

GLBT Alliance questionnaire

Santa Cruz City Council 2014

Bruce Van Allen

1- Please tell us why you are interested in reaching out to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender community.

ANSWER: While there has been progress on LGBT issues, especially locally, I consider our work as a community and a society as far from complete. Proactive inclusion of the LGBT community at all levels of the political process is essential, both to encourage and support LGBT folks' participation and also to keep LGBT issues in the awareness of all voters, activists, and elected officials.

2- Why do you want the endorsement of The GLBT Alliance, Santa Cruz County's grassroots progressive gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender political organization?

ANSWER: There are certainly interpersonal and cultural aspects of the long struggle for LGBT rights and freedoms, but the political side is where issues become explicit as choices that can - and should - be made by organized society through our laws and governing policies. In that context, it is important to have active LGBT political organizations to surface issues and advocate for change. I have worked with the GLBT Alliance for its entire lifetime, and will do everything I can as a committed ally to help advance its goals.

3- Please tell us about your history with the LGBT community, and your awareness of issues specific to our community. a - Have you had any opportunities to address LGBT issues in the course of your community service or professional life to date (i.e., have you helped formulate corporate non-discrimination standards, worked on the board of a non-profit that developed a LGBT outreach program, etc.)?

If so, please tell us about this work.

ANSWER: I have been a supporter and advocate for LGBT rights and freedoms since the late 1960s. In my teens as I explored my sexuality I realized that my own health, pleasure, and personal autonomy required me to reject externally-imposed roles and assumptions for how I should be. And it followed that this would be true for everyone. I regard my own freedom of choice about my sexuality to be at stake in the struggle for LGBT rights, irrespective of my choice of partners. I have tried to apply this understanding in my personal and work life, and having chosen political activism as a lifelong path, of course I have included this perspective in my advocacy and political alliances.

Over the years I have participated in nearly all of the Santa Cruz Pride marches/parades, worked in local campaigns against ballot measures attacking LGBT teachers and persons with AIDS/HIV, advocated for inclusion of healthcare and counseling for LGBT persons in local social service funding, written non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies for non-profits I managed, refused to provide election campaign consulting for candidates unwilling to embrace LGBT rights, affirmatively included LGBT folks in my own campaign committees, and sought to constructively remind people of how their language choices and jokes could change from reinforcing oppression to aligning with liberation.

b - The queer community is diverse, and we work to represent all elements of it. In support of that objective, we'd like to ask, specifically, whether you are familiar, at any level, with the issues faced, specifically, by the bisexual and transgender communities. If so, what influence would this have on your decisions as an elected official?

If not, what steps will you take to become familiar with the issues, needs and concerns of these communities?

ANSWER: Rejecting rigid ideas and rules about gender identification is part of the struggle I mentioned above. While there are physical differences between male and female humans, a) a significant number of people are born with mixed/ambiguous features, b) a significant number of people discover that their inner sense of self, sexual or otherwise, does not match their outward physical form, and c) in no way should anyone be required to conform to sexual/gender roles or behavioral restrictions based on their physical form.

In my own experience with friends and community, bisexuality is for some a "transitional" condition as they shift their sexual orientation and for others it is an "arrival" at a balanced place for their multi-faceted loves and desires. And of course everyone should be allowed to change over time.

I have been informed and influenced by readings and conversations since the 1980s about how many people are born with sexually mixed/ambiguous bodies, and how hospitals perform operations - often without parental knowledge or consent - to "correct" the newborns into "male" or "female" form. And I have had friendship and community connections with persons who have considered or chosen the challenging transgender transition.

c - As documented in the The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute publication, "Bisexual health: An introduction and model practices for HIV/STI prevention programming" (2007), which is available for download at the URL below, in many cases bisexual people face even greater health risks and obstacles to accessing effective health care and health information than their peers in the queer community, including higher levels of self-harm, suicide attempts and thoughts of suicide. What specific steps would you take to address the issues raised in this report, and elsewhere, that are specific to bisexuals, including "biphobia" and lack of service

provider awareness of bisexuality?

http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/bi_health_5_07_b.pdf

ANSWER: I oppose healthcare practices/services that assume or attempt to impose particular classifications of sexuality on people needing care. To the extent that City funding and policies might affect this, I will work to ensure that all care recipients can expect and receive equal access; furthermore, I will support continued education of providers in both the rights and the needs of bisexual patients.

A summary of the top ten health issues for the bisexual community, sourced from the above report, can be found here: http://brown.edu/Student_Services/Health_Services/Health_Education/lgbtq_health/bisexual_health/health_concerns_for_bisexuals.php

4 - Many adults, in and outside of the queer community, express their sexuality in a variety of ways, many of which are not well understood by the general public or the service provider community, and often subject to severe social stigma; this frequently leads to poor health outcomes for the individuals in question and / or complications when interacting with the legal system and social services providers.

