

MLGPA News

Politics, Education, Outreach

P.O. Box 232, Hallowell, ME 04347-0232

March 1998

ANALYSIS OF THE VOTE What Does it Mean?

February 10's vote to repeal the new anti-discrimination law was a difficult blow to the LGBT community. In the big picture, though, it is only a minor setback. As a community, we have struggled too long for respect and equal treatment to stop now. Losing the election by just over 2% of the people who voted is hardly a mandate for legalized discrimination. In fact, many people who voted "yes" to repeal the new law thought they were voting on whether gay people should have special rights, not equal rights.

Though at times our opposition seemed like a bunch of bumbling idiots, a facade which they have purposely cultivated, they were really a very well-oiled machine. They imported staff — professionals in getting out the conservative vote — from the large national religious right groups who have money and expertise to spare. They used scare tactics, fear, and outright lying to motivate their supporters to vote.

We know from polling that the majority of Maine citizens do not support discrimination against gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. Unfortunately, we did not succeed in convincing enough of our supporters that it was absolutely vital for them to vote. Some people were lulled into a false sense of security, assuming that Maine voters would never repeal a law that protected their friends and family from discrimination.

Maine Won't Discriminate, and all of its coalition members, did an excellent job with the resources and information it had. In scientific terms, the campaign accomplished exactly what it set out to do: based on the predicted 25% of registered voters who would turn out for this election (information obtained from the Secretary of State's office), the "no" vote needed 50% plus 1 in order to win, plus some extra for security.

According to unofficial results from the February 12 edition of the Portland Press Herald, 29.6% of registered voters (based on November 1997 voter registration) voted. That means there are 953,000 registered voters in the state of Maine. The number predicted to vote on February 10 was at most 25% or 238,250 people — half of that plus 1 is 119,126. Adding in a few extra votes for security (just in case 27% of the voters went to the polls), we needed

126,000 to win. On February 10, "no" voters totaled (unofficially) 137,610. That's 11,610 more votes than we should have needed.

Maine Won't Discriminate did its job professionally and efficiently. The culprit was the religious right and it is our job to learn how they operate so as to not let this happen again. We are dealing with a machine and not with some "concerned Maine families." And they won't stop here. Now that they have "won" the gay rights issue, they will move on to another issue — most likely abortion — and after that they will move on to another. On one particular day after the vote, the newspaper printed that the religious right had gained new political clout because of this election.

We must take this threat seriously. We must commit to fighting this entity in our state, regardless of the issue, and we must not let this group of radical conservative individuals get a stronghold in Maine. If we can hold them back on the civil rights issue for LGBT people, we can hold them back on everything. But we can only do it together.

For starters, we must commit to helping the Maine Women's Lobby and the Maine chapter of NOW as they fight the religious right on the abortion issue.

For more information or discussion, please e-mail us at: mlgpa@javanet.com or leave us a message at 1-800-55-MLGPA (761-3732 in greater Portland).

MLGPA Meetings

MLGPA monthly meetings are held the third Thursday of every month at the Maine Education Association Building on Civic Center Drive in Augusta, from 6–9pm. Committees meet first, followed by a full Board meeting from 7–9pm. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to attend. MLGPA Legislative Committee meetings are held every other Wednesday (2/18, 3/4, 3/18, etc.) at the MEA from 6–8pm. Please join us as we head into a candidate election year and as we determine the future of our civil rights.

MLGPA

Politics, Education, Outreach

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A word from the president...

In the Tuesday, February 17 edition of the Portland Press Herald, there is a comic on the editorial page. The comic shows a couple driving away in a car, with another couple waving good-bye saying, "Bye-Bye! So long! See ya again some time soon..." The license plate on the car driving away reads "Gay Rights Issue."

Thomas Wilson, author of the comic, hit the nail on the head. Tuesday's vote was but a minor setback in our continuing struggle for equal justice under the law. It is not very different than Governor McKernan's veto of the anti-discrimination bill in 1993. Four years after McKernan vetoed that bill, passed by both the House and Senate, victory was ours and it was so much sweeter than if McKernan had signed the bill into law. On May 16, 1997, during the signing of the anti-discrimination bill by Governor Angus King, someone leaned over and whispered to me, "The wait was worth it. McKernan could never have done what Governor King is doing for us now."

These words began to hold hope for me again on Wednesday, February 11, when I awoke to a type of mourning I had not felt before. Mourning the death of a loved one, as I experienced last summer, was somehow very different from this. I had little time to ponder, however. The media was out in droves on Wednesday, and by Thursday and Friday our community was venting, discussing, debating, and brainstorming what went wrong and what was next. I knew that MLGPA needed to be there with its leadership.

