

The Hate State

by Dave Shiflett

Denver

When the Colorado Rockies opened their first homestand at Mile High Stadium on April 9 (Good Friday, as was pointed out with varying degrees of horror and glee), President Bill Clinton was absent. Many had hoped that Bill, known in baseball circles as "Nookie Dog," would throw out the historic first pitch—picture him on the mound, scanning the stands for any sets of uncrossed legs before letting go a fastball—but according to *Rocky Mountain News* society columnist Bill Husted, the president may have backed out in order to keep solidarity with gay activists, who called for a tourist and business boycott of Colorado after state voters approved Amendment 2 last November, which bans laws giving protected status to homosexuals.

This sounds like the discreet sort of warfare Bill might volunteer for; if so, he joins other prominent Americans who have sworn not to set foot in the Hate State (as Colorado is now known in some circles) until the initiative is repealed. Among them: James Taylor, Whoopi Goldberg, Barbra Streisand, the Kennedy family (who skied in Utah over Christmas to show their willingness to sacrifice), and the city governments of San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and Atlanta (where homosexual and heterosexual sodomy can still get you jailed).

Various ACLU chapters have also taken the no-hate pledge, along with several convention groups, including the big-spending National Organization for Women. Martina Navratilova, the famous lesbian tennis player, Aspen resident, and woman of a hard, biker sort of beauty, threatened to move. A speaking

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invitation to Connie Chung was withdrawn after a local network rep said he could not, in good conscience, ask this most influential of personages to appear in Colorado and thus seem to take sides in the debate. The *Denver Post* reported that columnist Anna Quindlen is also avoiding the state, though her column continues to be distributed in Colorado copies of the *New York Times*, which editorially endorsed the boycott. Many Coloradans await word on how former Colorado resident Roseanne Barr will



react, but she is still at lunch and hasn't had time to respond.

That's a lot of high-profile support, and boycott organizers promised at the outset that they had a lot more friends out there who could, and would, do maximum damage to the state's economy. Ten percent of the population is homosexual, we were reminded: "your brothers, your sisters, your mailman," etc., etc. The winter snows were falling on the high country slopes even as the votes were counted, but economic doom was rolling our way.

Or so we were told. But things haven't turned out that way. Not even close.

No one saw this drama coming, and Colorado's story may be instructive for the nation at large, especially those states preparing to float similar amendments (at this writing such measures are being drawn up in California, Idaho, Washington, Michigan, Florida, and Maine). There is a price to pay for such legislation, though many probably won't consider it prohibitive.

Colorado's political and media elite had been nearly uniform in opposing A2, and pre-election polls showed that most voters would vote against it as well. But once inside the polling booth, voters made sure no one was peeking through the curtain and then voted yes by 53-47 percent.

The bowels of outrage immediately broke loose. On election night gay activists took over the Democratic Party's victory celebration in downtown Denver, putting a damper on the party's first presidential win in Colorado since LBJ. The front page of the post-election morning paper carried a picture of Gov. Roy Romer at a hastily called anti-Amendment 2 rally at the state capitol: Roy held a protest sign. Pat Schroeder, who represents Denver, published a letter in the *Denver Post* promising to overcome the vote at the federal level. A suicide was blamed on the amendment's passage while activists reported an upsurge in anti-gay violence, which was duly noted in the *New York Times's* call for a boycott. Police officials pointed out that all of the gays who had been murdered in 1992 may have been killed by other gays, but that information didn't seem to matter.

The most significant instrument of repeal, of course, was to be a national boycott of Colorado, which would cause natives to reconsider their votes and also drive home the point that such initiatives would be ruinous to any state stupid enough to follow suit. A campaign to

demonize A2 supporters was launched: a yes vote could be attributed, in most cases, to hate, though another explanation was that some who supported the amendment had been confused as to what it really meant.

But hate was the preferred explanation, and suddenly Coloradans found themselves in the same class as the dread Afrikaners, despite the fact that most people in the state are tolerant of everything short of sex with pigs (and only underage pigs at that). Anti-sodomy laws were repealed in the early 1970s and 70 percent of residents recently polled said homosexual relations between adults are not wrong. In post-election surveys, many amendment supporters stated not an aversion to homosexuality but a revulsion to the creation of another politically favored group.

Nonetheless, the anti-2 campaign was quickly taken up by the living and the Dead (the Grateful Dead, that is) and was even extended to make-believe land, as explained by David Lee, who had planned to set a spinoff from the "Cheers" television show in Denver. "We know there are many people in Colorado who are equally opposed to this canonized bigotry," he announced. "But we really can't justify spending a dime on filming exteriors, titles, or location scenes in your state."

Prominent Coloradans were accosted during visits to faraway places: Denver Mayor Wellington Webb, whose stepson is gay, was set upon during a trip to New York by an organization called the Lesbian Avengers. In the same spirit, the ad hoc New York Boycott Colorado demanded that the president of Celestial Seasonings, the Boulder-based tea company, hand over \$100,000 to fight for repeal of the amendment: otherwise NYBC promised to picket stores carrying the tea until it was removed from the menu.

Extortion? Most definitely. But as of now, no charges have been filed.

