

Amendment important to everyone who suffers discrimination

Pro

By Michiela Thuman

The sexual orientation amendment is not just an amendment to condone homosexuality. It is a civil rights amendment that affects everyone.

That is one of the ideas that pro gay and lesbian civil rights leaders in Lincoln are trying to get across before voters see a ballot May 11: the universality of the sexual orientation amendment.

"Right now there is no law to protect anyone against sexual discrimination," said Jim Holloway, a UNL student and president of the UNL Gay Student Group. "Right now people can be fired for something that has nothing to do with their competence as an employee or their responsibility as a tenant."

"People in Lincoln are very conservative, very family and church-oriented," Holloway said. "But they are also very fair-minded and can be persuaded that there is no need to fear gay people."

Holloway said the amendment stands a good chance of passing in Lincoln. "I'm very optimistic," he said, "but my main concern is that gay people get out and vote." If the entire gay population in Lincoln mobilizes and gets behind the amendment it could pass, he said.

"That's a hell of a voting block. If we lose it will be by a very close margin," Holloway estimates 10 percent to 20 percent of Lincoln's population is gay.

Precedent possible

If passed, the amendment would be the first of its kind to be enacted by an initial public vote, Holloway said.

The Rev. Larry Doerr, co-chairman of Citizens for Human Rights, campus minister and coordinator of Commonplace, said there is "a demonstrable need" for the amendment in Lincoln as there is discrimination here.

"If you walk funny you can be subjected to discrimination and lose your job without recourse," he said. Passage

of the amendment would decrease the number of those types of situations as harassment techniques, and would take the edge off homosexual fears of being "found out" and discriminated against, Doerr said.

He said he cannot speculate on whether the amendment has a good chance of passing. If passed, it does not assure anyone complete freedom from sexual discrimination, he said.

Doerr said opponents to the amendment are saying they want the freedom to discriminate.

Members of Citizens for Human Rights have been speaking to church, school and other community groups, he said.

Scott Stebelman, co-chairperson of the Lincoln Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights and assistant professor of UNL Libraries agreed that the amendment is necessary because people in general, not necessarily just gays, are discriminated against with a bias that is unfair and damaging to both the community and the individual.

Promotion work

Stebelman said coalition members have contacted various organizations and dispersed literature about the amendment.

Whether the amendment passes or not, Stebelman said coalition members will continue their efforts.

Debbie Alicen, a member of the Lincoln Lesbian League, said that group also has been involved in meetings and programs.

Alicen said she is not sure if the amendment will pass because she is not sure how middle-of-the-road voters will vote.

Marcee Metzger, coordinator of the Women's Resource Center at UNL, said the WRC supports the amendment, and is working with the coalition for its passage. The WRC has testified before the Lincoln City Council about discrimination in Lincoln.

Con

By Bob Glissmann

The issue in the sexual orientation amendment, according to Paul Cameron, "is not about protecting jobs for homosexuals, but of legitimizing homosexual activity."

Cameron, chairman of the Committee to Oppose Special Rights for Homosexuals and a social psychologist in Lincoln, said the goal of amendment supporters is to make homosexuality "as good or as socially recognized as heterosexuality."

Cameron said this attitude is wrong. "Homosexuality is bad. It's injurious to people who practice it and to society."

Nels Forde, a UNL history professor and vice chairman of the committee, said the amendment would "irreparably damage the moral character of the community."

He also said that the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and all western civilizations have opposed homosexuality.

Cameron said the amendment is designed "especially to protect those who behave in a homosexual manner."

He also said the amendment is not needed.

"It's gratuitous," he said. "They (homosexuals) have exactly the same rights as everybody else."

The cases of discrimination mentioned in a flier distributed by the Citizens for Human Rights, a pro-amendment group, "would not hold up in court. They're just one person's claim. . . there are always two sides of the story."

He said that, including the three examples printed in the flier, "There is not a single documented case in all the city of Lincoln (of job discrimination)."

He said, however, that he does have documentation of his charges against homosexuality.

Cameron said the amendment will

increase the incidence of child molestation in Lincoln schools by opening the way for more homosexuals to acquire teaching jobs. He cited statistics from the 1964 J. McGeorge study of 400 cases of sexual assaults on students by teachers that claims homosexual teachers are 43 times more apt than heterosexual teachers to molest their students.

