

Racine

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would permit Justices of the Peace to refuse to perform civil unions. What is your position on that bill?

Racine: I would want to talk this over with the Secretary of State and with an attorney. Generally, I don't think JPs should say yes, I'll do marriages but no, I won't do civil unions. I don't know how you write or enforce that. But to say specifically that we are going to have a law that permits discrimination, no, I wouldn't support that.

OITM: Would you support an amendment to Vermont's Constitution defining marriage as a union between one man and one woman?

Racine: I don't think it is necessary. No, I would not support that.

OITM: State Rep. Nancy Sheltra introduced a bill (H. 259) prohibiting the "promotion" of homosexuality in Vermont's public schools. As Governor, would you support that bill?

Racine: I would be absolutely opposed to that. Rep. Sheltra and others who are thinking like her see anything but condemnation of homosexuality as promotion. I think that is a very dangerous and ugly bill.

OITM: Recently, a gay male couple in Rutland was accused of sexually assaulting a male fos-

ter child in their care. In light of this, what is your position on gay men and lesbians serving as foster and adoptive parents?

Racine: I don't have any problem at all with gay men and lesbians adopting or being foster parents. They are no more or less likely to be pedophiles than anyone else in society. If a gay or lesbian couple has abused a child then they ought to be prosecuted for child molestation.

"My message is more of a plea to be politically active this year and to really search for the candidates who are going to be supportive of gay and lesbian issues and to be politically active on their behalf!" Doug Racine

OITM: In light of current budgetary pressures, what is your position on the continuation of Vermont's Human Rights Commission?

Racine: The Human Rights Commission along with any other entity of state government is going to face a tighter budget. That's just a fact of life right now. But I would certainly oppose any effort to eliminate the Human Rights Commission. It serves a crucial function in exposing discrimination of all sorts and in seeking prosecution in some cases. I don't want to see those efforts end.

OITM: What is your position on the medical use of marijuana by people living with HIV/AIDS?

Racine: I am supportive of the medical use of

marijuana and would support a well-crafted bill.

OITM: What is your position on legislation that would permit citizen initiatives in Vermont?

Racine: I like our system of government the way that it is in Vermont. Citizens have representation through the legislature. Citizens have

the ability to petition state government to make changes to the laws and I would prefer to keep with our representative form of government rather than go down the road that California and other states have gone where there are so many initiatives on the ballot that are contradictory and confusing. I don't think they are better served than the people of Vermont are.

OITM: As Governor would you maintain a relationship with Vermont's gay and lesbian community through an official liaison?

Racine: The answer to that is yes, but it needs to be broader than that. I have made an effort in this campaign to sit down with groups and not rely on one or two people to represent a whole community. That would be like having one businessperson to represent the whole business community. I think the gay and lesbian commu-

nity is as diverse as any other in their concerns about issues and political points of view. My efforts would be to reach out to as broad a group as possible.

OITM: Do you have any final message to Vermont's gay community?

Racine: Through political activism and electing the right people to office great strides have been made in Vermont towards moving beyond tolerance to acceptance and understanding of gay and lesbian Vermonters. A lot of that progress could be lost if the wrong people are elected. We have a House of Representatives in the last two years that has been very hostile to civil unions. We have a Republican party that made opposition to civil unions two years ago the basis for their political efforts and we almost lost Governor Dean. I want people to understand how close this (election) is.

My message is more of a plea to be politically active this year and to really search for the candidates who are going to be supportive of gay and lesbian issues and to be politically active on their behalf. We can lose in Vermont a lot of the progress that has been made. We can lose civil unions with the wrong legislature and the wrong Governor in place. While my opponent, Mr. Douglas, has said on occasion that he wouldn't support repeal of civil unions, he has also said that he supports the bill (H.502) that Rep. Peg Flory got through the House last year which very specifically repeals civil unions. He's trying to have it both ways, and I hope people will see through that and understand that if a bill like Peg Flory's lands on his desk as Governor, he will sign it — and civil unions will be dead in Vermont. ▼

Douglas

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say no it is an expansion of what we had. I don't want to get bogged down in semantics. I'm not going to suggest repealing the law but I am willing to consider recognition of other relationships. I guess I don't want to be trapped into the answer of whether that was the right vehicle or not.

OITM: The current civil union law has a reciprocal beneficiaries section for spinster aunts, mothers and sons, etc., yet no one has registered for this. Would that lead you to conclude that there isn't a demand for expansion of the law?

Douglas: It may well. I'm just saying that I'm not going to rule exploring the possibility of other types of recognition. I'm not proposing any but I'm not going to rule them out.

OITM: The proponents of H.502 are civil union opponents. Do you see H.502 an attempt to undermine the civil union law?

