuity. Your participation would lend a feeling of community.

...it is the residual homophobia that continues to prevent us from getting our basic civil rights.

L.D. 430
An Act to Prevent Discrimination
A Retrospective

After one of the best battles ever fought for our basic civil rights, L.D. 430 was defeated by just three votes on the immediate heals of a veto threat by Governor McKernan on the first of April.

What went well?

The public debate was officially kicked-off on the 4th of March with an impressive press conference on L.D. 430. Among those in attendance and speaking on behalf of the legislation were bill sponsor Senator Gerry Conley, Attorney General Michael Carpenter, and Patricia Ryan of the Human Rights Commission. At Jasper Wyman's press conference on the 14th, he sat alone in opposition.

On the 18th of March we had the best organized hearing ever held on this legislation. All the committee members, friends and foes alike, made it clear to us that the quality of the testimony and those testifying for the bill were outstanding - better than ever. The long list of mainstream national and state organizations (see attached fact sheet) endorsing passage of the bill greatly impressed the committee.

What is most encouraging is this open endorsement and support provided by many of these most well known and mainstream organizations in the state. Some of these are: The Department of Public Health, The Maine Medical Association, The Maine Council of Churches, The Maine Psychiatric Association, The Maine Psychological Association, The Maine Association of Social Workers, The Maine Teacher's Association, The Maine Lawyers Guild, NOW, The Maine Women's Lobby, The University of Maine System, The Maine Democratic Party and many more. This mainstream coalition support made it very difficult for opponents to argue against the bill.

On the other hand, Jasper Wyman of the league was the only individual representing an organization in opposition. Other testimony against the bill was outrageously bigoted, full of hate, anger and lies about who we are and what kind of lives we lead. This testimony made it all the more clear to committee members that there was a need for this legislation to be passed.

We are diligent, organized and committed. We will continue the fight and with your help we will succeed.

The handouts provided to the committee and the legislature was considered by those legislators commenting on it as top notch, some of the best ever received on any legislation brought before the legislature.

The post card campaign was well organized, professionally executed and effective. The participation of coalition organizations in the post card campaign was a great help.

The receptions and teas greatly impressed those legislators who attended. Significantly, opposition legislators who attended them were unable as a result to argue that discrimination did not exist on the floor of the legislature. It left them to make weak and vague arguments at best. "Something has to be done, but not this piece of legislation."

The production of 30 video tapes of the hearing for distribution to the legislature gave many the opportunity to view the hearing *ex post facto*. It was key, for example, in the moving of Republican Rep. David Ott from a "NO" vote on the committee to a "YES" vote on the floor.

The telephone tree gave many of us the opportunity to speak with each other, and our legislators directly - sometimes often. The participation in the tree by other coalition partners such as NOW helped us be even more effective in making our point to the legislature.

The Maine Council of Churches, which represents the vast majority of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish synagogues and churches in the state gave eloquent testimony to the need for the legislation. (The Catholic Church dropped its past opposition and while it does not approve the "lifestyle" it opposed discrimination against any and all minorities including the gay and lesbian community.) The Council of Churches even went so far as to appear 6 times on WCSH television (ch 6 Portland, ch. 2 Bangor) to rebut the negative statements of the station and Jasper Wyman on the legislation.

All major state newspapers, but the Bangor Daily News, endorsed the bill and had very positive news and editorial coverage on the bill otherwise. We saw many positive editorials that we never expected.

Years of coalition building, of education with the newspapers and otherwise seemingly unsympathetic state wide organizations paid off in their support of our call for justice and basic civil rights.

Outside Forces

There is this year in the legislature a pervasive malaise. There has been a great deal of bitterness in the 115th. The interim budget battle had just been completed when L.D. 430 was submitted for debate. Many legislators who otherwise might have been able to engage in positive lobbying for the bill across partisan lines found it difficult. The preoccupation with the budget made it difficult to get the attention of legislators during the budget debate. The time left to lobby once the bill was submitted for debate was therefore short.