What do you know about “alternative” sexualities aka Leather/BSDM/Fetish (often collectively referred to as “kink”) and their associated communities? Are you willing to learn more about them and engage in dialogue with people from your community who express their sexuality in this manner, in order to ensure that these constituents are better served by the agencies and institutions that you will be overseeing?

The Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance, which "works to advance the recognition of sexual, gender, and family diversity" and "to affirm sexual freedom as a fundamental human right"

addresses these issues as part of their larger agenda of supporting “sexual freedom.” Their web site is at <http://www.woodhullalliance.org/>
<<http://www.woodhullalliance.org/%E2%80%8E>>

The National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (NCSF) has an introduction to SM that outlines the governing principles followed by responsible individuals and organizations within these communities: <https://ncsfreedom.org/key-programs/education-outreach/education-outreach-program-page.html>

ANSWER: Consistent with what I have stated above, adults making informed and consensual choices about their sexual expression is a basic political goal for me.

5 - Many adults, in and outside of the queer community, participate in relationships that do not fit the traditional two-partner model, and in doing so, are subject to discrimination in housing, insurance coverage and access to health care, immigration, custody and parental rights.

What do you know about these “alternative” relationship structures, often referred to by those participating in them as the practice of “polyamory” (defined as “the practice, desire, or acceptance of having more than one intimate relationship at a time with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved”), the people who participate in them, and the communities that have formed around them? Are you willing to learn more about how these types of relationship structures work, and engage in dialogue with people who participate in them, in order to ensure that these constituents are better served by the agencies and institutions you will be overseeing?

ANSWER: In my politically-formative years, the feminist critique of marriage as an instrument of capitalist patriarchy had a big influence on my ideas and practices in relationships. (And of course I've shared some gentle humor in the recent marriage battles with friends from those times.) The principle lesson I learned from applying that

analysis is that the inner content of a relationship - how the love and connection and life-sharing is actually enacted - is more important than the outer form, whether officially sanctioned or not. At times in my life I have practiced polyamory (and it takes practice: back before the term polyamory my friends would say "Bruce is proof that non-monogamy works," and I would reply "well, it's more that non-monogamy IS work"). I feel strongly that people should be able to choose and change their intimate and family arrangements. I will support all efforts to end restrictions of rights based on family/relationship structure.

You can find out more about these types of families, and the issues they face, on the Family Matters Project website (sponsored by the Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance) at <http://www.familymattersproject.org>, which is "dedicated to advancing, respecting and protecting the fundamental human right to family by eliminating discrimination based on family structure and relationship choices."

6 - Have there been any LGBT people who've had a significant impact on your life as role models, inspirations, mentors, friends, etc.? If so, please tell us a little bit about how they've influenced you.

ANSWER: There are many, both in my personal life and in the continuing revelations of current and historical public figures as LGBT. I'm still learning, of course, but at this time LGBT people are so thoroughly woven into my life and my social-political outlook that it is hard to attribute influences to specific people.

In my personal life I would start with two significant experiences from my teen years. The first was the experience a few times in my early teens (age 14-16) of being propositioned by gay men who picked me up hitch-hiking around Los Angeles. When I described to friends how I had talked things over with these men and persuaded them

to drop me off, I was struck by my friends' reactions that I should have used violence or called the police. I saw so clearly that these were people who were taking great risks to have some sexual fun - something I really wanted but had yet to do - and I got an inkling of how living closeted made sex much more challenging than what I faced as merely a boy too shy to ask girls out.

My second early influence from LGBT people was at age 19 working on a film with a gay couple, in which I performed as a young artist coming into his (hetero-)sexuality, right at the time I was first in college studying Freud. I will never forget Paul's and Spencer's looks and silence when I surmised that Freud would agree that repressing one's sexuality would be unhealthy "even for homosexuals."

I mention both of the above influences because they shaped my outlook before I had adopted a fuller political analysis of sexual politics.

In my twenties in radical Santa Cruz of the 1970s, I was fortunate to be part of a community of men and women who shared the aforementioned critique of conventional marriage and sexuality; we challenged ourselves to examine our assumptions and beliefs about our sexualities, and tried every alternative approach we knew of. Several of my female friends and lovers came out as lesbians during this time, and their insights and critiques of male behavior were an important part of my feminist education. There are really too many LGBT men and women with whom I have shared personal life in Santa Cruz to mention names without fearing I would leave important ones out.

In the larger picture, it is a source of ongoing enjoyment (and sometimes a kind of sweet revenge) to hear of yet another celebrity or hero prominent in science, politics, the arts, philosophy, and so on, who comes out or is revealed from historical records as LGBT. Their influence for me is

usually dual: it can be hard but ultimately inspiring to hear of how they personally coped with societal discrimination and repression, and as with the millions of ordinary people who have come out in recent years, it is affirming of my/our values to see wide recognition of the roles LGBT people have played throughout history.

7- Please describe your philosophy for working with under-represented communities of which you are not a member and, specifically, how this will manifest itself in your tenure in office.

