

I apologize, fellow Courtiers, for filling your mailboxes with yet more mail. But Panzi's letter, sent to the General Membership, deserves a response. What follows, then, is an open letter to Thom Hansen.

May 31, 1999

Dear Thom,

First of all, I'd like to thank you for your letter of the 26th. I was happy to hear someone finally try to put forth a cogent argument for the passage of this amendment that now finds itself the subject of such controversy.

Your argument has not, however, altered my opposition to this amendment. The logic is flawed because your basic premise is erroneous. In your own words, "Presuming that two people who share a life will generally have the same ideals, value systems and opinions, they may vote the same on any given issue." I'm afraid, Thom, that you are *presuming* inaccurately. Two people in a relationship may share *similar*, not the *same*, ideals and values, but **opinions**...? If only that were true. Life would be beautiful and couples would never part. But they do. I know. Anyone who has survived a failed relationship knows that couples will disagree as often as not.

Your use of the word "household" also shows a monolithic view of what constitutes a "couple" in our community and a lack of appreciation of the wide variety of relationships out there. Cohabitation issues, monogamy issues, financial interdependence issues - these are not *minor* differences. They profoundly affect the entire nature of a relationship. Each relationship is unique. You cannot shoehorn a community as varied as ours into your definition. Besides, we all join the ICNY as individuals and we pay individual dues. We don't have a "household" membership level nor do we have reduced dues for such a level.

What is so very frustrating about this debate, with all of this mail going back and forth, is that we really didn't have to go here. As we said in the original letter accompanying the petition, this amendment simply isn't **necessary**. I'm sorry, but the Board should have more faith in the General Membership. If the majority of us don't want two members of a couple on the Board simultaneously, we won't elect them. If we do, and we find it's a problem, we'll impeach them. There was no real need to ban ALL couples from EVER serving on the Board.

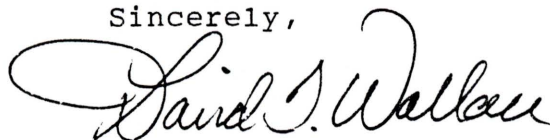
So much for my reaction to the substance of your letter. As for the style - for the most part you stick to the high road, but there are a couple of things I need to call you on.

You try to marginalize those of us who circulated the petition by a common rhetorical trick, exaggerating our opposition, calling us "violently opposed". No one is getting violent here, Thom. We made it **very** clear in the letter that accompanied the petition that we were not attacking the Board. The people who sign the petition are not attacking the Board. All we are engaged in is an open exercise of the democratic process. No one has accused you of robbing the treasury or anything else. There's no need to become defensive.

It also does not serve to further informed debate on a controversial subject when you trivialize how deeply some of us feel about this issue by saying it "pushes our discrimination button". Even though there are reasons to oppose the amendment that have nothing to do with whether or not you believe it is discrimination, let me be clear on this issue. It doesn't just push our buttons; many of us *do* sincerely feel that this *is* discrimination. Webster's Ninth Collegiate defines discrimination as "To make a difference in treatment or favor on a basis other than individual merit." That's pretty simple. That's pretty clear. I'm sorry that you don't agree, but it would have been really nice if you could have shown some respect for our position.

Yes. Respect. Just as you say, every one of us deserves it. This debate may have gotten off to a rocky start but nowhere in the letter that accompanied the petition do I see anything I would consider disrespectful. I don't think anyone who reads it will describe it as "accusations, gossip, name-calling, or rudeness." Yet you feel free, in your letter, to question our motives for opposing this amendment. That shocked me, Thom. I haven't heard anyone question your motives. When you question mine, you are questioning my integrity. Frankly, I found it offensive. But I will still answer your question, at least for myself, though not for the other three who signed the original letter, and not for those who have signed the petition. I don't need to step back; I know exactly why I am opposed to this amendment. I am opposed to it because, regardless of the intentions behind it, it is discriminatory. I am opposed to it for all six reasons clearly enumerated in the letter sent with the petitions. "Is it for the good of the group," you ask, "or because they personally feel discriminated against." Yes to both, Thom. I believe it clearly discriminates AND (not or) it is always for the good of the group to stand in opposition to any form of discrimination, regardless of the purpose behind it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David T. Wallace". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large, sweeping initial 'D'.

David. T. Wallace