

Treasurer's Primary Race Pits Gay-Friendly Ex-Legislator Against Gay Former Auditor.

BY EUAN BEAR

In one of the few statewide primary contests within the Vermont Democratic Party, former state Senator Jeb Spaulding and former state Auditor Ed Flanagan are competing for the chance to run as the party's candidate for State Treasurer.

The office of state treasurer is being vacated by Republican James Douglas, who is running for governor.

Since Ed Flanagan is openly gay, and Jeb Spaulding is not, the primary poses a potential question for Democratic GLBTQ voters: how much weight should a candidate's sexual identity or orientation carry in an election?

As a state Senator and chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Spaulding came out early in favor of full marriage rights for gays and lesbians. As it became clear that the Civil Union language was the best compromise that could be achieved, he gave that his support. Spaulding left the Senate after the 2000 session.

Flanagan was elected Auditor in 1992 and came out as a gay man in 1995. He was re-elected in 1996 and 1998, then left the Auditor's office to run against then-Republican US Senator James Jeffords. Flanagan was defeated by a better than two-to-one margin.

Both candidates were contacted and asked two questions: Why should GLBTQ Vermonters vote for you? What will you do to ensure that the treasurer's office will be able to balance the books in a timely fashion? Balancing the books has been an ongoing problem for the Treasurer's office for several years, according to numerous reports.

"GLBTQ Vermonters should vote for me for the same reasons any Vermonter should," said Spaulding. "They have the same economic and financial issues and concerns as all Vermonters — retirement security and a need to know that the Treasurer's office has prudent policies and is being well run."

Further, he said, "I have demonstrated an interest in making the world a better place, and I think the Treasurer's office can provide avenues for more inclusiveness. For example, we could be more active shareholders by voting our proxies and initiating shareholder resolutions in support of companies enacting

domestic partnership policies. I would like to push for Vermont to be more active."

The Treasurer does not make such decisions unilaterally, Spaulding clarified; he or she is one member of a board that manages teacher and state employee pension funds. And, he hastened to add, he is advocating prudent and responsible investing for the best return and the lowest risk.

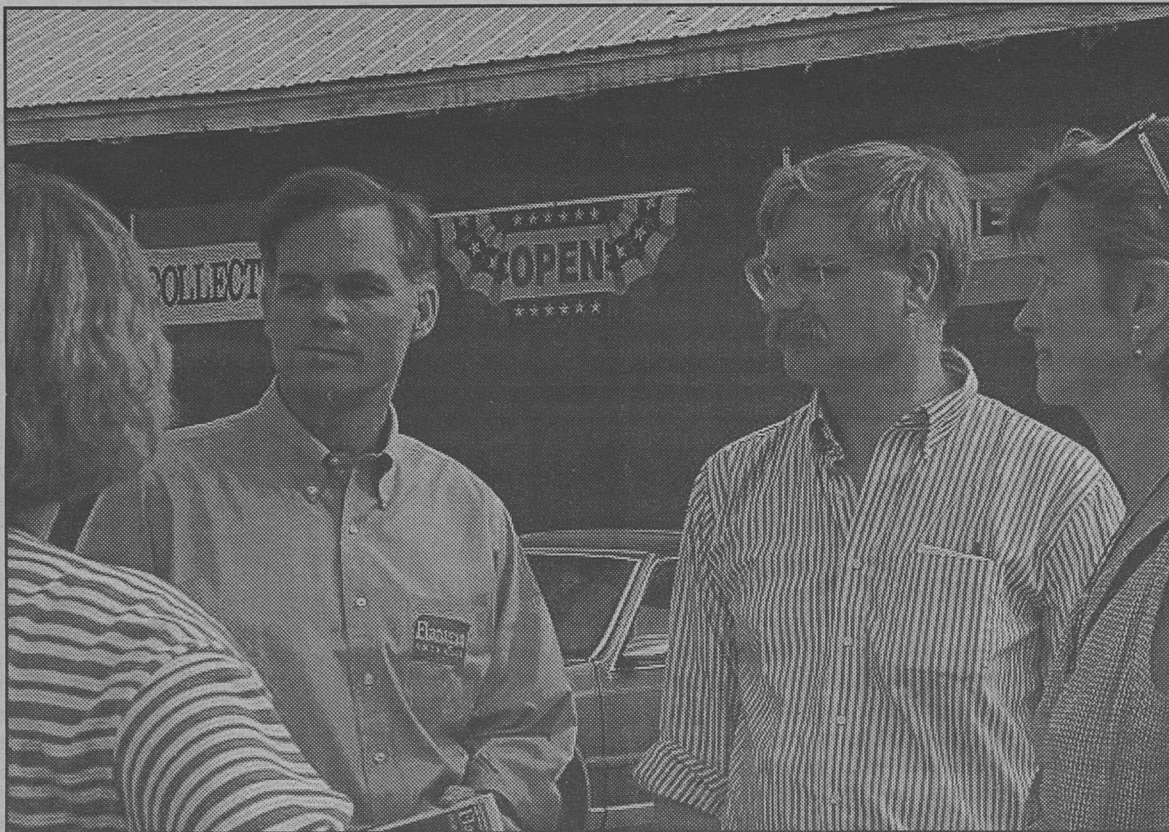
Spaulding did not avoid using the term "socially responsible investing," though he extended the definition. "There are two angles here," he said, "screening for financial practices — not investing in companies that reincorporate offshore, who have a diverse board of directors, including members from outside the company, and so on — and using our investment dollars to encourage socially responsible policies."

