


Fall 2007

Equality News (Autumn 2007)

Matthew R. Dubois

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EQUALITYNEWS

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EQUALITYMAINE

Autumn 2007

**Join EqualityMaine
in Augusta for our
Annual Meeting
September 27**

(see back page for details)

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Domestic Partners Added to Family Medical Leave Law

Governor Baldacci signed into law an amendment to Maine's Family Medical Leave Law that allows employees to take time off to care for a domestic partner. Beginning September 20, Maine's Family Medical Leave Law will allow employees to take up to 10 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a seriously ill domestic partner or domestic partner's child, and for the birth or adoption of a domestic partner's child.

The new law helps strengthen families while at the same time allowing employees to remain in good standing at work. It doesn't force an employee to choose between keeping one's job or caring for a seriously ill family member, which has been the case until now.

And while LGBT employees will now be treated in the same way married employees are when requesting time off under Maine law, LGBT employees are not treated like married employees when requesting time off under federal family medical leave (allowing up to 12 unpaid weeks off). It's a step in the right direction, with thousands of steps to go.

In the end, there was strong support for the bill in both chambers, due in great part to the real life stories we heard from Sandy Osterby and Charles Dwyer. At a public hearing of the Joint Committee on Labor, Sandy and Charles came forward to tell their personal stories of struggle caring for a terminally ill life partner—their challenges of juggling work responsibilities with the responsibility of being primary caregiver for their dying partner.

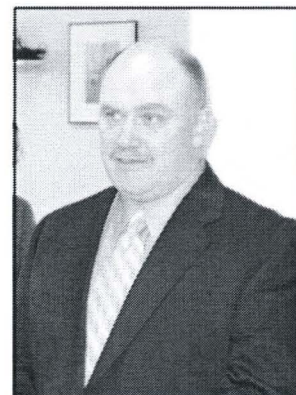
Sandy spoke of her shock in learning that her partner of 23 years, Donna, had been diagnosed with lung cancer, especially since Donna had never smoked a day in her life. As Donna's health deteriorated, Sandy used her sick and vacation time to care for her, but as the situation grew worse, it became increasingly difficult to balance Donna's medical needs with Sandy's job responsibilities. Sandy's family members chipped in to help with caregiving, but they lived an hour away and Donna wanted Sandy to be by her side as she struggled through her final weeks and days.

Employees can take time off to care for a seriously ill spouse through Maine's Family Medical Leave Law, but FMLA didn't extend to non-married employees and

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Legislators passed an amendment to include domestic partners in Maine's Family Medical Leave Laws in large part due to the personal testimonies of Sandy Osterby and Charles Dwyer, both of whom faced challenges in being primary caregiver for their dying partner while remaining in good standing in their jobs.



EqualityMaine

EqualityMaine works to secure full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in Maine through political action, education, and collaboration.

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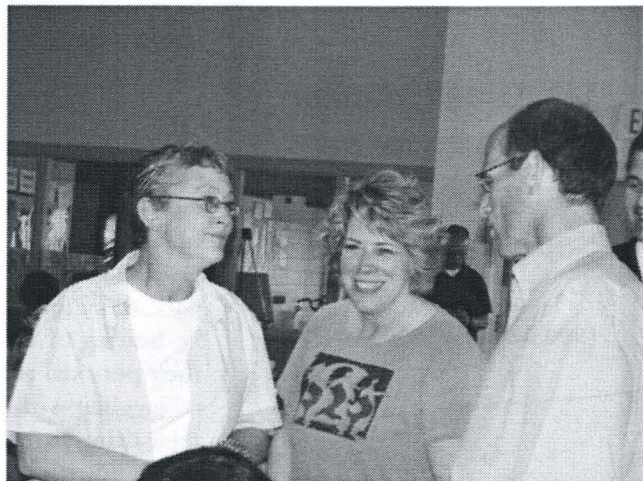
Staff Member Honored for Public Service

Darlene Huntress, EqualityMaine's Public Policy Director, was honored with a public service award by the Portland Democratic City Committee at their annual Harry Truman Dinner in June. Democratic activist and friend Corey Hascall presented the award to Darlene, saying she was an outstanding public servant and one of the best organizers in the state of Maine.

The tribute is named in honor of Harry Truman because he was an example of a citizen public servant. Although he rose to the highest position of service in the country, Truman was first and foremost a local politician. When asked what he liked most about politics, Truman answered, "People, and to do things for people." Throughout his career, he fulfilled that basic goal, and did it with honesty, tolerance, loyalty, humility, plain speaking, humor and a dose of old-fashioned common sense—all attributes that Darlene exemplifies.

Born and raised in Shapleigh, Darlene is a 7th generation Mainer who credits her parents and small town upbringing for instilling a sense of community activism early in her life.

Darlene Huntress (L) talks with Governor Baldacci (R) and EqualityMaine board member Cecelia Burnett during the Harry Truman Dinner where she was honored with a public service award.



Three new Board members were elected to the EqualityMaine Board of Directors this spring. Two of the three are pictured here—the third, Richard Moll, was enjoying his annual six-month hiatus in Palm Springs, California. From L to R: new board member Wallace Pinfold, President Matthew Dubois, Vice-president Barb Wood, and new board member Shawn LaGrega.

Maine Needs Public Education on Marriage

What we've learned about the challenges of winning the freedom to marry is that any effort to change marriage laws must be preceded by a strong and effective public education campaign. This will undoubtedly be the case in Maine, given our three-decade long effort to win non-discrimination protections for LGBT Mainers.

Not only must we educate legislators, but Maine's constitutional provision of a People's Veto ensures that we must educate voters at the same time. And if a change in Maine's marriage laws were to come through the courts instead of the legislature, then we also need to educate the general public. While courts often operate independent of the legislature, they rarely operate independent of public opinion.

We cannot predict how marriage equality will eventually be won in Maine—legislation, referendum, or litigation—but we do know that regardless of the strategy, a strong and effective public education campaign is required.

