

Testimony - House Judiciary Committee  
In support of House Bill 481 - Nondiscrimination Bill

February 18, 2013

For the record, my name is Reverend Robyn Morrison. My address is 3426 Blue Heron Street in Helena. I am writing in support of House Bill 481.

It is long past time that we extend equal rights to all people, regardless of their sexual orientation. The struggle for equal rights for the rainbow continuum of gay, lesbian, and transgender people is not unlike the struggle for freedom from religious persecution that is core to the history of the United States. Equal rights for people with different sexual orientations and gender expressions is one of our current struggles to resist religious persecution. Freedom of religion was never meant to allow one set of religious beliefs to dominate and oppress those with different beliefs.

The passion that fuels many of the opponents of the Equality Ordinance is religiously motivated judgment and hatred. Those who violate the human rights of gays and lesbians ignore the greatest commandment which is to love our neighbor. I am deeply offended by people who call themselves Christians who use a handful of passages from the Bible to clobber people, taking Holy texts out of context and misinterpreting scripture; using the Bible to justify their hatred, discrimination, and injustice.

There are no passages in the Bible that condemn loving, committed, same-sex relationships. References to God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah misinterpret the story. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of the horrible things their men did to their perceived enemies, to the strangers in their midst. It is a condemnation of a community's lack of hospitality, not sexual orientation. The Bible condemns hatred, not love.

There is one gospel story that may reveal what Jesus would do about homosexuality. It is the only recorded account of his interaction with a same sex relationship. When the Roman Centurion asked Jesus to heal his younger male sexual partner (his slave), Jesus granted his request and commended him for his great faith. Jesus repeatedly confronted the harsh legalism of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders, and he always sided on love and reconciliation. He was constantly ministering to people who were outcast, judged, and marginalized by religion.

As an ordained Christian minister, I urge you to resist the arguments you may hear from so called Christians who assert their fundamentalist religious rights at the cost of human rights for all people. The Old Testament is full of laws or rules set forth by religious authorities as an attempt to legislate the purity of the Israelite's religious identify. These ancient laws specify that all who curse father or mother, and all adulterers, shall be put to death. We certainly do not want to revert to any of these barbaric ancient religious laws. Right now, fundamentalist Christians are

behind the efforts in Uganda to make homosexuality a crime punishable by death. Lives are at stake. In America young people commit suicide because of the bullying and hatred they experience. Stopping the injustice begins here and now; in our state with this Bill.

The bill does not infringe upon the rights of people to practice their religion as long as they do not harm others in the process. Equal rights for gays, lesbians and transgender people addresses their most basic rights to shelter, work, and access to goods and services. I am asking you to protect the most vulnerable members of our community from the very real persecution that they are experiencing; persecution that is generally fueled by religious beliefs.

I wish we did not have to legislate equal rights and tolerance, but we have had to do this in the past, and we need to do this now. I respectfully urge you to vote yes on House Bill 481. It is what Jesus would do.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robyn Morrison". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "R".

# Missoulian

## Sally Mauk: Gay rights activist says Obama inauguration a 'historic moment'

FEBRUARY 01, 2013 7:15 PM • BY SALLY MAUK FOR THE MISSOULIAN

Kris Hermanns couldn't believe it. A president of the United States, in his inaugural address, came out in support of gay marriage and equality for LGBT people.

Hermanns is a longtime gay rights activist and executive director of the Seattle-based Pride Foundation, an LGBTQ community foundation serving the Northwest. She toured Montana soon after the inauguration, meeting with area Pride supporters.

What President Barack Obama said exactly was this:

"Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law – for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well."

Hermanns says the president's remarks were a "historic moment" in the gay rights movement.

"Many of us never imagined that we'd have a president who would say this in an inaugural speech but also a president who would advocate for our rights and our liberties in the way that he has over the last five years," Hermanns said.

Hermanns notes Obama's position on gay rights has evolved during his time in office. Gay rights activists thought he dragged his feet on fulfilling his campaign promise to repeal the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy but applauded his eventual successful push for repeal. And the president only within the past year came out in support of gay marriage.

"He's been very forward about the struggle he has had, partly because of his faith, supporting marriage for same-sex couples," said Hermanns. "And this past year we have seen him acknowledge that he has grown and understood more deeply, that same-sex couples want to get married for the same reasons that other people want to get married – love and commitment."

A recent Gallup poll found that 53 percent of Americans now support gay marriage, up from 40 percent in 2005. One could debate whether the president is leading or following on the issue. Hermanns thinks he's doing a little of both.

"He actually has an incredible platform as the president of the United States to further amplify the values of this country and that includes LGBT people being treated equally," said Hermanns. "And he at the same time, and many of our elected officials ... are recognizing that their neighbors, their family members, their colleagues are LGBT and deserve their support and respect."

Gay marriage is now legal in nine states, but 30 states – including Montana – have amended their constitutions to ban it. Hermanns is under no illusion that the issue is close to being resolved.

“As historic and exciting as (the president’s speech) was ... we have a tremendous amount of work to do,” said Hermanns. “And I think that President Obama’s inaugural speech says that. That the underlying principles of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are dynamic values of our country and that requires all of us to act collectively to ensure that each of us experiences it.”

The U.S. Supreme Court will hear two cases in March, on California’s Proposition 8 banning same sex marriage and on a provision of the federal Defense of Marriage Act. Decisions in those cases, expected in June, could either advance or set back the push for gay marriage.