ANSWER: Our community and our nation have large inequities in how the benefits and privileges of society are allocated and apportioned. As I see it, the state of our system reflects the ongoing struggle for rights and equality, and I do not think history always brings progress. This means that I align myself with the struggles of under-represented communities in two ways: I look to follow their leadership and initiative in raising issues and engaging in struggles, and I do my best to understand how I may benefit from inequitable social relations - and to take responsibility to work for change when I find it.

8 - Please tell us what you know about current City-operated or funded programs which impact the LGBT community, and what suggestions, if any, you have for improvements.

ANSWER: I am familiar with City-funded community programs such as the Diversity Center, the SC Women's Health Center, the Teen Center, and Encompass/Youth Services, which all provide services primarily or inclusively for people in the LGBT community. I consider these programs and organizations to be an important part of the City budget, and also part of what stitches Santa Cruz together as a caring community. I would like to see this part of the City budget expanded, and I would support LGBT-originated proposals for additional areas to fund.

9 - Local non-profits that serve the LGBT community, along with

other non-profits, have experienced considerable cuts in funding from all sources over the past couple of years. As a member of the City Council, where would you place funding for health and human services on your priority list?

ANSWER: I strongly support restoring cuts to health and human services, and this will be a high priority if elected. I was part of the original local movement to increase City budgeting for community programs, and I continue to believe this is an important responsibility of City government.

10 - Will you insist that the City not associate with organizations - such as the Boy Scouts and The Salvation Army - that have clearly stated their intent to discriminate against LGBT people, supporting, instead, such inclusive organizations as Girl Scouts or Big Brothers/Big Sisters or Goodwill?

ANSWER: Yes, no question. It offends me as a former Boy Scout that this organization continues to behave so contrarily to the values of respect and self-determination that everyone deserves.

11 - Will you ensure that medical insurance for City employees covers complete health care for gender reassignment surgery and medical care for transgender employees and family?

ANSWER: I support this and will vote for it on the City Council if elected.

12 – If elected, do you intend to take a leadership role with respect to LGBT youth in your city, working to ensure that all schools are safe for all students? If yes, please cite a concrete example of how you would do so. In particular, did you support AB 1266 (text here: <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billStatusClient.xhtml>), which guarantees equal access to all school programs and facilities for students in accordance with their expressed gender

identity?

ANSWER: I have been a supporter of the Queer Youth Leadership Awards, and I will continue to take part in efforts to create positive awareness of LGBT youth. In addition, I want to see more done to end bullying and discrimination against LGBT youth in schools and in the broader community. I did support AB 1266, and if elected I would seek a thorough examination of City laws and policies that may work against the ability of LGBT youth to thrive with their own gender identities.

13 – If elected, do you intend to take a leadership role with respect to rights and services for LGBT elders in your city? If yes, please cite a concrete example of how you would do so.

ANSWER: I would be pleased to work with people and organizations on supporting LGBT elders, and I will work to end discrimination against them in housing, health services, and community programs; in addition I will work to remove barriers to such things as partner access in crises. As a related matter, affordable housing is a high priority for me in general, and I will work to ensure that City-assisted housing meets the needs of low-income LGBT elders.

14 - What would you do to support HIV education and services for at-risk communities in your city? Specifically, do you support syringe exchange in an effort to stop the spread of HIV and other blood-borne diseases and will you work to keep the program based on best practices and evidence-based research? Do you support safe needle drop-boxes in public areas, such as parks or bus depots? Will you support the syringe exchange program if it encounters interference? Do you support training for your police department around needle exchange?

ANSWER: Yes to all of the sub-questions here. I was an early supporter of needle exchange before it became legal. I

plan to speak out during this campaign against the attempt to cut back and restrict the needle exchange.

15 - Do you support marriage equality, and did you do so publicly? Are you aware of a nation-wide movement to create "religious exemptions" to marriage equality and other nondiscrimination laws (e.g.: AB 2237 - text here: http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/13-14/bill/asm/ab_2201-2250/ab_2237_bill_20140221_introduced.html)? Do you have a position on such exemptions?

ANSWER: Yes, I support marriage equality. I have attended (and made buttons for) all of the local rallies for marriage equality over the past few years. I think the "religious exemptions" are un-American!

16 - Have you in the past, and will you in the future, attend LGBT events, such as LGBT Pride, Queer Youth Leadership Awards, or the BAYMEC dinner? If you have not attended, why not?

ANSWER: I have attended and urged others to attend all of the above. I will be co-sponsoring a table at this year's BAYMEC dinner with Sen. Bill Monning, and we are providing tickets at our table for several Queer Youth leaders.

17 - If you receive The GLBT Alliance's endorsement, will you display it in your campaign literature?

ANSWER: Of course.

18 - Have you received endorsements which you think might be of interest to the LGBT community?

ANSWER: Jerry Solomon, Merrie Schaller, Adam Spickler, Bill Monning, Mark Stone, John Leopold

19- Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

ANSWER: Thanks for your great work!