Legislatures around the country today, and here in Maine, continue to experience a conservative backlash as a result of other successes by lesbians and gays around the country.

The Persian Gulf War and the weakened economy made it difficult for legislators to focus and think positively about civil rights legislation.

The Christian Civic League was out and ready for us this time. With their quarter million dollar ($250,000) annual budget raised nationally and from the in-state ultra right, their full time paid staff of five, well organized public relations campaign, plus their gay baiting fundamentalist pastors, we had a formidable foe.

What is unfortunate is that a sure-fire method to motivate people to action is to frighten them. The CCL's allegations that the gay and lesbian community does not deserve civil rights "not because of who we are but because of what we do" feeds on a history of lies, prejudice and fear. It alleges that we are "a threat to the family structure, which is at the fundamental core of American society." It alleges that we are evil and dangerous. The arguments are preposterous and are more reminiscent of allegations made by a certain U.S. Senator in the early '50's and a certain foreign chancellor in the '30's. On the other hand, they do scare a lot of people into writing a lot of letters and into making a lot of phone calls, perhaps more than our side did.

Finally, one hour before the House debate on L.D. 430, the governor held a news conference wherein he threatened to veto the bill if it were passed by the legislature. This was total contradiction of a written assurance he had made to ML/GPA during his re-election campaign that "should the legislature pass this legislation, it should become law."

Ultimately, continued homophobia, misology and misogyny seems to prevail and continues to prevent the legislature from enacting this legislation. The opposition now openly acknowledges that there is discrimination against us. They are running out of arguments to publicly oppose us. However, it is the residual homophobia that continues to prevent us from getting our basic civil rights.

Progress

We have a wide network of support from mainstream organizations.

Discrimination has been accepted as a fact, as is the concept that something has to be done about it.

There is a new acceptance and comfort with the use of the so called "G" and "L" words by the legislature.

Where we need more work

So, how can we be sure to make it happen next time? What is it that we are doing well that we can do better next time? What else can we do that we have not been doing? We continue work on our civil rights agenda without pause. There are a number of things we can do as individuals and as an organization. Some are:

We need public spokespersons willing to speak publicly and as much as possible to continue conscious raising on the need for civil rights legislation in the state and educating the people that we are basically as deserving of civil rights as they.

A public education program as part of an overall campaign will convincingly demonstrate to the people and leadership of Maine that:

• we are caring daughters and sons, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, uncles and aunts, colleagues and friends. We are taxpayers and good citizens who deserve not second class citizenship, but the same rights of all the people of Maine.

• all the lies and disinformation they

have been fed to all of us as children and, which continues today about us must be set aside. We need be accepted and embraced for who we are, good and caring people just like most of them.

• the lies of the Christian Civic League, that ministry of divisiveness and prejudice, is meant for the purpose of filling the political campaign coffers of the far right. The league (how can it be called Christian) feeds on ignorance, fear and hate.

• it is in the "best interests" of state leadership to reject the negativism of the league and a history of fear and prejudice in order to bring the state together with a civil rights statute that will protect all its citizens.

We need to be able to reach out successfully to the rank and file of our coalition partners, other supporting organizations and all non-gays for their support. And the support we need is a fired-up rank and file that is ready to let the legislature know the importance of our need for civil rights.

We need to continue to expand the rank and file of ML/GPA and we need to motivate ourselves to be more than willing to call and write our legislators. Additionally, we must do a better job of motivating a greater number of our members to be more active in the grass roots efforts to get this legislation passed.

We need to continue to expand our sources of funding in order to out organize and counter successfully the well funded Christian Civic League.

We must act on an earlier decision to bring on a paid staff person to run the day-to-day operations of ML/GPA (again, the CCL has 5 paid staff people).