Hermanns can’t forecast what the court will do. But she is confident that someday, sooner or later, the fight she’s waging will be won. And she believes the president’s 2013 inaugural address will be an important part of the history of that victory.

“What it does is it allows us to be even more visible and public with the work that we’re doing on the ground. ... There are young people, as well as elders in our community, who heard or read (the president’s speech) who may not be out. And that the president of the United States has acknowledged our humanity and dignity goes a long way.”

Sally Mauk is news director at Montana Public Radio, KUFR, in Missoula. She writes a twice-monthly column for the Missoulian.

To the Leadership and members of the Montana House Judiciary Committee:

I am Lyle Hamilton, a retired United Methodist minister living in Helena. My wife, Marianne Niesen is an ordained and still an active United Methodist pastor, serving in her 19<sup>th</sup> year as the Senior Pastor of St. Paul's United Methodist Church. Although she cannot be with us in person this morning, I am empowered to speak for both of us.

Marianne and I both, without hesitation, **speak out very strongly in favor** of the House bill 481 to amend the Montana Human Rights Act that will protect the legal rights and status of *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered* (LGBT) persons who live in, go to school in, work in, or visit the state of Montana. *Discrimination of any kind, because of who you are, is illogical, questionably faithful, should not be legal, and simply must be unacceptable behavior in our place and time.* No person, couple, or family should be discriminated against in

housing,  
schooling,  
hospital visitation,  
job hiring or placement,  
obtaining insurance, or  
handling inheritance issues as they choose.

We must be free to love whom we love and commit our lives in love and companionship with whom we are led to make such commitments. We should not be able to legitimately discriminate against each other because of who we know ourselves to be in our heart of hearts. We are all brothers and sisters, neighbors, members of the same family . . . and everyone should always be treated with dignity, equality, and justice, compassion and mercy, hope and acceptance.

### **When Persons Reach out Heart to Heart**

*Written in honor of Nicole George and Shannon Doom*  
GERALD - CMD

When persons reach out heart to heart  
and love is given birth;  
in human clay God's born again

upon our planet, earth.  
Commitment lives in everyone  
who gives their heart away;  
what matters is that love is life,  
and light still brings the day.

When persons reach out soul to soul  
their difference shrinks to none;  
God's holy Light shines through them both,  
molds of them wholly one.  
Love incarnate embraces them,  
no more distance remains;  
gifts given and received are blessed . . .  
forever and again.

When persons reach out mind to mind,  
then dark gives way to dawn;  
it matters not what draws them close,  
it's birthing a new morn.  
They honor truly who they are  
as ones marked by God's grace;  
deep love looks through the lover's eyes,  
and looking back – God's face.

written by Lyle Hamilton  
December, 2011  
copyright April, 2012

We encourage you to approve House Bill 481 with clarity and strength of purpose. In this way, everyone in our beloved state will be able to depend upon being valued, feeling secure, and treated with the same fairness, dignity, justice and respect as everyone else. Although we have many differences, let us be one human family, under God. I thank all of you for your understanding and your leadership in this most important and timely matter.

My name is John Ilgenfritz. I was born and raised in Nebraska, graduated from College in Utah, was married in Idaho and shortly thereafter moved to Montana in the 1970s. Montana is my home.

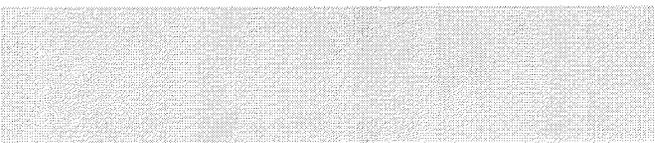
My upbringing was traditional, God, family, hard work and love thy neighbor.

The only family reunion of our far-flung family held was just prior to my move to Montana. It was especially "eventful" because my uncle brought his partner and the news drove a wedge between those whose love for him was unchanged and those who could not handle it. I learned that a cousin who attended and witnessed the hurt inflicted on my uncle and his partner, was also gay, but chose to live his life in the shadows for fear that he would also be shunned. He died this past fall.

This very personal experience prompted me to attend the public meetings this past year to discuss passing a city anti-discrimination ordinance in Helena.

The statements made by opponents to the ordinance were similar to those made against others throughout our country's history. No need for me to state them, opponents here today will do so.

The Helena ordinance thankfully passed. That ordinance nor the passage of this bill will heal all the hurts of the past, but it will send a strong message that discrimination is not OK and there is a price to pay if you do so.



Visitors  
per

A few sessions ago, testimony was given in support of HB 240, which would have added gender and sexual orientation as meriting protection under the hatecrime law.

It struck a chord with me and the clipping from the Helena I.R. hangs on my kitchen wall. I'd like to close by quoting it.

"People do not choose their gender or sexual orientation. We are what we are, as God created us and as a child of God, we are entitled to be protected from harm."

I know if John Bohlinger was here today he would stand by that quote he made during his testimony at that time.

Please support HB 481  
Thanks for your time and attention.

John Ilgenfritz  
1001 Harrison Ave.  
Helena, MT  
59601

HB 481

President Obama thinks it the right thing to do... and we should too!!

Do the right thing for Montana and Please pass this Bill!!

Thank you.

Fran Effertz  
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