Educating legislators, voters and the general public is the foundation of EqualityMaine's public education campaign. To that end, we are conducting **in-district meetings** with legislators, canvassing voters and collecting **constituent postcards** and, in collaboration with Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD), have formed a **media response team** that responds publicly to every article, editorial, or letter-to-the-editor on marriage.

In-District Meetings:

One of the most effective ways to educate legislators about issues that matter to their constituents is through in-district meetings, which allow for quality communication between legislators and their constituents. There is likely nothing more compelling for a legislator than sitting at a constituent's kitchen table, having a face-to-face conversation, and listening to why an issue like marriage is so important to that person.

EqualityMaine is organizing constituent teams throughout the state, who will meet with 30 legislators in 2007 and another 50 in 2008. Teams are a combination of LGBT individuals and couples, straight allies, clergy, business leaders, educators and local elected officials.

Before teams meet with legislators, they are trained on messaging and logistics. The meetings begin with a viewing of our DVD, *Marriage in Maine: The Way Life Should Be*. This is followed by a frank and open discussion about marriage, with each constituent talking about his/her own reasons for supporting it and legislators asking questions. By the end of the meeting, legislators have a greater understanding of why all couples in Maine should have the freedom to marry, and constituents have a better understanding of their legislator's level of commitment to this issue.

Constituent Postcards:

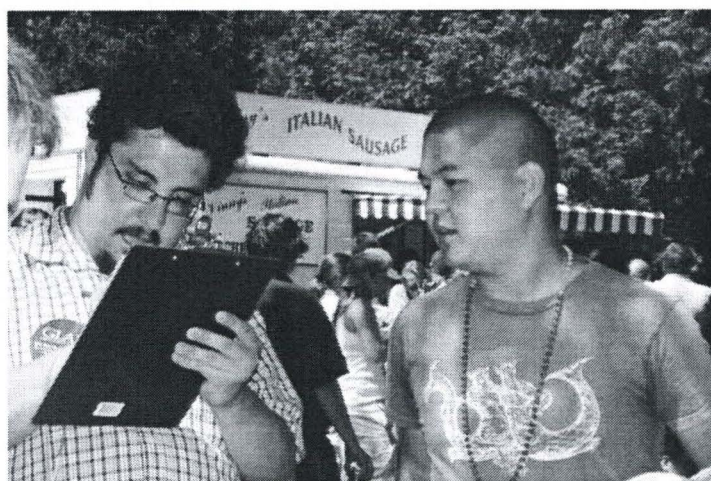
In addition to educating legislators one-one-one, another successful strategy is generating massive constituent contact. We need only look to our neighbors to the south to see how effective a massive amount of constituent contact is in making history.

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EqualityMaine volunteer Toho Soma (R) collects a legislative postcard on marriage equality at this year's Southern Maine Pride festival. Postcards will be sent to legislators prior to legislative action on marriage.

Results of 2007 LGBT Legislation

With over 2,400 legislative bills this year, it's not surprising that several addressed LGBT equality—whether in support of it or opposed to it. Thanks to our legislative committee and our lobbyist, Kate Knox, EqualityMaine played a role in all LGBT legislation in 2007. Below is an overview and the results of the bills.

Bills We SUPPORTED:

LD 375, An Act to Amend the Family Medical Leave Law—PASSED. This was EqualityMaine's primary legislation this year, an effort to address the inequities that gay and lesbian families face in the workplace. This bill amends Maine's Family Medical Leave Law to include domestic partners. It was sponsored by Senator Dennis Damon (D-Hancock County).

LD 663, An Act to Update Absentee Ballot Procedures—PASSED. Sponsored by Rep. Chris Barstow (D-Gorham), this bill amends Maine's absentee ballot law that, until now, allowed only immediate family members to request and drop off absentee ballots. The bill amends the definition of "immediate family members" under the election laws to include domestic partners.

LD 1862, An Act Regarding Fairness for Families Regarding Workers' Compensation Coverage—PASSED. Sponsored by Rep. John Tuttle (D-Sanford), this bill adds domestic partners to the list of individuals who may waive workers' compensation coverage in certain circumstances. These circumstances typically apply when domestic partners work together in a company owned by one of the partners.

LD 1788, An Act to Equalize Tax Filing Status—carried over till 2008. Sponsored by Rep. Dick Woodbury (I-Yarmouth), this bill would allow, possibly require, domestic partners to file state income tax returns under the

same requirements as for married persons. The bill is complicated because taxes are complicated, and taxes are a significant piece of the puzzle in LGBT family equality. The bill has been carried over till 2008 to give people more time to research the implications of filing taxes as a married couple—yet not being treated as a married couple in the hundreds of other areas related to marriage.

LD 1454, An Act to Care for Working Families—carried over till 2008. Sponsored by Rep. Jacqueline Norton (D-Bangor), this bill requires an employer to provide each employee up to 9 days annually of paid sick leave. Paid sick leave may be used by an employee during an absence from employment due to the illness of the employee or the illness of an immediate family member. Although not specific to LGBT people, we support this bill being led by the Maine Women's Lobby.

Bills We OPPOSED:

LD 1589, An Act to Prohibit the Use of Opposite-Gender Bathrooms, Changing Rooms and Locker Rooms—DIED in COMMITTEE. Sponsored by Rep. Brian Duprey (R-Hampden), this bill would have made it a crime for a person to use a public bathroom, changing room or locker room that was designated for use by a gender different than the gender the person was assigned at birth. The only provision would be for a person who "completely undergoes a medical procedure" in which that person's gender is changed. Medical procedures vary widely and no one standard can be used to determine whether someone's gender is changed. At the public legislative hearing, trans advocates Jean Vermette from Bangor and Kael Parker from Portland delivered articulate testimony against the legislation and provided the committee with its first trans 101 education.