The newspapers, meanwhile, have been full of A2-related stories, very few of them favorable. A search of the *Rocky Mountain News's* electronic library for 1992-93 reflects the level of obsession. The words "deficit reduction," for instance, were found in 208 stories, while "health care reform" appeared in 237. "Amendment 2," however, was mentioned in 653 stories, while the word "homosexual" appeared in 876. Other more traditional members of

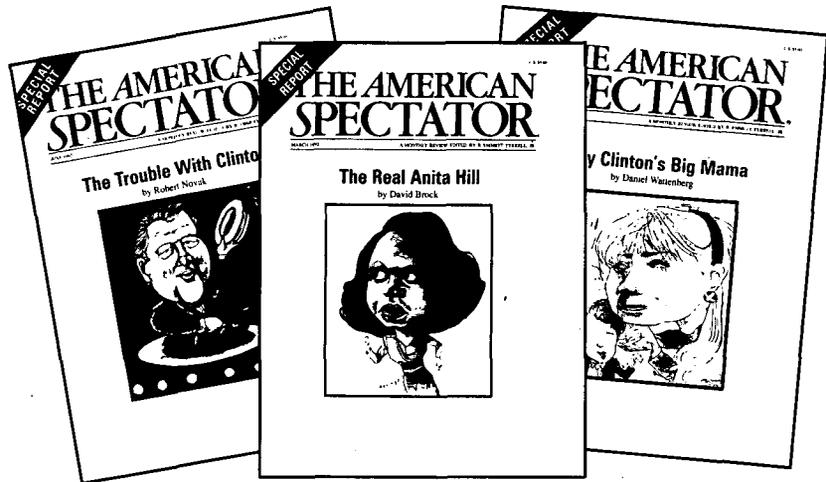
the community had a difficult time keeping up: "horses," which are very popular here, were mentioned in 672 articles, while the popular "trout" were found in 423. "Heterosexuals" limped in with 145 mentions, outdoing "prairie dogs," but not by a lot.

In short, there was much, much noise: Colorado even suffered the indignity of having People for the American Way open a Boulder office this spring, so concerned is Norman Lear about the power

of the "religious right" to pass such an amendment (the Rocky Mountain West has the lowest incidence of churchgoing in the United States). But if there has been noise, there have also been many, many tourists—perhaps more than ever before.

Easter afternoon at Vail's Two Elks restaurant: Though we are more than two miles above sea level and it is snowing outside, people are everywhere—plane-loads of rich Mexicans, a few Europeans,

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and the usual horde of Americans. A visitor from the East looks around and asks how the protest is going; in the spirit of the day it is explained that the boycott, like the Rapture, is expected by many but has yet to arrive. Maybe it has something to do with those reports, very common since the November vote, about the homosexual population being closer to one percent than to ten.

Convention cancellations through 1999 are running at about \$35 million, but tourism officials believe most, if not all, will be made up in new bookings (the state's annual tourist business brings in \$6 billion a year). Nonetheless, the release of the cancellation figure led to a bit of crowing by the organizers: "A purpose of the boycott is to, in fact, show that there will be no business as usual in a state that actively discriminates against gay and lesbian people," Robin Kane of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force told the AP.

Robin has a point. The ski season saw a 5-percent increase in lift-ticket sales over last year (9.87 million, up from 9.40 million)—the biggest year yet. How many of those skiers went in-state? It is hard to tell, but ski industry officials say the number of people boarding planes at area resorts rose 4.4 percent. The summer season is ahead, to be sure, but few expect a drop in the usual 9 million or so tourist visits. With the Rockies now playing in Mile High Stadium and the Pope due in August for World Youth Day, the summer season may also break records.

Despite these troubling facts, in May the boycott was deemed an "unqualified success" by national gay leaders, and a few days later a group of activists gathered in New York to chant "We're queer, we're here, we won't drink Coors beer." A dramatic scene, but perhaps not entirely justified. After all, it is very hard to gauge any ill effects from A2, as the amendment was blocked by a court injunction on January 22—before it could even go into effect.

It's not known if Barbra or Whoopi are aware of that, but they may be interested in one more piece of information. A couple of months after the vote, as the boycott raged, Coloradans were asked if they would vote the same way. They said yes by 51 to 43 percent—a larger spread than the original vote. A new plan of attack may be in order. □

Castroville

by Kenneth S. Lynn

In this hour of Cuba's agony, the upbeat messages that appear on state billboards in provincial town squares and along lonely highways in the countryside, as well as in choice locations across Havana, make bitterly laughable reading. "We're happy here," one of them proclaims. "I myself am staying," trumpets another. And a third insists: "To the Revolution and to Socialism we owe everything we are today." References to the Revolution in this sort of propaganda testify to an aging leadership's undiminished faith in the power of class rhetoric to arouse the people. What is more striking, though, is the number of messages that reflect the rather different strategy of the men in their thirties who run the Communist Youth League. "Cuba yes!" and "It is time to unite!" are calculated to appeal to nationalistic pride.

Kenneth S. Lynn is the author of Hemingway and other books.

Andres Oppenheimer and other writers who aim their reports from Cuba at American audiences speak of the coming fall of Castro. Perhaps they are right; most certainly I hope so. Yet in the course of my visit in March (during which the difficulties of life were worsened by hurricane-force winds roaring out of the same storm system that buried the eastern U.S. in snow), none of the sharp-eyed Cuba-watchers in the U. S. Interests Section was willing to say to me flat-out that the fate of Castro was sealed. Nor did I see, or hear tell of, any sort of public manifestation of discontent with his rule, even though it is surely widespread.

What is far clearer than the imminence of the Maximum Leader's departure is the fact that the system he imposed upon the populace with his arrival never worked. Thanks to the subsidy of \$2 billion a year (in some years, the amount may have soared to \$4 billion) that the Soviets were slip-