A pamphlet from his group also cites other studies which say that homosexuals are promiscuous and have more incidence of venereal diseases than heterosexuals.

He said he "shudders at the thought" of the amendment passing, but that no one knows all that will happen if the amendment passes.

"I'm sure it will protect job acquisition," he said.

He said homosexuals will be able to say they were discriminated against if they are fired, even if their dismissal is for another reason.

"Homosexuals will think 'all I have to do is get a job,'" he said.

Cameron said amendment backers have not been able to refute any of his findings and that some UNL psychology professors who publically support the amendment are "blinded by advocacy" and have no documentation of their statements.

Cameron said he has offered to pay \$500 to anyone who shows his statistics are in error. So far, he said, no one has accepted his challenge.

He also said amendment backers have a much larger budget than his group.

His group will spend \$2,000 for the election and the opposition is spending the same amount "on just radio spots with just one radio station," he said.

Cameron predicted that the national media soon will be in Lincoln to cover the controversy.

He said passage of the amendment would attract "more freaky people" to Lincoln and may have some negative economic impact through loss of tourists to the city.

Homosexuals 'came out' because they wanted to live honest lives

By Michiela Thuman and Chris Hodges

The following are excerpts from interviews conducted with two homosexual members who live in Lincoln. Each shared information about what it means to be homosexual, to "come out," and to face daily social and emotional frustrations. Both wished to remain unidentified. The names attributed to each are fictitious.

Mark, 20, is a full-time student at UNL with a part-time job and high career aspirations.

"All my life I've had this feeling that I was different," he said. "I just didn't look at things the way other people did."

Jane, 33, is involved in a professional career. She "became" a lesbian six or seven years ago — a process she described as a gradual discovery of her own true feelings.

Mark said he first realized in junior high what direction his sexual interests were taking. He said he knew he was gay through high school, yet still believed that sooner or later he would meet a nice girl, settle down, get married and have a family.

He said he did not accept his gayness until about two years ago, about six months before he began his first serious relationship with another man.

"When I finally realized I was gay and had come to grips with it, I not only wanted to have sex with a man,

but I wanted to fall in love with one. I knew I was gay and what I wanted; the only problem was I had no idea where to find it."

Before accepting her lesbianism, Jane was a full-time student at UNL working part-time and living with her parents. Her life was typical of many young women in college; she had average grades and dated two or three young men.

"I was young. At that time, the men were filling my needs," she said.

Mark said his father was the first to learn that his son is homosexual.

"I am very lucky. I've always had a very good relationship with my parents. I never feared rejection, but I valued my father's opinion very highly. That he might think less of me was very scary."

Jane said she hid her identity as a lesbian from her family for four years. "I don't think they (the family) were very happy about it when I told them. Several of my friends were not very surprised, though."

"My family is very accepting of it," Mark said. "It shook my dad to the core at first. But he knew that if I had already reached a point where I identified myself as gay, acted on it and began a relationship with another man, there was nothing he could do to change me."

Both Mark and Jane said they want very much to develop steady, long-lasting relationships with one per-

son.

"I want to find a lover, someone I can settle down with in a monogamous relationship and have a kind of love and caring security that everyone needs," Mark said.

Jane said some of her co-workers are aware that she's a lesbian, but she said she does not make a point of "coming out" at work.

Mark, on the other hand, is completely open about his gayness, even at his job.

Mark said his primary concern is that gay people not be afraid of themselves.

"There are a lot of people out there who are gay and would like to do something about it but are just scared," he said. "Can you imagine being black and not knowing another black person?"

"It's difficult to show straight people what we're like," Mark said. "We're not being honest to ourselves. You can't live a lie. People keep thinking homosexuality is a choice people make, that we say to ourselves one day, 'I want to be gay,'" he said. "I ask heterosexual people, 'When did you choose to be straight?'"

"Any human being has the capacity to love another human being, no matter what sex," he said.

"I am a highly intelligent person, extremely talented in the work I have chosen for my career. No one can call me a rotten person and have me believe it," he said. "This is who I am. This is what makes me happy."

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