(continued on page 5)

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When you become a Sustaining Partner, your monthly donation helps provide steady, reliable income for EqualityMaine to respond quickly and effectively to discrimination and move Maine forward towards full equality.

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Results of 2007 LGBT Legislation

(continued from page 4)

LD 568, An Act to Conform HIV Testing to the Recommendations of the Federal Centers of Disease Control and Prevention—DIED in COMMITTEE. Sponsored by Senator Lisa Marrache (D-Somerville), this bill would have repealed the requirements for informed consent for HIV testing and counseling prior to testing. A similar bill (LD 429) with less drastic changes to patient protections was submitted and LD 568 was unanimously killed.

LD 180, An Act to Provide for a Change in Gender Designation on a Driver's License—DIED in COMMITTEE. This bill was sponsored by Senator Dana Dow (R-Lincoln County). Although we fully support people changing their gender designation on a driver's license, this bill was not the right approach. The Department of Motor Vehicles currently allows people who are post-op to change their gender designation and although not all trans people will have surgery, when we go through the legislature for more substantive changes to the law, we will support a bill that addresses more areas and is less cumbersome.

Bills for which we testified neither For nor Against:

LD 429, An Act to Improve Access to HIV Testing in Health Care Settings—PASSED. Sponsored by Rep. Lisa Miller (D-Somerville), this highly controversial bill generally pitted professionals in the health care system against individuals seeking patient protections for people living with HIV or AIDS. The bill was a recommendation from the Federal CDC (Centers for Disease Control) calling for routine HIV testing in health care settings, in order to diagnose

nents were concerned about losing important patient protections because, as we know, there is nothing routine about being diagnosed with HIV. EqualityMaine testified neither for nor against the bill but rather made a proposal about compromise language that we believe would have allowed for routine HIV testing while maintaining important patient protections. Our compromise language was not accepted and the bill passed as written.

LD 779, An Act to Remove Clergy as Signatories on Marriage Licenses—DEFEATED. Sponsored by Rep. Boyd Marley (D-Portland), this bill was intended to eliminate clergy's responsibility of doing the state's work and thus allow clergy to focus only on the religious aspect of a marriage. The bill was opposed by nearly every clergy and religious person in Maine. EqualityMaine testified neither for nor against but rather made some observations about the intersection of civil marriage and religious marriage and about the importance of religious blessings of the relationships of many same-sex couples. •



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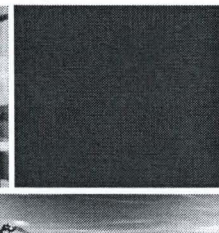
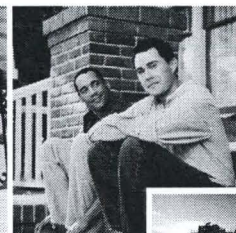
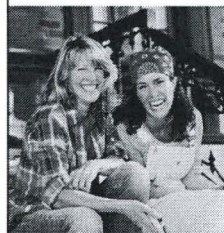
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EqualityMaine Hosts First EqualityFolk Social

EqualityMaine hosted its first annual *EqualityFolk: A Community Social* event in Bangor on August 25th. (Event had not yet happened by the printing of this newsletter). Organized in conjunction with the American Folk Festival on the Bangor waterfront, the event expected to draw LGBT friends and allies from the Bangor area and beyond. After a day of folk music, *EqualityFolk* is a time when attendees can enjoy the cool of Carolina Sports and Spirits before returning to the festival for evening performances.

Time Warner Cable continued their support of EqualityMaine by sponsoring the event. Thanks to their support, and the support of a dedicated host committee, *EqualityFolk* is free to the public.

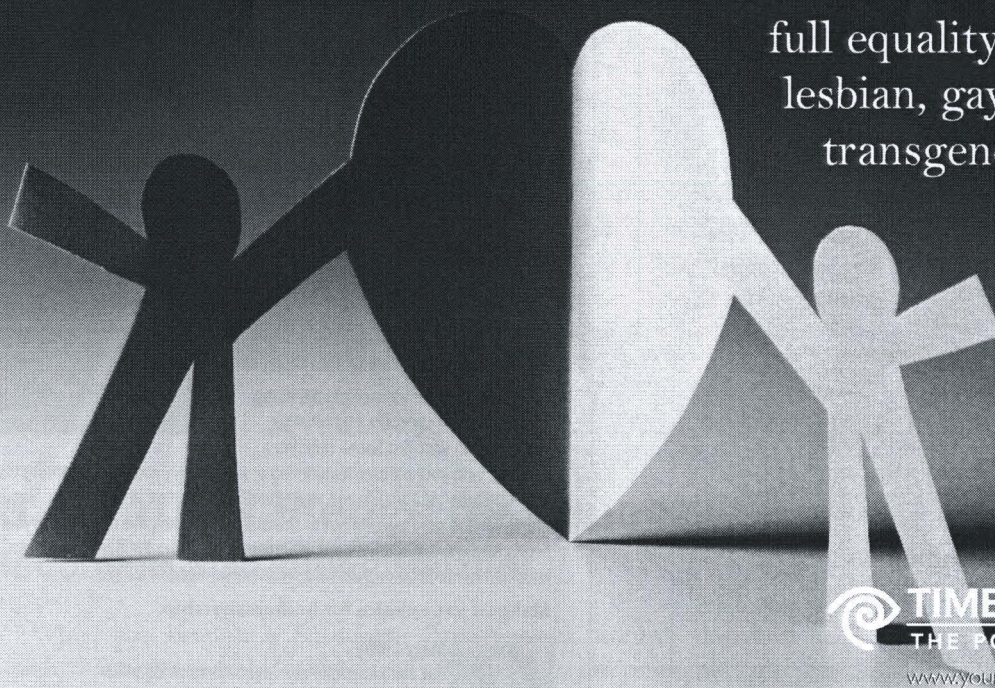
EqualityFolk marks an organizational effort to expand EqualityMaine's reach to more areas of Maine. With a staff

of five, EqualityMaine can now better serve the LGBT community across the state. Bringing together LGBT friends and allies for an informal social event is an important step toward forging the personal relationships that are fundamental to effective community organizing.