We all need to be forceful and persuasive, and be so often. It is a continuing part of the coming out process to move beyond the shame and fear that society has historically laid upon us. It leaves some of us paralyzed and unable to speak out on our own behalf. We must become warriors for ourselves, for our brothers and sisters, and for those generations of gays and lesbians who will follow in our footsteps, thankful that we were able to begin the process of blotting out homophobia through the acquiring of basic civil rights.

It also involves continued grass roots organizing from our bars to the churches.

With much work and persuasion, we shall have a governor that is educated, enlightened and ready to sign a bill affording us basic civil protections under the law.

This is but some of what lies out before us. We are diligent, organized and committed. We will continue the fight and with your help we will succeed.

Thanks go to:

Special thanks go to Senator Dale McCormick and Representative Susan Farnsworth for their personal commitments and work for our civil rights. Also, we thank Attorney General Michael Carpenter for his public support, Patricia Ryan for her leadership and origination of this legislation in the Human Rights Commission, Senator Gerry Conley of Portland for his sponsorship of the bill, Senator Barbara Gill of So. Portland, Representative William O'Gara of Westbrook and Representative Pat Stevens of Bangor for their co-sponsorships. We thank wholeheartedly the long list of legislators who lobbied actively for the bill and the even longer list of those who voted "YES".

How We Work to Win on All our Issues

It is important for ML/GPA to continue to push for those issues in the legislature which are a fundamental to our goals. The three that are viewed as paramount are: civil rights legislation, a strong pro-choice stand and a strong advocacy for progressive AIDS policies.

It is the organization's goal to work for these issues in the legislature and in the public arena. It is also our goal to execute our policies such that we find ourselves in a Win-Win-Win situation when working these three issues.

During the effort to pass L.D. 430, some press statements were made which caused some to become concerned that perhaps one issue was or would be sacrificed to another in order to achieve some goal involving another issue, i.e. a Win-Lose situation. The Board of Directors is determined and continues to be determined to not have this be the case. The Board feels that through proper planning and wise execution of plans, no one issue needs to be diminished for another.

Of Endorsements

During the legislative debate of L.D. 430 some legislators were said by the press to be singled out by our organization to be "black listed." What we would like to make clear to our members is that no such black listing occurred. Some of our opponents in the legislature took the last paragraph of our 1990 endorsement press release on candidate endorsements out of context and used it against us.

The paragraph read: "While ML/GPA commends the voting records of the following legislators on civil rights, we are unable to endorse them because of their voting records on the choice issue. For ML/GPA, choice is a bottom line issue. These legislators are: ...."

ML/GPA, during the legislative lobbying process, assuaged the attack by developing the following statement: ML/GPA feels it unfortunate that these 11 legislators took our statement the way they did. We commend them for the progress they have made which has brought them to vote "YES" on civil rights. Choice is a very important issue to ML/GPA. ML/GPA continues to review its endorsement criteria, and will continue to consult with our coalition partners who have long standing and valuable experience on the issue of endorsements. Endorsements are made to assist ML/GPA in achieving its primary goals.

Upcoming Meetings

Meetings (unless noted *) are held at the All Soul's Church on King St In Augusta on the third Sunday of each month

Meetings begin at 2 p.m. and are preceeded by a social hour, usually with refreshments. The schedule is as follows:

June 23, July 20*, August 18*, September 15, October pending, November 17, December 15*.

The July 20 Meeting is advertised on the back page of this newsletter. The August 18 Meeting will be the annual retreat at Blueberry Cove. The December 15 location will be announced later.

How Shall I Vote, Dad?

District 116 is located in the heart of Bangor's west side bounded by Hampden and running along the riverfront to Kenduskeag Stream and into the heights of Thomas hill. Contrasts like the fabulous homes of millionaires on West Broadway and the run-down rentals of the under-employed on First Street are reflected in the residents of the district, too. As an example, Steven King lives on one street and Charlie Howard was a resident of the other.

Tying this all together in democratic fashion as a common denominator is our Representative to the Legislature, Thomas Duffy. A pleasant enough sort who always passes the time of day and does well at remembering who we are, Tom has trouble with civil rights. I have been lobbying Tom since 1985 when he was a fresh face in the 112th.

