

1994

## Civil Rights Excerpts

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### Recommended Citation

"Civil Rights Excerpts" (1994). *The Good 5 Cent Cigar Articles*. Paper 24.  
<https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/gsc-5cent-articles/24>

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# Not special rights, just equal rights

## Pursuing a policy of justice for homosexuals

Good of Cigar 3/25/94

To the Cigar:

The *Cigar's* editorial of March 22 commented that two URI chaplains had "overstepped their duty" by speaking out for gay rights without taking into consideration the opinion of Protestant students on campus. This reflects a misunderstanding of the role of chaplains.

As chaplains we are approved and recognized by the university, but we are paid and supervised by our respective religious bodies—the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island in one case, and the Rhode Island State Council of Churches in the other. Chaplains are not representatives of the community; we are ministers to it. As such, we play many roles. We provide emotional support, assist in spiritual development, take part in educational activities, and work at the institutional level in various ways. We also have a responsibility to foster the development of ethical sensitivity and to

speak out on issues of social justice.

We believe in a God of love and justice, and we believe that anyone who shares that belief must defend the fundamental human rights of all people. It is for this reason we are committed to pursuing a policy of justice for homosexuals in our society. It is for this reason that we have spoken and will continue to speak on this important issue.

We certainly understand that our views are not held by all within our own traditions, nor by all at URI. We would be happy to discuss personally our views and our reasons for them with anyone who is interested in doing so. But we will also continue to speak out on this and other issues as our own consciences and religious beliefs require. To do so is not "overstepping" our duty, it IS our duty. Failure to do so would be to sidestep our duty.

Bill Bartels  
Protestant chaplain  
Norman MacLeod  
Episcopal chaplain

To the Cigar:

The editorial "Rights and Representation" that appeared in the March 22 edition of the *Cigar* showed a lack of awareness of the purpose of a civil rights bill. Since the letter policy does not include editorials in the disclaimer, I assume that this letter is intended to refute the view of the *Cigar* staff. The sexual orientations clause to the civil rights bill would prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodation and credit. All we are asking for is that those two words be inserted into the current civil rights bill. There is no mention of "special" rights, minority status, or affirmative action programs. I am in complete agreement that gay, lesbian and bisexual people should not have special rights. However, all people need to be equally protected under the law against discrimination of all kinds. Think about the other categories included in the bill—age, race and gender. None of these groups are afforded special rights. However, inclusion does ensure that all people, regardless of age, race or gender, are equally protected under the law.

In an ideal world, you are right. I also feel that equality would come through education and heightened awareness. And it might be nice to "revitalize our current standards of equality." But who is kidding who here? America has been around for over 200

years and we are certainly nowhere near the ideal written about in the editorial. So what does one do in the meantime—continue to allow discrimination, overt and covert, while waiting for the ideal to occur? Do we allow people to lose their jobs because they are gay, should we stand back and allow more young people to take their lives because they are gay and don't know where to turn, all the time waiting for society to evolve to your picture of the ideal world? I think you know the answers to those questions.

Yes, gay, lesbian and bisexual people are discriminated against. You may not find us in the statistics found in public records. The "closet" is one of the most oppressive institutions created by a heterosexist society. And it is silent. The only way it is known is by those courageous enough to risk families, jobs and personal safety to come out and reveal the prejudice, discrimination and hatred occurring behind its doors. If you have to risk your job to be honest, that is discrimination. I understand the concept of the "closet" is hard to understand. However, that is not an excuse for making a decision about equal rights without first reading about the lives of gay, lesbian and bisexual men and women who have been oppressed. The things you write about, the way you state your opinions, does not give me much hope that your "mainstream approach" is going to work.

Gary Burkholder

# Civil rights are civil rights, and they're being trampled on

Good S/Cigar 3/23/94

To the Cigar:

Once again, the editorial board of the *Cigar* has decided to take upon themselves to twist a situation to make it look different than what it really is. We are referring to the editorial printed in the March 22, 1994 issue, titled "Rights and Representation." The point that is made is that the gay rights bill will "exacerbate the minority status of homosexuals," and will give homosexuals "special treatment." This is definitely not true. Homosexuals are already looked upon as a minority, and are "segregated" from the community by social actions and by legal inaction. At the present time, Rhode Island laws make it legal to discriminate against anyone who is homosexual. What civil rights do homosexuals have if they must "stay in the closet" in order to keep their job, home, or credit rating? **The law that was in committee in the House of Repre-**

sentatives was not a law giving homosexuals "special rights," but rather one which made it illegal for anyone to deny homosexuals their fundamental civil rights. This law would simply protect the civil rights granted by the United States Constitution since birth. I do not feel that it is appropriate to call a bill promoting the civil rights of homosexuals "special treatment." It really is not, and should not be seen as such by ANYONE.

In regard to the second issue, the representation of Protestant students by their chaplains, if you disagree with a church's reforms, you should take it up with them. Homosexuality, or sexual preference, has nothing to do with the basic civil rights found in the Constitution. It is also extremely ironic that whomever wrote this editorial states "the Protestant church must remember they are community leaders and they should

be held to some degree of fair representation," but then refuses to follow this tenet. For example, the March 8th issue's editorial, "Punished or privileged?" was advocacy continuous punishment for a student who had already been punished by our illustrious Rhode Island court system. Although editorials are meant to be an outlet for opinions, the conservative editorial opinions do not seem to reflect the majority of URI. Thank God! Fair representation? A newspaper should not play the role of judge and jury of our communities, but remain impartial.

