

Editorial

The resolution passed by the MAA's Board of Governors at the January Joint Meetings in San Antonio, to move the January 1995 Joint Meetings from Denver, Colorado, to San Francisco, California, was bound to be controversial.

As reported in the February FOCUS, the decision was not lightly arrived at; indeed, for the first time ever, the MAA governors and the AMS Council met together in a joint session to debate the matter. That debate was long, thoughtful, and well informed, and both governing bodies deserve immense credit for the responsible manner in which they took on such a difficult issue. The electoral decision in Colorado to remove certain statutory restrictions on discrimination against homosexuals, which is what led to the

debate and the final decision to move, had the potential to provoke an acrimonious exchange, but this did not occur.

The views expressed at the joint session indicated a clear sentiment in favor of moving the meetings, and the final votes were very decisive. But there were voices raised against moving, and it was clear that among the memberships at large, not everyone would agree with the final outcome. Some might feel that the MAA, as an organization of mathematicians, has no business even debating the matter, let alone coming to the decision it did. But, as was expressed during the joint discussion in San Antonio, once the Colorado electors had cast their votes the way they did, not to have such a debate would also have been unacceptable to many members; so

either way, the Association would be the loser.

FOCUS has received six letters protesting the decision. The three published in this issue are representative of the views expressed in those letters. (One writer asked that his letter be published without his name. This I cannot do.) It is the nature of such situations that only the protesting side takes pen to paper, so the letters I received cannot be assumed to indicate a majority view. Indeed, to go by the Governors' January vote, they express a minority view. But it is a view that, I feel, deserves to be heard.

The above are the opinions of the FOCUS editor, and do not necessarily represent the official view of the MAA.

Opinion

To the Editor,

I am writing to express my disappointment with a resolution passed by the governing boards of the AMS and the MAA regarding a possible change in venue for the 1995 annual meetings. First, let me say that after discussing the issue with Michael Artin, Marcia P. Sward, and others at the San Antonio meetings, I understand the decision to try to move the meetings, and I am not opposed to such a change.

My disappointment in the matter stems from the wording of the resolution. The resolution states that the actions taken by the voters in Colorado were "wrong." Whether or not we agree with this statement, the AMS and the MAA have no business taking a political stand in a non-mathematical issue, especially an issue as volatile as this one. In my opinion, this resolution clearly steps outside the bounds of propriety. Such a political statement is unnecessary; the meetings can be moved without taking an official stand that has the potential to alienate a significant

number of individuals within the mathematical community. Politicization of the AMS and the MAA should be avoided at all costs if the two organizations are to keep their focus on their true mathematical missions.

Although it may be too late to change the wording of this resolution, I hope that any other public statements by the organizations regarding this issue can be made in a politically neutral manner. I also hope that in the future, more care will be taken regarding such issues.

Sincerely,

Bryan Dawson

Assistant Professor of Mathematics

Emporia State University

Dear Professor Devlin,

I was disappointed to learn in the June issue of FOCUS that the Joint Meetings Committee succumbed to "political correctness" and moved the 1995 meeting scheduled for Denver. I was looking forward to being once again in the beautiful state of Colorado. Don't look for me in San Francisco, I won't be there. This will be my way of stating to the MAA that we should be in the "mathematics business," and not get distracted by issues which, although important in their own right, are not the business of the MAA.

Sincerely,

John Watson

Arkansas Tech University



Opinion

Dear Dr. Devlin,

I am writing in response to the two articles in FOCUS that deal with the MAA/AMS vote to move the Winter 1995 meeting out of Denver, Colorado.

The decision to move the joint MAA/AMS meeting from Denver to, subsequently, San Francisco, was made because the voters of the state of Colorado allegedly chose to discriminate against homosexuals in the passage of their Amendment 2. I believe the action by the MAA Board of Governors was both hastily done and totally inappropriate.

If homosexuals were suddenly denied their civil rights by the passage of Amendment 2, then the MAA's action might have been appropriate. This question was asked of Ignacio Rodrigues, a former member of the Colorado Civil Rights Commission. His answer, which must be credible, is as follows, "The United States Constitution guaranteed civil rights to all citizens. Amendment 2 in no way compromises that." So, if civil rights accorded to all citizens is still guaranteed for homosexuals, then the question of the sudden increase of discrimination is untrue. For this reason the MAA has no ground for making any statement against the state of Colorado.

Many of the national wire services reported a dramatic increase in crimes against homosexuals after passage of Amendment 2. If the number of crimes against homosexuals actually did increase then the MAA might have been justified in making a public statement of some type. However, as pointed out in the Rocky Mountain News, Denver's largest newspaper and a strong opponent of Amendment 2, "the reported incidents [of increased crimes against homosexuals] are not by a disinterested outside agency or organization, but rather by gay leaders, and their sense of besiegement does not correspond with the impressions of other close observers such as the police and the Denver mayor's office." This quote simply states that the reports of increased crimes against homosexuals were generated by the homosexuals themselves and not by actual events

which generate police reports. For this reason the MAA had no business making any statements against the state of Colorado.

Another point to be considered is whether the citizens of Colorado actually hate homosexuals. I think not for several reasons. One reason is the lack of anti-sodomy laws in the state. Another reason is that the voters in Colorado have a clear idea of exactly what the phrase "homosexual rights" means. This understanding came out in a poll released January 8, 1993, by the *Denver Post* which showed that fifty-four percent (54%) of the respondents agreed with the statement, "When homosexuals talk about gay rights what they are really saying is that they want special treatment." The actions of homosexual groups as reported in various news accounts certainly gives credence to this viewpoint. So, if the phrase "homosexual rights" really means "special treatment," then the action of the MAA means that it is official MAA policy to support and promote "special treatment" for an individual who happens to be a homosexual. If so, then a direct policy statement saying so should come from the Board of Governors. If not, then the MAA had no basis making any statement against the state of Colorado.

I have now dealt with the haste in which the MAA has acted, now I will give reasons why the action was inappropriate. First of all, I believe the decision on meeting sites is well within the purview of the Board of Governors to decide. However, I do not believe it is within the jurisdiction of the Board of Governors to set policy on social issues without consulting the membership. This is what the Board has done. The MAA has a credible record in its attempts to recruit women into mathematics, and this latter decision was not made by an ivory tower elite, but by consultation from its members. But now the Board of Governors has taken upon itself to be the conscience of the MAA, and that is just wrong.

Second, what does a professional association have to do with matters outside the

profession? After all, the purpose of the association is to benefit its members. There seems no real reason for meddling in political or social issues when such meddling cannot help the association and the benefits to the association are so nebulous. This action by the Board of Governors will neither help the MAA nor will the members receive professional benefits.

I believe that the action taken by the MAA Board of Governors against the state of Colorado by moving the 1995 meeting out of Denver was wrong. It was wrong because it was ill-conceived. It was wrong because it lacked proper investigation. It was wrong because it says that all members of the MAA are for "homosexual rights". It was wrong because it defamed the credibility of mathematics and mathematicians. It was wrong because it made mathematicians appear as busy-bodies with nothing better to do than interfere with other people's lives. It was wrong because it made mathematicians appear to be uninterested in the things that are essential to the profession: good mathematics and good teaching.

I think the MAA is now standing with egg on its face, and should be ashamed of the actions of its Board of Governors. I think the MAA ought to apologize to the voters of the state of Colorado for its actions, and do what is necessary to regain their goodwill.

Sincerely,

Stephen Hennagin

Arkadelphia, Arkansas

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 your department free.
 See page 45.