EqualityMaine field organizer Matt Moonen planned to lead a team of Bangor-area volunteers in collecting legislative postcards at the Folk Festival as part of our campaign for the freedom to marry. Increasing the number of active organizers in the Bangor area is critical if we are to win the freedom to marry in the near future.

In the coming years, we hope *EqualityFolk* will prove to be a signature summertime event for our community in Bangor. Many thanks to Time Warner Cable, Carolina Sports and Spirits, and our host committee for ensuring a successful event. •

Time Warner Cable is proud to support EqualityMaine and their continued efforts to secure full equality for Maine's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community.



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Pro-Equality Legislator Elected in Special Election

By Matt Moonen, Organizer

In April we were saddened by the news of the death of State Representative Abigail Holman (R-Fayette). Just elected in November 2006 to her first term representing House District 83, Rep. Holman was known as a moderate and was already well-liked by her colleagues in Augusta.

In the weeks following her death, the Democratic and Republican Parties chose their nominees for a special election to fill the vacant seat. The Republicans nominated Penny Morrell, an employee of Maine Right to Life and an opponent of equality for Maine's LGBT citizens. The Democrats nominated Deane Jones, a member of the Board of Selectmen of the town of Mt. Vernon and a supporter of marriage equality in Maine.

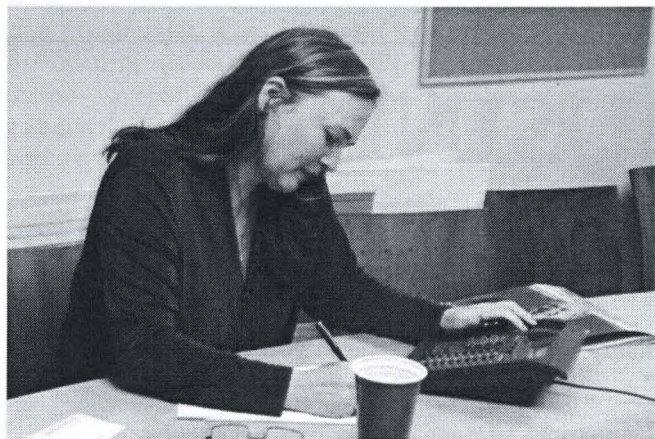
As part of the campaign to elect Deane Jones to the state legislature, EqualityMaine ran phone banks to our members in House District 83, totaling nearly 150 calls. In addition, some of our volunteers went to Augusta to help the Democratic Party turn out voters on election day.

In the end, Jones defeated Morrell by nearly 300 votes (55% - 45%). The Christian Civic League of Maine was disheartened by the results. "I pray the sexual immorality lobby's victory today will be short-lived," said Mike Heath, executive director of the League.

We congratulate Deane Jones on his victory and look forward to working with him as EqualityMaine and its coalition partners work to win the freedom to marry for all Maine citizens. •



EqualityMaine volunteers Phyllis Libby (above) and Julie Vohs (left) contact EqualityMaine members during the special election to replace State Representative Abigail Holman in House District 83. Rep. Holman died in a tragic skiing accident at Sugarloaf. Deane Jones was elected 55%-45% over Right to Life Penny Morrell.



Father Tom, ULC Ordained

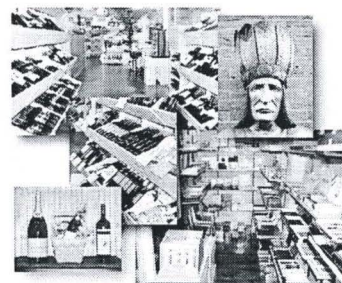
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Domestic Partners Added to Family Medical Leave Law

(continued from page 1)

therefore was not available to same-sex couples. Sandy was dependent on the generosity of her co-workers, who amazingly donated their vacation time so that she could provide the 24-hour care that Donna needed.

Sandy acknowledges that she was incredibly lucky to work with such extraordinary and giving people. Because of their generosity, she did not risk losing her job by taking time off to care for her partner. But being able to care for your family should not be a matter of luck.

Many hard-working Maine people do not have such supportive work environments. Yet everyone faces hardships at some point in life, and many people deal with serious illness. In those times, no one should have to choose between being a responsible employee and a caring family member.

Then there was Charles, whose partner Declan was terminally ill with liver cancer and too sick to travel with him to the committee hearing. Charles had hoped that both he and Declan would be able to testify about how fortunate Charles was to have the benefits of a recent personnel policy passed only for state employees that allowed him to take family medical leave to care for Declan. Unlike Sandy, Charles did not have to rely on the generosity of his co-workers to do what all Mainers should have the right to

do—care for their loved ones without jeopardizing their jobs.

As a state employee, Charles had options that others simply do not have. But the policy under which he took family medical leave to care for Declan was just a policy, not a law, and it could change with the next administration. Charles asked the Committee to support the proposed amendment to FMLA, saying LGBT employees needing to care for their partners should be able to rely on state law, rather than on the goodwill of any particular administration.

Declan died just weeks after the legislative hearing but before the legislature passed the amendment to the Family Medical Leave Law. Our hearts go out to Charles.

Thanks to Sandy, Charles, prime legislative sponsor Senator Dennis Damon (D-Hancock County), Labor Committee chair Senator Ethan Strimling (D-Cumberland County), our lobbyist Kate Knox, and our coalition partners, especially Maine Women's Lobby and GLAD, for all their help and support in passing this important piece of legislation.