That year the first answer was that there weren't enough gays in the district. Nearly a ghetto, our neighbors responded in enough numbers to convince Tom that line was not going to work. So, he came clean in a Shop 'n Save conversation one day that he couldn't support us because he was afraid of not being re-elected.

A number of incidents in the district have left Tom with no doubt that there is discrimination. Tom avoided me a couple of times in the halls this year. Liking that kind of game, I decided to play along. I cornered im in the chamber. My rep is one of the back benchers. I stood back there staring at him until he had to turn around and admit that he was cornered. After a sheepish grin, he came out for a talk.

We went over the whole thing again. "So what's *really* your problem, Tom?

"My father is an 82-year-old Irishman who has a girlfriend and is really opposed to this issue."

"I would think an Irishman that old would have had a bellyful of discrimination."

"He has, but we've talked about this, and he is set against it. How would I ever explain voting for it to him?"

Tom went on to vote against LD 430 in the first round, so I decided another pep talk might help. I caught up with him in the hall just outside the clerk's office.

"I had a talk with my father about this bill. I told him that the church was in favor of it."

What did he say?

Smiling as if the answer were amusing he said: "My father said 'There's another place I won't be able to go any more.'"

Then he ducked in to the clerk's office.

I'm left with the hope that someone will offer an alternative in the next election. And, I have one of those deep philosophical questions nagging me.

Do bigots always beget bigots?

Harry Gordon

Officers and Board

President Ed Shannon, Ogunquit 646-4872; Vice-President Sive Neilan, Union 763-4161; Treasurer Connie Roy, Warren 273-3316; Secretary Harry Gordon, Bangor 942-3901; Board: Marion Anderson, Auburn 786-4585; Rita Clifford, Windham 892-6136; Diane Elze, Cape Elizabeth 799-6905; Larry Godfrey, S Thomaston 594-2957; Elinor Goldberg, Union 763-3838; Robert Gordon, S Portland 871-1014; Allen LaPan, Augusta 622-2245; Mark Letizia, Penobscot 469-3409; Ron McClinton, Portland 773-4444; Jim Michaud, Bath 443-2557; F E Pentlarge, Hallowell 623-2349; Dan Stevens, Augusta 622-6631; Barbara Wood, Portland 871-1555.

Officers and Board Members serve until the Annual Meeting in February. If you have questions or need information, contact the Board Member living nearest you for assistance.

Thanks

To Our Members Families and Friends

To you, ML/GPA members, your families and friends who actively participated in the effort, whether it was to call or write a legislator, to testify or to organize a small army of people to work for the bill, our heart-felt thanks! Those of you who testified at the hearing about your own personal experiences of discrimination were the passion and power that moved committee members at times to tears. All your efforts are what ultimately move legislators to vote for us. Time and time again we were told of the many supportive phone calls, letters and post cards received. We even had an almost comical instance where what I consider to be one of "the hopeless" legislators complained he would vote against the bill because he had too many calls and cards in support of the bill. Isn't it strange and tragic how convoluted the logic of our opponents can become.

"When a person behaves in keeping with his or her conscience, when she tries to speak the truth and when he tries to behave as a citizen even under conditions where citizenship is degraded, it may not lead to anything, yet it might.

But what surely will not lead to anything is when a person only calculates whether it will lead to something or not. . "

Vaclav Havel
President of Czechoslovakia

A Message From The President

I was asked by a very wise and special person in ML/GPA to include personal reflections on my experience working toward the passage of LD 430, An Act to Prevent Discrimination. I've been reflecting and what I'm experiencing more than anything are feelings. They run the gamut from great sadness to joy, and from anger to loneliness and fear.