"Screened investments," Spaulding concluded, "offer as good or better returns as non-screened investments. I would push for including a segment of our investments that was socially screened."

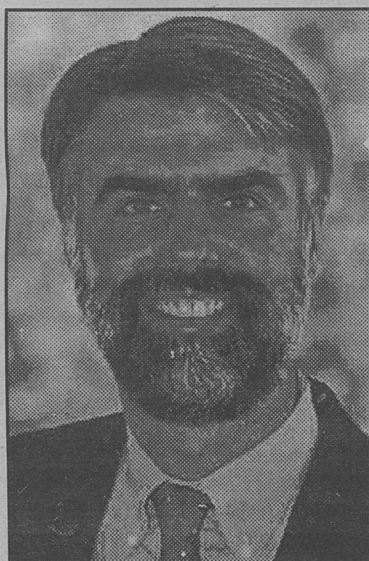
Flanagan suggested that on September 10, GLBTQ voters should vote for him, "for a couple of reasons. I have shared the experience that many of your readers have lived through, growing up gay in America, going through the ordeal of coming out, and feeling like an alien." But, he added, "I would not ask for their vote just as a gay man or as a straight man. That experience is just one asset and I have others."

Flanagan went on to list his accomplishments as the State Auditor, beginning with reforming the office from "a silent cave in the bureaucracy" to a watchdog for Vermonters, suggesting that the Treasurer's office could benefit from similar treatment. "While other candidates may talk about the need to stand up to the Enrons and the chief executives," he concluded, "I've already done it. And I'll continue to do it. It is outrageous that Vermonters are being deprived of their retirement security because a few have exploited the market for their own benefit. I have the strength and the guts."

On the second question — about balancing the state's books in a timely fashion — Flanagan said, "I was the one who identified the problem that the Treasurer's Office was not balancing the books. I suggested a remedy in our report, which I will summarize and repeat here. Like any other financial operation, whether it's



above, Ed Flanagan (left) meets with constituents. Left, Jeb Spaulding.



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a small business or a family operation, you've got to reconcile the influx of cash with the outgo.

"When you don't, it increases the potential for theft, inadvertent misapplication of funds, a lack of compliance with internal controls that should guarantee that Vermonters' tax monies are being spent the way they were intended to be. It's basic bread and butter accounting," he explained.

"I can't say that there's been a conscious, deliberate effort to camouflage the state's books, but there's been negligence. If there are

contributing causes — a new computer system, too few personnel — it's up to the Treasurer to blow the whistle and explain what's going on and why."

On balancing the books, Spaulding declared that he would take three initial steps to make sure the Treasurer's office was providing timely and accurate information. "First, I'd hire an outside management consultant to evaluate current practice and recommend changes," he said. Asked whether the Auditor's report already did that, he said, "What we get from the Auditor is facts and figures, not an actual man-

agement review."

Spaulding's second step would be to "strengthen the department's ability to attract and support quality employees through training and education."

Ensuring that the Treasurer's office is using the most up-to-date information technology, and if not, upgrading it, was Spaulding's third step toward timely financial reports.

Whichever set of answers appeals to you, act on it — vote in the primary September 10. ▼

OITM Volunteer Maria Gentile Dies in Car Accident Lack of Legal Documents or CU Leaves Partner in Limbo

Maria M. Gentile, age 35, died in a car accident on July 23, according to her partner, Kathy Pettinato, who survived the crash with minor injuries. Pettinato, who was driving, was wearing a seatbelt, Gentile was not. Pettinato said their 1986 Chevy Blazer, rolled into a ravine when she swerved to avoid hitting a deer.

A report in the *Rutland Herald* said that according to police,

Pettinato was "processed for drunken driving after the accident."

The two women had been together for four years and had moved to Vermont from Connecticut in December 2001. They had begun volunteering for *Out in the Mountains* distributing papers in the Manchester, Vermont area in May.

Gentile, a former social worker in Massachusetts, had helped to

found the consumer-based mental health movement in Connecticut, said Pettinato. Gentile herself had been diagnosed with major depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder, according to her partner. The two women met as volunteers for the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. They had been planning for a civil union in the near future.

Pettinato said that at least in

part because of her partner's disability, they had no legal documents to provide for each other in the event one partner died. "The house is in probate," said Pettinato. "I guess her parents have hired an estate lawyer. But her parents are supportive — they told me to take whatever I wanted. I don't want anything, but just to have my friend back." While Gentile's parents, siblings, and nieces and nephews were listed in the obituary in the *Brattleboro Reformer*, Pettinato was not.

Pettinato said she doesn't know whether she'll stay in Vermont — in part it depends on what happens

when her partner's estate is settled. "I just don't want to end up like that movie — *If Walls Could Talk 2*."

Gentile was buried in Brattleboro, said Pettinato, because her family knew she was very happy there. "They allowed her to be buried with the rings that I gave her," Pettinato said in a phone interview. But Pettinato doesn't have the rings that Gentile gave her. "I took them off when I was trying to dig her out and they were stolen."

Donations in Maria Gentile's memory can be made to any animal welfare organization in honor of Gentile's work with animals. ▼