A press conference to acknowledge the passage of the bill will be held in the Hall of Flags at the State House at 11:00am on Wednesday, September 19, the day before the law goes into effect. The public is welcome. •



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Maine Needs Public Education on Marriage

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On June 14th, Massachusetts' legislators defeated an anti-marriage amendment by an astounding 151-45 vote. The amendment needed only 50 votes to be sent to referendum, but it fell five votes short when nine legislators, who had previously voted in favor of the amendment, switched their votes to oppose it. As a result, marriage for same-sex couples will remain the law of the land in Massachusetts for years to come.

This historic vote did not happen by chance. For years, MassEquality built public support for marriage by running an aggressive public education campaign. One of their tactics, which turned out to be a brilliant campaign strategy, was to collect signed constituent postcards in support of marriage and send them to legislators just before the vote. But they didn't just collect a few postcards—they collected over 200,000, from every legislative district in the state. The postcards served two equally important purposes: they helped MassEquality identify their supporters and they represented the enormous support for marriage among legislators' constituents.

The front page of *The Boston Globe* on June 14th featured a photograph of Massachusetts State Representative Paul Kujawski, a longtime opponent of marriage who had previously voted in favor of the discriminatory amendment. In the photograph, Rep. Kujawski was seated at his desk, surrounded by stacks and stacks of postcards in support of marriage—overwhelming evidence of how his constituents felt about the issue. In the accompanying article, Rep. Kujawski explained that he felt conflicted and was unsure of

how he would vote. Later that afternoon, he switched his vote to oppose the amendment.

The power of these postcards cannot be overstated. That's why here at EqualityMaine, we have chosen a postcard campaign as one of the tactics in our public education

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While most people were enjoying the festivities of Pride, EqualityMaine volunteer Niki Norman (left) spent the day collecting legislative postcards on marriage equality. Volunteers collected 470 postcards during Pride weekend. Postcards ask legislators to be proactive in the movement to win the freedom to marry in Maine.

What Side of History Are You On?

By Betsy Smith, Executive Director

When LGBT people oppose the freedom to marry it is often, they say, because marriage is not something they want for themselves. It's "not my issue," they say, and feel justified sitting on the sidelines—or worse, speaking out against the efforts to win the freedom to marry.

For those in this category, I ask for a little perspective on the situation.

In the early 1800s, there were many African Americans who accepted their status as slaves. In the early 1900s, there were many women who accepted their status of not having the right to vote. And in the early 2000s, there are many LGBT people who accept their status of not having the freedom to marry.

In all great civil rights movements, as time plays out, there's a right side of history and there's a wrong side.

When we look back at events of the 1800s, we can't imagine being opposed to slaves having the right to be free.

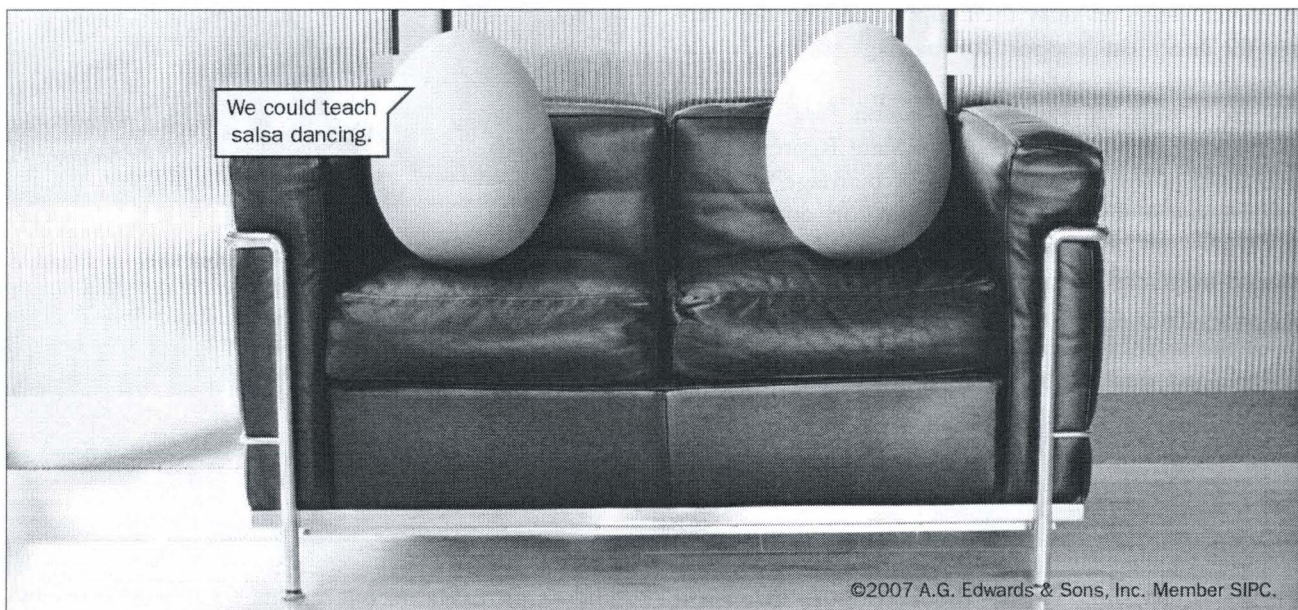
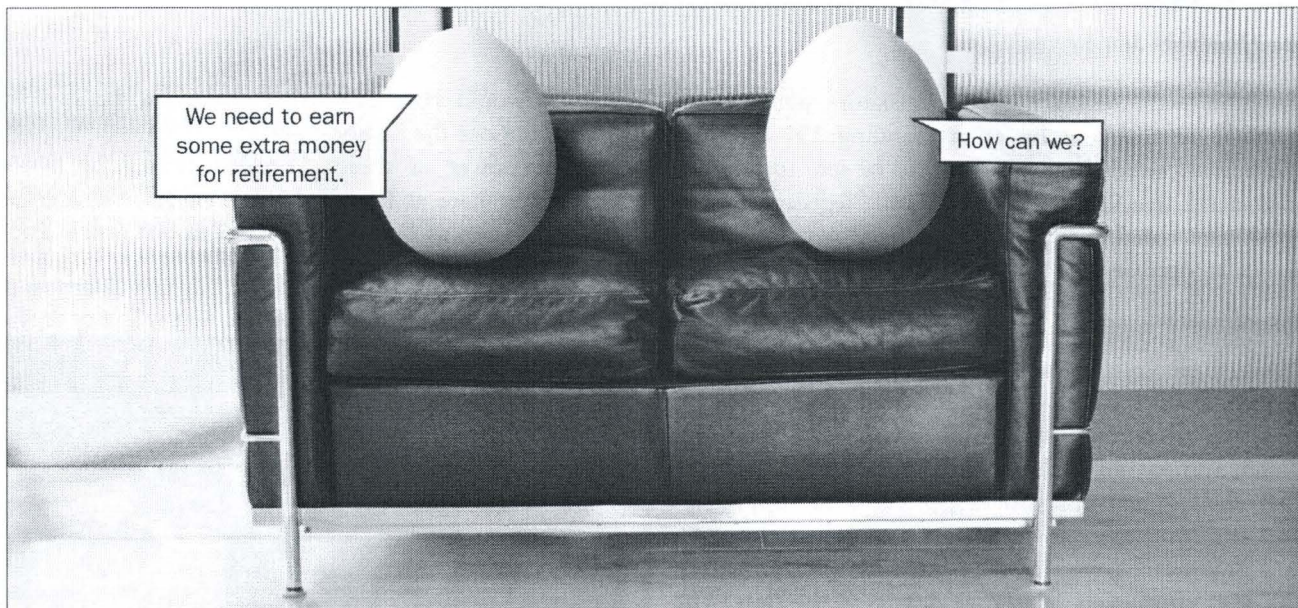
There's probably no one in this country who doesn't know what side of history they're on in the former movement to free slaves.