Douglas: I don't know. I saw it, at the time, as a way to accommodate those who wanted to undermine the civil union law. Some would argue that the new House majority was achieved, in part, because of the [civil union] law and I think the [House] leadership felt they had an obligation to provide a forum for that discussion. But what their objective was on an individual basis, I don't know. I talked with Rep. Peg Flory [R-Pittsford] more recently and I think she feels that the [Judiciary] committee might look at other issues in the coming session.

OITM: Legislation has been introduced that would permit Justices of the Peace to refuse to perform civil unions. What is your position on that bill (S.55)?

Douglas: I guess I wonder if it is constitutional based on the Supreme Court's decision. We have an obligation to adhere to the Baker deci-

sion and extend the benefits of marriage to gay couples. There was a question at the time about Town Clerks declining to issue a license, and I think the advice the Attorney General gave was that they ought not to decline. A public official needs to treat all residents of the state equally so I don't know if it would be constitutional. So I guess my reaction would be to ask my legal counsel how to react to it. If it appears to violate the Baker decision, then that ought to settle the debate.

OITM: Earlier this year, you criticized the political tactics of Rev. David Sterzbach, an anti gay activist. While you were critical of his attacks on Republican lawmakers you did not condemn his attacks on Vermont's gay community. Why?

Douglas: I've never met Mr. Sterzbach and don't know about all of his activities. What I saw was attacks on people of good will in the

"The biggest issue ... is the weakness in our economy and the erosion of 8,000 jobs over the last year or so. It doesn't matter what anyone's sexual orientation is, it is a serious problem." Jim Douglas

legislature and that is what I was focusing on. I guess I hadn't heard his attacks otherwise. I think most Vermonters want to move on and I think that most Vermonters don't like the tactics that he has employed.

OITM: State Rep. Nancy Sheltra introduced a bill [H. 259] prohibiting the "promotion" of homosexuality in Vermont's public schools. As Governor, would you support that bill?

Douglas: I think I heard [former] Education Commissioner [David Wolk] say that we don't want to promote any particular matters of sexual orientation in schools and that ought to be the policy statewide. I certainly agree with that. I don't see the need for the legislation.

OITM: What is your position of the adoption of children by gay men and lesbians?

Douglas: I really believe that a father and mother are the best environment for a child but that's not possible in every case and I believe that the best interest of the child ought to be the controlling standard. There is no question that a gay household can be a very loving experience for a youngster and I certainly wouldn't move to change the law (permitting gay adoption).

OITM: What is your position on the medical use of marijuana by people living with HIV/AIDS?

Douglas: I yield to Dr. [Gov.] Dean's inclination on that. I'm not persuaded that we ought to do it. I don't pretend to be an expert on the topic but many physicians and law enforcement officials believe we ought not to open that door so I'd like to see if there are alternatives that we can pursue. I certainly know people who had HIV, cancer and other very painful and debilitating diseases and I obviously want to

find a way to accommodate their suffering. But I'm not persuaded that a drug that has been illegal for so long ought to be permitted. I might be persuaded but I guess I'm not at this point.

OITM: As Governor would you maintain a relationship with Vermont's gay and lesbian community through an official liaison?

Douglas: I hadn't thought about that. I guess the question is broader about liaisons to other communities or organizations. I guess I don't know the answer to that right now.

OITM: What is your position on the existence of Vermont's Human Rights Commission? In the past, there have been legislative attempts to eliminate it.

Douglas: I don't know. We're coming into a time now where budgets are very tight and

tough decisions are going to have to be made. I certainly want to make sure that all civil rights laws are enforced. Whether that is in the context of a separate commission I think is something that we can debate. In tough budgetary times I don't want to be tied definitively. I certainly respect all that the commission has done.

OITM: Many civil union opponents contend that civil unions are just marriage by another name yet, as a married heterosexual, you receive 1,049 federal benefits that gay and lesbian couples do not.

Douglas: I didn't know that. But even if we called it marriage here the feds wouldn't necessarily be obligated to go along would they?

OITM: Probably not, in light of the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Would you support an amendment to Vermont's Constitution defining marriage as a union between one man and one woman?

Douglas: I'm certainly not going to propose that. We have the shortest constitution in the country in terms of its length. It is very basic. It is the fundamental law of our state. We ought not to amend it lightly by putting in more detail than is customary. Secondly, I don't want to see the state bogged down in another debate on a topic that was amply debated two years ago. So I don't see the usefulness of doing it.

OITM: Do you have any final message to the readers of OITM?

Douglas: I guess I come back to what I said at the beginning. We have some serious issues confronting our state, principally the result of the weak economy, and I want all Vermonters to work together to solve these problems. It doesn't matter what their sexual orientation is. I want people to bring their talent and abilities to the table and work to improve our state. It is going to take everybody's effort. My goal as a Governor is to bring Vermonters together to talk about matters that unite us and not to get bogged down in a debate over issues that divide us. ▼

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