

CIVIL LIBERTIES: The Key to Improving Community/Police Relations in Lawrence

FOLLOWING the general meeting of the *Douglas County ACLU* last September, a committee was formed to seek a resolution to the growing number of alleged civil rights violations and other forms of alleged police misconduct in the Lawrence area. The committee concluded that the problem stems from a failure on the part of the Lawrence community to take responsibility for the quality of law enforcement.

To increase awareness, the Douglas County ACLU is sponsoring a *Community/Police Relations Committee* (CPRC), composed of volunteers, to invite comments from anyone in Lawrence, including the police. Respondents may express a point of view or recite positive or negative experiences with law enforcement. On a regular basis, the Committee will make the information public. Because police misconduct intimidates citizens, generating a distrust of the law and its agents, victims of civil liberties abuses may fear to file a complaint with the police. The CPRC, as an independent agency, hopes to encourage all citizens to report their experiences in order to provide an accurate picture of the relationship between the Lawrence police and the community. The CPRC will not seek the redress of any grievance but will help efforts to make law enforcement a more effective tool for improving community life.

Across the country, the ACLU has been helping people to establish various forms of independent community/police relations committees—in Denver, Colorado, San Diego, California, Austin, Texas, Gainesville, Florida, and many smaller cities and towns. These committees or review boards believe that the principles of civil liberty and equality before the law are the foundation of peaceful communities and effective law enforcement. When the police do not respect the law or the citizens they serve, when the citizens do not trust and appreciate their police force, the effect is a spiral of criminality and alienation within the community and between the community and its police force. The result is an overtaxed and ineffective police force and judicial system. Police harassment of socially and economically marginalized populations, including adolescent males of all races, only exacerbates the burdens these populations already carry in attempting to stabilize their lives. Time, energy, and money spent coping with unwarranted police scrutiny and entanglements deplete already limited resources. The

time and energy of the police force is also depleted without serving the needs of the community. Such harassment directly contributes to the poverty that produces crime. Effective law enforcement requires mutual trust and respect between the community and its police force. The principles of civil liberty are the cornerstone of such a relationship.

The CPRC is currently in the process of solidifying its membership and procedures. More details about its development will appear in following newsletters. Anyone interested in supporting this project, please contact *Robin Devine at 832-1029*.

BE SECURE IN THEIR PERSONS
AGAINST UNREASONABLE
NOT BE VIOLATED, AND NO

USA PATRIOT ACT Resolution Campaign

by Clark Coan

A COMMITTEE of the Douglas County chapter has drafted a resolution to be submitted to the Lawrence City Commission calling for the reform of the USA Patriot and Homeland Security Acts. Provisions of these acts impinge upon civil liberties, particularly the right of privacy. Over 20 communities across the country have adopted similar resolutions.

A debate (announced earlier) on whether the two acts are justified as government policy has been scheduled for Feb. 13 at 7:00 p.m. in the Lawrence Public Library. *Copies of the resolution for the City Commission will be available at that meeting.* To help implement this important initiative, contact the committee chair, Clark Coan; email: trails.west@lycos.com or telephone 842-3458. For more information on the national campaign see www.bordc.org.

informational/links to civil liberties issues on the net

PLEASE VISIT the new Douglas County ACLU website: www.acludouglascounty.org and be sure to come back and check it often for local news and updates to the site.

ACLU National website: www.aclu.org

Be sure to check out current issues in their *Safe and Free in Times of Crisis* section at: www.aclu.org/safeandfree

ACLU's summary explanation of the ACT: www.aclu.org/congress/I110101a.html

The entire Act online ...348 pages of it! (from the Electronic Privacy Info Center website): www.epic.org/privacy/terrorism/hr3162.html

Consent to Search

by Steve Slopes

WRITING on behalf of the Douglas County ACLU, Mary Davidson sent a letter to Chief Ron Olin asking that the Lawrence Police Department initiate the consistent use of their own Consent to Search form. A signed consent would assure a judge that the civil liberties of the accused had been properly observed.

Chief Olin declined to change customary procedures. Following the ACLU request, a newspaper article quoted Judge Michael Malone concerning a case in which flaws in police procedure resulted in criminal charges being dismissed (Dave Ranney, *LJWorld*, 12-24-02). More recent errors in police procedure resulted in the suspension of a police officer and the probable dismissal of several cases. (Dave Ranney, *LJWorld*, 1-28-03, 1A)

True Separation

Several fundamentalist Christian groups collaborated on producing a video, *True Separation*, probably intended for a KU audience. It professes objectivity in addressing the separation of church and state.

The pretext is that a *University of Kansas* professor asks his class to stage a mock trial based on a challenge to the depiction of a religious character (Moses) on the University seal. The protagonist seeks counsel from two ministers who base their answers on the Mayflower Compact rather than the Constitution.

A reverse chronology of how quickly this passed—proposed on Sept 24th, signed into law Oct 26 (from the American Library Association): www.ala.org/washoff/patriotchron.html

USA PATRIOT ART: *Cartooning and Free Speech in War Time*; A collection of 43 provocative and powerful cartoons; The ACLU has received generous permission from the show's curators to present it online: <http://www.aclu.org/cartoons/artshow.html>

Free Speech Victory

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speech since holding a sign or applauding may express political ideas. She added, "A public meeting is meant to be a forum for the expression of political opinions. It is not a classroom." (*ljworld online*, 12-30-02)

Several dozen protestors marched to the City Commission meeting on December 31 and held their signs throughout the meeting. Various speakers explained that some people are too shy to speak but wish to hold signs. Mary said that developers bring in large charts and pictures without objection. It would not be fair to prohibit signs to the public while privileging developers. As a result of several good speakers and the decorum of the sign-holding audience, Mayor Hack and the other commissioners agreed to withdraw the proposed ban. (See *Joel Mathis article*, *LJWorld*, Dec.31,1A)

CONTRIBUTIONS AND DUES

The Douglas County ACLU consists of national ACLU members residing in Douglas County. The local chapter does not have local dues. Donations to the local chapter are sent to the Kansas City headquarters where they are reserved for our expenses in making fliers, etc.

After reviewing the video on November 7, 2002, the Douglas County ACLU decided not to respond since the video did not seem likely to convince college or high school students.