When we look back at events of the 1900s, we can't imagine being opposed to women having the right to vote. There's probably no one in this country who doesn't know what side of history they're on in the former movement to allow women to vote.

When people look back at events of the 2000s, they will not be able to imagine being opposed to LGBT people having the freedom to marry. Everyone will know what side of history they are on.

Marriage is an historic civil rights movement. Our great-grandchildren, grand-nieces and grand-nephews will read about this civil rights movement in the history books.

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What Side of History?

(continued from page 9)

And they'll wonder, 'where were my LGBT ancestors on this issue? Did they accept their status of not having the freedom to marry, or were they fighting for it?'

When we passed the non-discrimination law in 2005, virtually no one sat on the sidelines. Non-gay people—who could rightfully claim it was "not their issue"—were some of the hardest working volunteers on the Maine Won't Discriminate campaign. Why?.....because it was a civil rights movement, and in a civil rights movement people are either on the right side of history or on the wrong side. Non-gay people came out in droves because they wanted to be on the right side of history.

If marriage isn't your issue, or it's not something you want for yourself, please give serious consideration as to what side of history you're on. When you look back, either in this life or the next, on what side of history do you want to be remembered? If you choose to be on the right side of history, then stand up and be counted, like our non-gay allies did in 2005. And join our campaign to help win the freedom to marry in Maine. •

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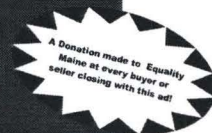
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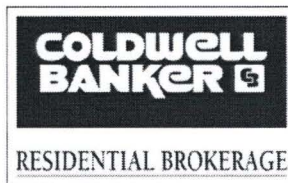
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It's Time to Extend Legislative Term Limits

While little information is currently available, there is an important referendum campaign happening this fall. On November 6, 2007, voters will be asked whether they support extending the number of terms a legislator can serve from 4 terms (8 years) to 6 (12 years).

EqualityMaine supports extending term limits to 12 years.

Under the current system, knowledge of issues and procedures is lost every two years when about one-third of all legislators are termed out. It can take several years for legislators to fully understand some of the issues they are asked to vote on—issues that affect our lives as Maine citizens. Just when legislators get to that point, they are termed out.

EqualityMaine supports extending term limits because educating legislators about LGBT issues is often a long-term investment, with legislators moving up the learning curve at various paces. An issue like marriage is especially long-term, and how sad for our community to lose the vote of a legislator just when that legislator reaches the point of understanding why LGBT couples deserve full equality through marriage.

Massachusetts, fortunately, did not find themselves in this situation. Two months ago, legislators resoundingly defeated an anti-marriage amendment by 151-45. The first time this anti-marriage amendment was voted on was nearly three years ago, shortly after the 2004 Supreme Judicial

Court ruling that made marriage legal in Massachusetts. If Massachusetts had had legislative term limits, possibly one-third of the legislators voting on June 14, 2007, would have been new. They would have had only a fraction of the knowledge and understanding that incumbents have about marriage and only a fraction of the communication that constituents sent their legislators (see page 9). What a difference the lack of term limits played in that historic vote.

Term limits are most noticeable in leadership—Speaker of the House, Senate President, etc. When legislators work their way into leadership roles, it is typically in their 4th term, the last term they can serve. After one year, they are termed out and someone new comes in. With no consistency in leadership, it's no wonder that complex issues such as tax reform and health care don't get resolved.

While term limits seemed like a good idea in 1993, the year voters supported a referendum question on term limits by 68 percent, we have since come to realize that they are, in essence, anti-democratic. In a democracy, voters are able to vote for the candidate of their choice. Term limits prevent this. Term limits dictate who can and who cannot run for office.

We don't know who is running the campaign to extend term limits or when you'll begin hearing campaign advertising about it, but when November 6 rolls around, please get out and vote. •

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Maine Needs Public Education on Marriage

(continued from page 9)

on marriage. While we can't compare the beginning of our campaign to the end of MassEquality's (or Maine to Massachusetts for that matter), we are happy that we have collected nearly 1,000 postcards from several districts across the state. This summer we've gone door-to-door, talking to voters and asking them to sign. We've also attended fairs, festivals, concerts, and picnics, collecting postcards along the way. We will continue this work into the fall and into 2008, and we definitely need your help!

