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Northern Lambda Nord

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Maine is target of anti-gay Colorado-style amendment

The right-wing has begun a drive to prohibit the enactment of any laws to protect non-heterosexuals from discrimination and to repeal existing laws in Portland and Lewiston. Under the leadership of Carolyn Cosby, the Auburn-based Concerned Maine Families organization has begun a petition drive to limit Maine's non-discrimination laws to those classes which are already protected. The petition question reads as follows:

Do you favor the changes in Maine law limiting protected classifications in future state and local laws to race, color, sex, physical or mental disability, religion, age, ancestry, national origin, familial status, and marital status, and repealing existing laws which expand these classification as proposed by citizen petition?

In other words, "sexual orientation" and any other class of persons may not be added, and any classification other than those enumerated must be removed, i.e. the Portland and Lewiston ordinances would be nullified.

The Maine Lesbian-Gay Political Alliance and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force co-sponsored a series of workshops in Augusta to educate and organize the gay, lesbian-bisexual community and our supporters as to what to expect and how to respond to this campaign. Eight people from Aroostook County were in attendance at the day-long event.

At the opening session, Paula Aboud, MelGPA president, made an analogy between the right wing push in the U.S. to codify their brand of Christian theology and morality nationwide, and the rising waters of the Mississippi River. Our decision is where to put the sand bags, how high, and how much help we will have to stop the flow.

A member of the Maine Legislature, Rep. Susan Farnsworth of Hallowell, discussed the history of the Concerned Maine Families group and how the religious right is loosely organized in Maine. The most famous right winger, Jasper Wyman of the Christian Civic League, has distanced himself from Carolyn Cosby's group. He may want to run for governor.

Sally Sutton, Executive Director of the Maine Civil Liberties Union, spoke of her organization's goals - to defend the Bill of Rights and to protect the minority from the majority. and the legal issues facing Maine citizens with regards to this type of petition drive.

NGLTF grass roots organizer Scot Nakagawa of Portland, Oregon, traced the history of the right wing's efforts to maintain the status quo in this country. He noted that their movement is based upon sexism, racism, and homophobia as well as on economic fear. These are the same people who opposed the abolition of slavery, the movement for women's suffrage, civil rights for racial minorities, and equal rights for women. (Remember how much opposition they voiced during the attempt to ratify the ERA, which would have put women's equality into the U.S. Constitution?)

Their modern organizing began with the conservative Goldwater era 30 years ago. It is the most well-organized and well-financed radical movement in the U.S. The Coors family is one of the biggest funding supporters of the right wing. At the Republican National Convention, Pat Robertson referred to this as a "religious war". By fighting for political and religious domination of U.S. society, they feel their place in heaven is assured.

Some people in our society who have never had to acknowledge that they have civil rights (straight white men, for example) feel threatened by those groups who are now gaining their civil rights, women, racial minorities, gays & lesbians. Scot noted that "local" groups such as Concerned Maine Families are tied to national organizations such as the Christian Coalition who provide financial help and advice.

The balance of the morning and early afternoon included two major workshops held simultaneously. Lambda members made sure they were represented in both discussions. One session covered community/coalition building and grassroots & rural organizing. The second session discussed the media: how they work, how to get our message out, how to respond/react to the right wing. Complete details about these two important discussions will be the subject of upcoming NLN meetings.

Though we are at the northern end of the state of Maine, what is happening in Auburn, Lewiston, Portland, and Augusta will have a profound, personal affect on our lives in Aroostook County. The Lambda members who attended the workshops have a lot of information to share and hope to apply the skills and lessons learned to better our lives here in The County. Stay tuned.
HIV Testing

Testing for HIV in Maine is both confidential and anonymous - they do not need to know your name, address, phone. Testing in New Brunswick is confidential but NOT anonymous! Call ACAP Family Planning for more information and an appointment.

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Testing includes both pre- and post-discussion. There is a minimal fee to cover lab costs.

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Coming Saturday, October 2
annual NLN Membership Drive Party at the Caribou Country Club
Be there or be square!

Do more than belong.
participate