So my thoughts have been optimistic. I feel that in a year, or two, or three, or whenever it is that we pass the bill and the citizens of Maine support it overwhelmingly, that it will be worth the wait. It will be a sweet victory to show the Christian Civic League that instead of winning by a lousy 7000 votes, or just over 2% of the people who voted, that Maine voters overwhelmingly support non-discrimination against lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals. Repeal Prevails?? Not for long!!

In Solidarity,
Betsy Smith

Maine Diversity Alliance

A New Non-Profit Organization Forms

The Maine Diversity Alliance is the new non-profit organization established by MLGPA. MDA will carry out the education, outreach, and grassroots components of MLGPA, as well as establish its own mission and goals. Because MDA is a non-profit organization, it will be able to apply for grants and other funding sources not available to MLGPA.

The first project that the Maine Diversity Alliance will undertake is a statewide hate crimes prevention project funded in part by the Maine Equity Fund. MDA will develop and implement a program to supplement the work already being done with hate crimes toward LGBT individuals.

A second project will be education and outreach in rural Maine and other small communities on the issue of civil rights for LGBT individuals. February 10's vote showed us that we must move beyond the cities to educate those in smaller communities, where gay people live but cannot always live openly.

Officers of the corporation (MDA) have been elected and by-laws have been passed. Officers will proceed in electing a Board of Directors in March. This Board will function separately from MLGPA, and anyone interested in serving on the Board should contact Betsy Smith at 774-7863, ext. 164.

WHAT'S NEXT??

MLGPA Moves Forward

As an organization and as a community, it is our responsibility to plan for the future and to make a renewed commitment to attaining anti-discrimination protection for LGBT people. As someone said the day after the vote, "We spent 20 years educating the Legislature. Now we must turn our education to the people." MLGPA assures you that it will not take 20 years to educate the people.

We have two camps to educate: 1) the "yes" voters, many of whom thought they were voting on whether gay people should have special rights, and 2) the people who didn't vote, many of whom thought their vote wasn't needed to maintain the anti-discrimination law. Since there will always be a small percentage of individuals who will vote to repeal an anti-discrimination law, we do not have to educate everyone.

In particular, we need to find and educate the individuals in rural Maine who believe that discrimination is wrong, but do not understand that they voted against what they believed. Finding and educating them will be a challenge, but not impossible. We will develop an education packet for rural Maine and will seek out our supporters in those locations to help implement the program. This, of course, is where MLGPA members will be essential. We will have more information in subsequent newsletters for those of you who are interested in working on this project.

Educating our supporters who did not vote will require a different approach—perhaps even a sense of urgency. They need to understand the importance of going to the polls—why just one vote can make a difference. We will develop an education program for these folks as well, but to start, all of us must talk to everyone we know about the vote and what happened, about discrimination, and about the need for every citizen to be treated fairly under the law.

Politically we have a number of options, all of which are being discussed at the state level. We have many supportive legislators who are as committed to this issue as we are and we will work with them to determine the best approach in getting this bill passed again. Some options include: introducing the bill in 1999, which could lead to another people's veto in 2000; introducing the bill in 1999 and having the Legislature send it to referendum to be voted on in a general election; or waiting another session, giving us more time to educate the people of Maine.

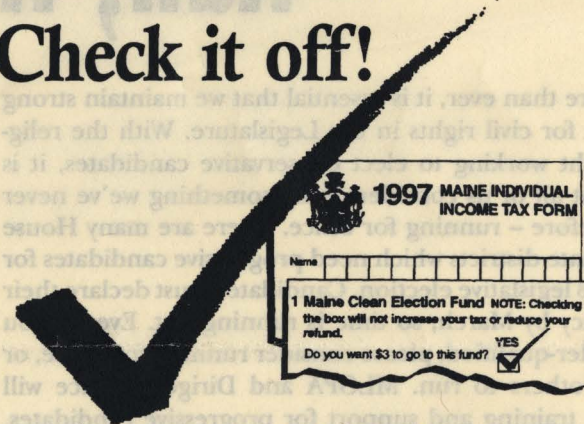
Also politically, we must ensure that our support in the Legislature stays strong, which we can do by electing gay and gay-supportive individuals. On page 4 in this newsletter you will find a list of the races in which we need progressive candidates. You can make a difference. PLEASE consider running for office, or find others who

will, and we will provide you with the information, training, and support you need to be successful.

So now we move on. MLGPA has planned several regional community meetings in order to get input from everyone. These meetings will start in the south and end in the north and will be led by an experienced facilitator. Our goal is to offer participants an opportunity to process the campaign and brainstorm for the future. We hope that every MLGPA member will be able to attend at least one of these meetings. The dates for these meetings were not set prior to the printing of this newsletter, so please call the MLGPA office to get dates, times, and locations (1-800-55-MLGPA or 761-3732 in greater Portland).