Media Response Team:

To move public opinion on marriage, the public needs to see LGBT families and understand the impact that marriage has on all families. The most effective way to accomplish this is through the media. To that end, EqualityMaine and GLAD have formed a statewide media response team. Together we monitor all the daily newspapers in Maine and when an article, editorial or letter-to-the-editor on an LGBT issue arises we alert members of the team, who write and submit letters-to-the-editor of that newspaper.

Just days after Massachusetts' legislators defeated the anti-marriage amendment, the *Maine Sunday Telegram* came out in support of the freedom to marry in Maine, should the issue come to the legislature. Our media response team flooded the *Telegram* with letters-to-the-editor in support of marriage; by the end of the week, at least fifteen letters had been submitted. Thanks to our volunteers' efforts, the following edition of the *Maine Sunday Telegram* devoted almost the entire letters-to-the-editor section to letters affirming marriage here in Maine, all under the heading "Marriage Matters." One of our volunteers, Tamiko Davies, was even named "Letter Writer of the Month." With this coverage, thousands of Mainers read articulate and thoughtful letters about why marriage matters to LGBT people and their families.

For the foreseeable future, EqualityMaine is in a public education campaign, the goal of which is to increase the

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Marriage matters



Same-sex marriage supporters react at the Massachusetts Statehouse in Boston in 2003 after state lawmakers again avoided taking a formal stand on a proposed constitutional amendment that would ban gay marriage.

Thank you for your June 17 editorial supporting same-sex marriage in Maine. The more than 1,000 legal rights that are immediately and automatically granted through marriage cannot be duplicated by domestic partnership, civil unions or individual and expensive separate legal documents.

No matter how many years my female partner and I have lived and loved together, neither how committed we are to each other's well-being, we are still second-class citizens in the eyes of the law.

Our having the right to marry would harm no one. But it would help protect us in medical, legal and financial matters. We only want the same rights as other committed couples.

We do not seek "approval" or sanction by all religions. Those who do not want equal marriage would not be forced to change their beliefs or religious practices.

But if same-sex marriage was legal, my partner and I could get married in the church where we are members. We would like the same expression of religious freedom that other citizens currently enjoy.

Two people who love each other and agree to the responsibilities of marriage should be granted the same legal rights as other residents of our great state. Though it may be a difficult discussion for many, I believe the common sense of Mainers will prevail. Same-sex marriage should be legal.

Harry Dowzer
South Portland

Murray: I was pleased to read your editorial about same-sex marriage, as it sent a compelling message to legislators to support marriage equality in Maine.

That stands out of America's greatest institutions would be inclusive of everyone regardless of sexual orientation. It's about time for sound judgment.

Although each situation is unique, overall it has been shown that two-parent families are advantageous for children to grow up in, whether they have biological, two dads or a mom and a dad.

The more support and care available, the better, not only for children, but for spouses as well. Married people tend to have better health and live longer.

Also, considering how difficult it is to get health insurance or social security benefits, the least we can do is offer a better safety net for a committed couple.

When you look at the diverse role of heterosexual couples

that has climbed above all persons, who is to say their marriages are any stranger?

This is simply a harmless issue - allow any couple the choice to succeed in marriage by allowing them to marry in the first place. And allow children the benefits of having married parents.

Trends to support at risk families are moving toward community-based, family-focused care, and marriage helps create a family as a cohesive group, both legally and socially.

This is a good idea to strengthen the entire community. We will all benefit from marriage equality.

Regal Nasser
South Portland

The editorial endorsing "same-sex" marriage in Maine calls for a thorough discussion, but that discussion is unlikely to take place for several reasons:

■ Rather than promoting honest and open discussion, the newspaper already states that the Legislature "should support" a proposal for same-sex marriage.

■ The newspaper also editorializes the news when it presents a one-sided article on the recent gay pride parade that is essentially a free, child, religious, secular event, presentation of the gay agenda without a single line of perspective from anyone else.

When there are events by groups with traditional points of view, your writers always report quotations and coverage from gay advocacy groups.

■ Even though the polls indicate that the vast majority of Americans favor marriage between one man and one woman, there are few who are willing to publicly defend that position because they have

been harassed and humiliated into silence by accusations that their views are hateful and homophobic.

The Legislature may eventually vote to make "same-sex marriage" legal, but it can never make it moral. Public opinion may move in the direction of legitimizing gay unions, but public opinion can never make such unions natural, normal or desirable.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for traditional Christians is to speak the truth to love - a genuine, humble, self-sacrificing love for gay persons that shows itself in both word and deed.

Sandy Williams
Portland

What a pleasure: to see the newspaper's editorial in favor of marriage equality.

You are exactly right. The definition of marriage contained within it states that 1,000 legal protections that those of us who are heterosexual take for granted and that are denied to gay and lesbian people.

The right to visit a loved one in a hospital, for example, can be denied to a gay or lesbian partner of many decades, and control over medical decisions-making can automatically default to family members who aren't even close, despite the existence of a stable, committed same-sex relationship that may have existed for decades.

Most people agree that this is wrong.

I am deeply respectful of those whose opinions are guided by their faith and religious beliefs, as long as their faith traditions do not violate my faith traditions. America is a pluralistic society in which there must be room for many points of view.

We ought to, in my opinion,

have marital rights for same-sex partners conferred by law and allow each church the right to make its own decision as to whether it wishes to solemnize such unions. But within that church only - marital relationships between people of the same gender.

But it is time to allow people access to a legal marital relationship if they love each other, care for each other and consent to caring for each other, regardless of their gender.

The time for marriage equality has come.

Pete Miller
Portland

My husband and I are a heterosexual couple who would like our gay and lesbian friends to have the same opportunity to be married as we have had.

The societal acceptance, emotional commitment and legal rights that come with marriage should be made available in Maine to them as well.