The whole issue has been totally obliterated. Civil rights are civil rights, and they are granted to all people, regardless of sex, race, sexual preference, etc. These rights are being trampled on in Rhode Island, and this bill would (hopefully) put a stop to it. It does not matter if the chaplains are not representing the

majority of the Protestant students, they are representing something more important: FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS. Finally, a religious group has shown they are not too pompous to recognize this fact. We believe that the *Cigar* should get the facts straight before they print an editorial of this, or any nature.

Alan D' Aiello Jr.  
Michelle D'Entremont

# No special treatment, just human rights

Good S/Cigar 3/24/94

To the Cigar:

I find it ironic that a newspaper editorial, one of the best illustrations of the freedoms of the press in this country, has managed to make an argument against one of the fundamental freedoms included in our Bill of Rights, that of speech.

"Rights and Representation" (3/23/94) suggests that two URI Chaplains

should have asked Protestant students about their opinions on Gay Rights before speaking at the Statehouse. The editorial staff's opinion is that students may have disagreed with the Chaplain's views. Who knows that answer? How can we find out what people believe without opening a dialogue in the first place?

Personally, I disagree completely with the opin-

ions expressed by the *Cigar* editorial staff on the issue of Gay Rights. Did they ask me or any other members of the community? I don't know. However, I will not suggest that the *Cigar* should lose the freedom to express an opinion through an editorial. It is a right guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The Chaplains William Bartels and Norman

MacLeod deserve to share in that freedom.

If the expectation that a person has the right to be free from discrimination is considered "special treatment" by the *Cigar*, then let all people demand that special treatment known as human rights!

Suzanne Sullivan

# URI clergy speak out for gay rights

by Kari Lyons  
News Editor

*Good Sp. Cigar*  
*3/22/94*

The issues of religion and homosexuality confronted one another when two URI chaplains, along with several clergy from Rhode Island, voiced their opinions on ending discrimination based on sexual orientation at a press conference last Tuesday.

The conference, which took place at the Statehouse, gave people a chance to present their views on a bill that will legislate individuals the freedom to be employed and receive housing without discrimination based on sexual orientation. This is the tenth consecutive year the bill was introduced for passage.

URI Protestant Chaplain William Bartels and URI Episcopal Chaplain Norman MacLeod, along with approximately nine other Rhode Island clergy, showed up to make a statement on behalf of the bill.

The bill came up one vote short of passing last Thursday by the Judiciary Committee. The vote killed the bill, and denied its entrance to the House of Representatives for review.

The clergy who went to the conference were mainly from the main-line Protestant denominations, which are Episcopal, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, and Presbyterian.

There has been a major conflict in the Protestant religion over the church's stand on homosexuality for several years. The conflict evolves around how certain scriptural references are to be interpreted.

MacLeod said, "My interpretation and that of many clergy and church people is that those negative references to homosexuality need to be understood in terms of the cultural situation that produced those writings without denying the word of God."

He added that it is necessary to interpret the scriptures in light of modern knowledge and the evolution of society in general.

Bartels said during his speech at the conference that "these bills have been defeated because the politics of prejudice have won over the politics of principle; the politics of fear have triumphed over the politics of fairness."

Bartels added after the judiciary committee voted, "I don't see how any moral person could deny any group of individuals their basic civil rights."

Gary Burkholder, president of the URI Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Association said Representative Frank Gashen may propose a bill to override the judiciary decision. He said the GLBA is waiting to see what happens, but he feels the committee's decision is unjust. The GLBA will be holding a rally on Wednesday at 4 p.m. outside the Statehouse to support the proposal.

## Rights and representation

The recent defeat of a gay rights bill brings about a couple of very interesting issues; one is campus related, and the other is much broader.

First, the issue of a gay rights bill.

The creation of a gay rights bill would only exacerbate the minority status of homosexuals. We do not need new laws continuing to segregate homosexuals from the community. What is needed is a stronger support of already present laws and statutes that allow for freedom and equality for all.

When one minority group begins lobbying for special laws pertaining to them alone, then there will be no fair treatment, only special treatment. Special treatment perpetuates minority status.

What members of the gay community want is to be

### Editorial

recognized as regular members of society. To establish new and individualized legislation would only strengthen their minority status, not weaken it. Would it not be more effective to strive towards equality through the education and heightened awareness of society? Would it not be more effective to revitalize our current standards of equality and make sure they are all-encompassing?

Homosexuals will only gain recognition through a mainstream approach, not by some tangential approach.

The second issue at hand is regarding the actions of two university chaplains. One Protestant and one Episcopalian chaplain spoke out in support of the gay rights bill prior to the bill's defeat. In fact, many members of the religious community spoke out in support of this issue. The question that should be raised is how accurately were students of the Protestant faith represented by these chaplains' public display?

While they were acting on a personal level and for the official position of the Church there should be some representation of the university's Protestant body.

Their statement could be seen, to many religiously conservative people, as contradictory to many religious beliefs and practices. It could be argued that in some religious beliefs homosexuality and religion do not mix, much like oil and water do not. Understandably, the chaplains were pushing for a human rights issue, and not solely a gay rights issue.

Many people will argue where the line between religion and issues of homosexuality should be drawn. Many theologians would question how one could support the other. The question is did they reflect the feeling and sentiment of the majority of URI Protestant students? While these chaplains are not politicians, they do reflect attitudes and opinions of the campus religious body, conservative and liberal alike. Even though they acted within the official stance of the Protestant church they must remember they are community leaders and they should be held to some degree of fair representation.

Just how accurate was their representation of their religious constituents? Were students of the Protestant faith questioned as to their beliefs on this issue?

It just seems that these chaplains overstepped their duty to the students whom they serve in an effort to push their own personal beliefs.