As difficult as the past couple of weeks have been, MLGPA is excited about the future and feels that the best of our days are still ahead. Imagine the party we can throw when, finally, Maine citizens overwhelmingly support anti-discrimination laws for LGBT people.

Check it out. Check it off!



Your Maine tax form has a new feature—a \$3 check off that lets you do something about campaign finance reform, without adding to your tax bill. By checking "Yes," you direct three of your tax dollars to the Maine Clean Election Fund.

Starting in the year 2000, the Clean Election Fund will give limited, equal funding to qualified candidates who agree to strict spending limits and accept no private money.

Do your part.
☒ **Check "Yes" for Clean Elections.**

For more information: (207) 780-8657 mcl97@aol.com

Banquet a Smashing Success!

The MLGPA Annual Awards Banquet was held Saturday, February 7, at the Augusta Civic Center, with food, awards, and dancing at their finest. Over 300 people attended the event, with an extra 32 strolling in just for the dance. In the next newsletter we will report the financial profit from the banquet.

The award recipients this year were spectacular and each gave a moving and emotional acceptance speech.

Great Pioneer Award—For Being on the Forefront of Major Change for the LGBT Community
Mabel Wadsworth Women's Health Center, Bangor

Cameron Duncan Award—
For Outstanding AIDS Community Service
Tom Antonik, Lisbon

F.E. Pentlarge Award—For Outstanding Demonstration of Family Values
Mary Jane and Lawrence Wallace, Portland

Community Service Awards:
Reverend Fred Lipp, former pastor of First Parish Church, Portland

Mary Harney—Organizer and AIDS worker in Hancock County

Catherine Kidman—Director of Outright, Portland

Media Award:

Bill Nemitz (Portland Press Herald)

President's Award:

Dan Stevens, Augusta

Many thanks go out to the volunteers who worked so hard to make this banquet one of the best ever: Maggie Allen (co-chair), Jennifer Goldman (co-chair), Judy Edgerly, Julie Rothrock, Del Wilson, Dan Kelley, Harold Booth, Lisa Smith (graphic design), Kate McLaughlin, Karen Richard, Brian Kaufman and Paule French (photographer).

MLGPA extends its appreciation to this year's banquet sponsors and patrons: David P. Becker, Nina R. Mollicone, Dan Stevens & Tom Lecakis, Karen Geraghty & Carol Kelly, David J. Garrity & Edward A. Hobler, Katherine Pelletreau, Celeste Gosselin & Jewel McHale, Rick Gowen, and Betsy Smith & Jennifer Hoopes.

Run, Run, Run

More than ever, it is essential that we maintain strong support for civil rights in the Legislature. With the religious right working to elect conservative candidates, it is vital that all of us consider doing something we've never done before – running for office. There are many House and Senate districts which need progressive candidates for the 1998 legislative election. Candidates must declare their candidacy by March, so time is running out. Even if you feel under-qualified, please consider running for office, or recruit others to run. MLGPA and Dirigo Alliance will provide training and support for progressive candidates. We need you!

Here is a list of the House and Senate districts which we have targeted as essential races to win. These races are either open seats, being vacated by legislative term limits, or have conservative legislators who need to be challenged. Please look over this list, and help us find candidates to run! You may contact us at 1-800-55-MLGPA.

Dist.	Town(s)	Currently held by:
H1	part of Kittery	Kenneth Lemont (R) *
H2	part of York	David Ott (R) *
H22	parts of Gorham and Scarborough	Bob Pendleton (R) *
H59	Jefferson, Nobleboro, Waldoboro	Robert Spear (R) *

H65	Andover, Bethel, Byron, Rangeley	Alvin Barth (R) *
H66	Bingham, Brighton Plt., Carabassett, Jackman, Kingfield, Moscow, New Portland	Edward Dexter (R) *
H73	part of Auburn	Belinda Gerry (I)
H85	Durham, parts of Lisbon & Brunswick	William Bodwell (R)
H95	part of Augusta	David Madore (R)
H114	Dixmont, Hampden, Newburgh	Debra Plowman (R)
H119	part of Bangor	Tarren Bragdon (R)
H145	most of Presque Isle	James Donnelly (R)
S2	Caribou, Easton, Fort Fairfield, Limestone, Presque Isle	Leo Kieffer (R) *
S4	Washington County	Vinton Cassidy (R)
S8	Piscataquis County	Stephen Hall (R) *
S16	Lincoln County and part of Kennebec	Marjorie Kilkelly (D) *
S19	Arrowsic, Bath, Bowdoin, Bowdoinham, Topsham, Harpswell, Georgetown, Woolwich	Mary Small (R) *

* designates open seats