Thank you for your support for this.

Deanne Parley
Portland

We are about the most successful family you might imagine. We have two young children ages 1 and 3. We try to feed them healthy food, keep them clean and teach them good manners.

We worry about their future, how they will find a job and how they will find a partner. We are at the playground or the gym every once in a while to see how they are doing.

We are not just complaining. We have two young children ages 1 and 3. We try to feed them healthy food, keep them clean and teach them good manners.

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Tamiko Davies
Portland

number of conversations we have about marriage—that is, our lives as loving, committed couples, our children and relatives, our dogs and cats, our tragedies and joys, our everyday lives.

There are many ways to volunteer in this effort. Please contact us by phone, 207-761-3732, or by email, info@equalitymaine.org, and let's talk about how you can make a difference in winning the freedom to marry in Maine. •

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The Development Corner

By Brian Sandberg, Development Director

Business sponsorships are very important to our work here at EqualityMaine. And while the financial support is essential, it's not just about money. Public support from Time Warner Cable, Verizon, Diversified Communications, Norway Savings Bank, Five County Credit Union, Honeck & O'Toole, and Vogel & Dubois is an endorsement from high profile members of the business community that our work matters to Maine employers. It's an endorsement of fairness and equality.

As part of our efforts to actively engage business leaders in Maine, we have formed a Business Council for dedicated business supporters. Membership in the Business Council (\$2500/year) is an important source of revenue, but equally important is that we develop deeper relationships with important leaders in Maine.

The time is ripe for this program. Nationally, business leaders have long recognized the critical economic benefits of a tolerant society. Corporations like Volvo, American Airlines, IBM and leading wealth management firms have long supported national LGBT organizations. As a disproportionately wealthy, educated, brand-loyal audience, the LGBT community is a coveted market niche as both consumers and employees. One hundred seventy-five of the Fortune 500 companies have LGBT marketing campaigns.¹ And nearly every Human Resources department has a diversity team charged with attracting top talent from all patches in the quilt.

The more our political and economic leaders recognize the critical contributions the LGBT community makes to the Maine economy, the more likely the state is to resurrect its struggling economy. Across the board our political and economic leaders decry our overtaxed, under performing economy. LGBT consumers, employees, and entrepreneurs could be essential to efforts to transition from our traditional resource-based economy to a creative economy founded on innovation and entrepreneurship.

Richard Florida, a widely read scholar and business consultant, notes that locales with an active LGBT community are likely to be conducive to the creative ideas that drive economic growth.

"Regions and nations that have such an ecosystem—that can do the best job of tapping the diverse creative talents of the most people—gain a tremendous competitive advantage."²

A highly touted report by the Brookings Report emphasized the importance of innovative workers, firms, and industry clusters to producing high quality jobs and a higher standard of living for all Mainers:

- 15 million people self identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.*
- There are 52,000 gay and lesbian adults living in Maine.**
- National gay and lesbian buying power is estimated at \$690 billion.*
- 15% of gay and lesbian households earn at least \$100,000 annually, compared with only 4% of the US population as a whole.***
- 65% of gay households have a college degree, compared with 31% of the US population as a whole.***
- 78% of LGBT Americans prefer to buy brands that market directly to them.****

* Harris Interactive, <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/GLBT>

** The Williams Institute, 2006, Same-sex couples and the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Population: New Estimates from the American Community Survey.

*** The Original GLBT Expo, <http://www.originalgbtexpo.com/stats.php>

**** National Center for Lesbian Rights, Available from http://www.nclrights.org/sponsor/NCLR_Corporate_Sponsor_Packet_2007.pdf

"Innovation is not just the province of a few high-tech industries; it is essential to nearly all Maine businesses whether urban or rural, resource-based or knowledge-driven. Nor does innovation occur only once. Instead, the global economy requires continuous learning and innovation—the competitive bar is always rising."³

EqualityMaine's Business Council is an opportunity for business leaders across the state to reach an important consumer market, attract top-notch employees, and help shape Maine's economy for years to come. EqualityMaine's work for full equality for the LGBT community is not just a matter of fairness, it's smart business. •

¹ Gunther, Marc. Courting the gay consumer. Fortune Magazine

² Florida, Richard. Kotkin's Fallacies: Why Diversity Matters for Economic Growth. Internet. Available from http://creativeclass.com/rfegdb/articles/Kotkins_Fallacies.pdf.

³ The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2006. Charting Maine's Future: An Action Plan for Promoting Sustainable Prosperity and Quality Places.

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP OR JOIN EQUALITYMAINE TODAY!

All EqualityMaine members receive a subscription to our quarterly newsletter, voting rights at the annual meeting, advance notice of community events, membership in the email Action Alert Network, opportunities to volunteer and the satisfaction of supporting equality for all. Contributions of any amount are counted towards membership – whether you can give \$1 or \$1,000, your membership makes a difference in promoting diversity and protecting the rights of LGBT people in Maine.

YES! I want to be a member of EqualityMaine! Enclosed is my contribution of:

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☐ Sign me up as a Sustaining Partner! Please start charging my monthly gift of \$10 / \$25 / \$50 / \$_____

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☐ I'd like to volunteer

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Please Join Us at EqualityMaine's Annual Meeting!

Thursday, September 27, 2007, 6:00–8:00 pm
Maine Education Association
35 Community Drive, Augusta

EqualityMaine's Annual Meeting is open to the public and we especially encourage EqualityMaine members and friends to attend.

Agenda includes year-in-review, preview of upcoming year, viewing of EqualityMaine's new DVD *The Way Life Should Be: Marriage in Maine*, election of new board members, approval of proposed changes to the by-laws (proposed changes to the by-laws may be found at <http://tinyurl.com/2x6h3q>) and guest presentation on November's referendum question on term limits.

No cost. Light refreshments provided. Meet new people. And learn about the LGBT community's political advocacy efforts and actions.