I have for a long time wanted to participate more actively in order to help see things improve for the gay and lesbian community in Maine. Having spent 1990 working with a dynamic group of honorable and dedicated men and women in ML/GPA, I felt good about taking on a more active role in support of the needs of our community as an officer. Once February 2nd was behind us all, I realized I had been plunged fully into the exhaustive and exhausting planning effort to acquire basic civil rights during the 115th session of the legislature. It was the most exciting and overwhelming on the job training I'd ever had the pleasure of experiencing.

The planning for and execution of receptions for legislators, post card campaigns, phone trees, documentation for legislators, press conferences, the Judiciary Committee hearing, editorial board meetings, coordinating coalition support, lobbying individual legislators, seeking and coordinating out of state support, tracking the scheduling of the bill for the floor debates, the floor debates and the vote tallies. It was an emotional roller coaster. The highs were so high, for example the hearing on the 18th of March. What a masterpiece. Followed by the Senate passage. It was glorious. Then there were the lows. The team of Muriel Holloway, Zack Matthews and Jasper Wyman conniving on the Senate floor trying to force a referendum amendment. The amendment failed. Then occurred the governor's veto threat timed just an hour before the House debate and vote on the 1st of April. To our great disappointment, LD 430 lost by three votes.

The loss aside, the experience is one that involved a phenomenal team of men and women with a sense of commitment, determination and mutual support that all and all made it nothing short of exhilarating and heart warming. It is a group of people in ML/GPA who have this "stuff" that makes us special. I am forever thankful to you. You know who you are: Diane, Sive, Dan, Herb, Bob, Rita, Ellie, Harry, F.E., Al, Betsy, Susan, Dale and more . . .

We have come so far and have come so close. However, the winds of prejudice, disinformation and hate remain with us. But our pace does not falter for a moment. We march on. We have the support of mainstream state and national organizations. We have a wonderful supportive group of legislators who spoke so eloquently of the need for this legislation from the floor. We have each other, our partners, friends and families. We are left only to combat the lies and hate mongering of the league, the timidity, residual ignorance and prejudice of certain state legislators, and finally a governor who appears more the spokesperson for rightist special interests rather than the leader of the citizens of Maine trying to bring us together.

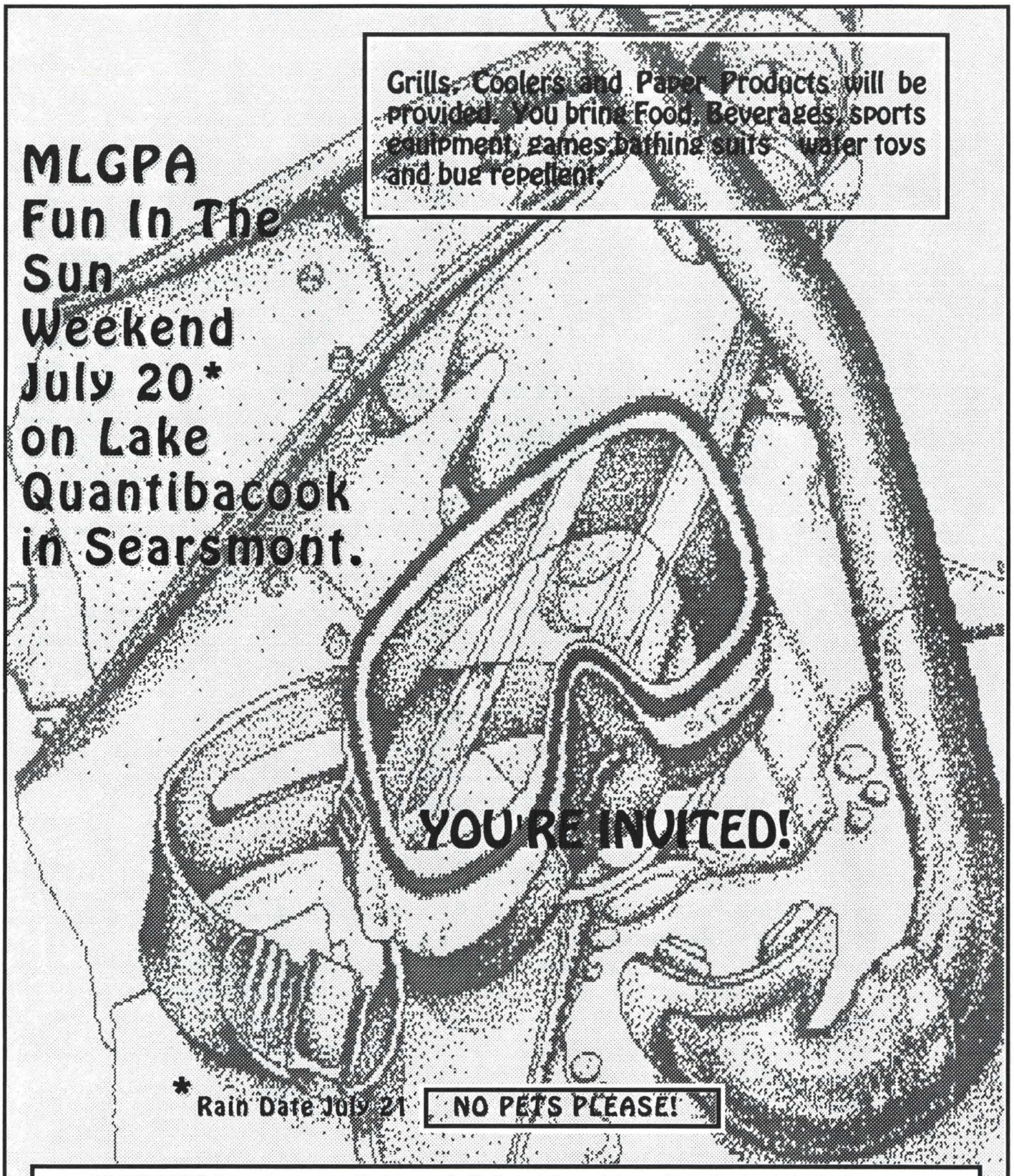
We have laid "An Act to Prevent Discrimination" to rest for the remainder of the 115th. We mourn this painful loss. However, 1991 can be better remembered for one special success.

The legislature has passed a Hate Crimes Statistics bill which includes a categorization "sexual orientation". Crime fighting organizations in the state will be required to specify in their reports that there was "manifest evidence of prejudice based upon race, religion, sexual orientation or ethnic origin." This passage came after clear evidence of hate crimes against lesbians and gays were presented to the legislature by Portland Police Chief Michael Chitwood, Lt. Mark Dion and others.

It is important to note that the legislation acknowledges the gay and lesbian community in Maine is being singled out, harassed and criminally victimized by the forces of ignorance and hate. What Maine needs to realize is that seemingly law-abiding citizens are victimizing us in the same but a somewhat more subtle manner - in employment, housing, public accommodation and credit. We need basic civil rights protections under the state's Human Rights Act. So, we march on - without wavering in our ranks - we march on - until we succeed! "An Act to Prevent Discrimination" will pass!

I thank each and every one of you for your efforts, and for your moral and financial support. We would not have gotten this far without you. We owe it to you to keep up the fight and all we can ask for is your continued and stronger support.

Thanks!



DIRECTIONS From **Augusta:** Rt 3 towards Belfast, take a right on New England Rd (in Searsmont just past sign for Queen Bee Greenhouse). Go 3.4 miles to pond Rd on left (just before Victor Grange.) Take Pond Rd to FL(fire lane) #2. House is at end of this road. **From Coast-Belfast & North:** Rt 3 to New England Rd on left then see above. **From Coast-Camden and South:** Rt 105 to Rt 131 in Appleton—take Right and continue on 131 past Rt 173 coming into Searsmont Village and take next left—this is New England Rd. Take first right on Pond Rd (Victor Grange is on corner) and follow to FL (fire lane) #2 sign. Take right to last house on lake. **LOST?** Call John or Michael at 342-5865.