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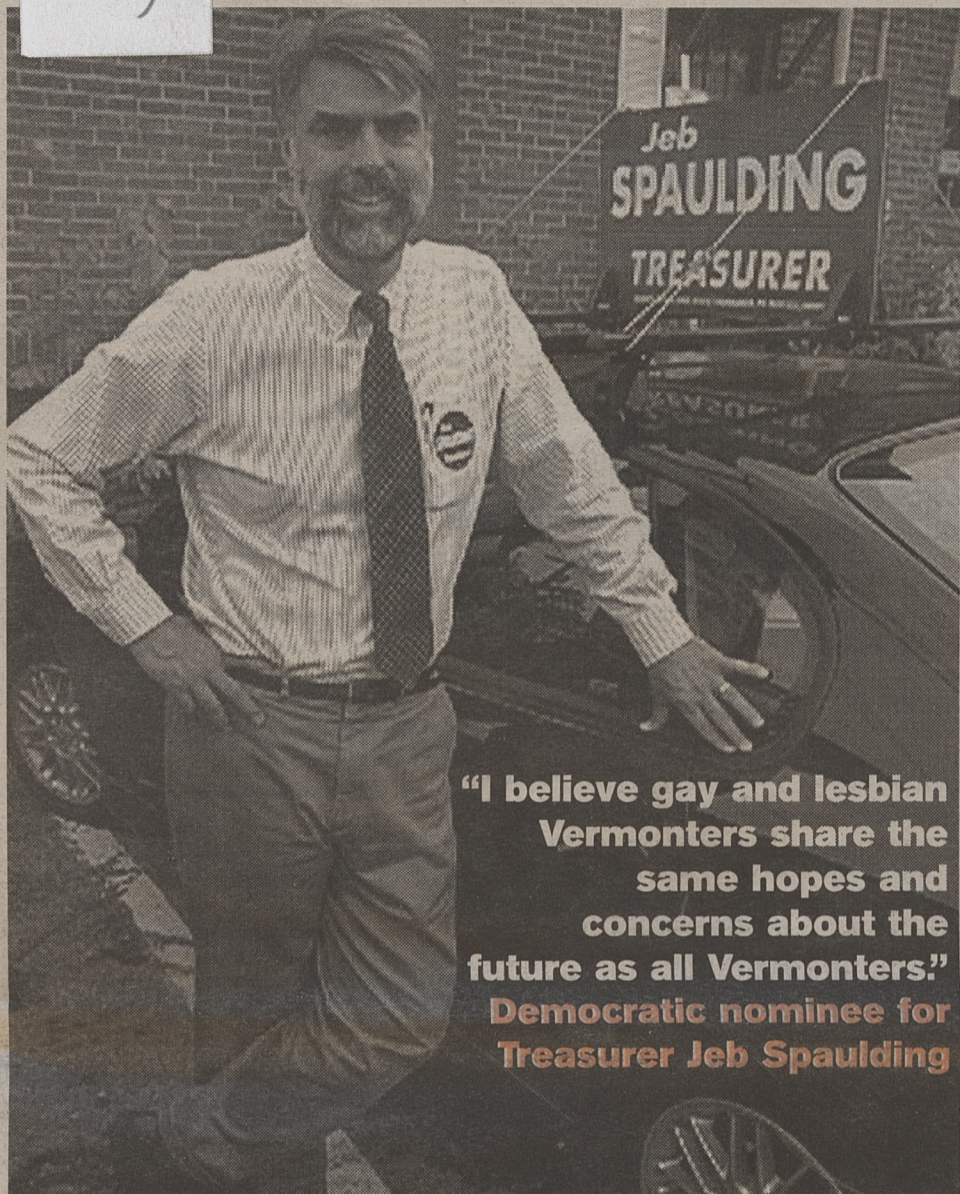
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Volume XVI, Number 8

OCTOBER 2002

www.mountainpridemedial.org



"I believe gay and lesbian Vermonters share the same hopes and concerns about the future as all Vermonters!"
Democratic nominee for Treasurer Jeb Spaulding

BY PAUL OLSEN

The results of Vermont's September 10 primary mean there will be no openly gay or transgender statewide candidates on the ballot this year.

In a contentious Democratic primary for Treasurer, openly gay former Vermont Auditor Ed Flanagan lost to former state Sen. Jeb Spaulding by more than 7,500 votes.

"It was really a victory that he [Spaulding] should be proud of," Flanagan said

After the Primary, the Political Deluge

Statewide Campaigns Take Shape

when conceding the race. "If democracy is thriving and working well then there should be sparks and there should be tension [in campaigns]. If there isn't, then democracy is too whispered and is probably not doing its job."

As the Democratic nominee for Treasurer, Spaulding welcomes the gay community's support. "I believe gay and lesbian Vermonters share the same hopes and concerns about the future as all Vermonters and I hope they will support me," he said. As Treasurer, Spaulding would "actively vote our proxies and co-sponsor shareholder resolutions on corporate policies to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and to ensure domestic partner benefits."

Spaulding faces retiring state Rep. John LaBarge (R-Grand Isle), a civil union opponent, on Election Day.

In the GOP congressional primary, moderate Rutland lawyer Bill Meub soundly defeated two conservative challengers: Gregory Parke, a former Air Force pilot, and Karen Ann Kerin, a transgender engineer from South Royalton.

Kerin attributes her loss to being "outspent and shunned by the media."

"The results are very disheartening because conservatives did not turn out," she said. "I thought a primary was a good thing because it brought early attention to the party. That was an opportunity that seems to have gone awry because the rhetoric coming from all parties is very much the same."

Bill Meub now faces incumbent U.S. Rep. Bernie Sanders (I), a longtime supporter of the gay and lesbian community (see related story on page 3).

Saying he is not an anti-gay verbal

"basher," Meub believes gay and lesbian Vermonters should support his candidacy. "Prejudice and discrimination against the GLBT community is wrong," he said.

In the race for Governor, Republican Treasurer James Douglas, Independent Con Hogan, and Democrat Lt. Governor Douglas Racine will face off on November 5.

While Douglas, Hogan and Racine all say they would appoint openly gay men and lesbians to state commissions, and/or their Cabinet, they differ on the future of Vermont's landmark civil union law.

Both Douglas and Hogan are open to expanding Vermont's civil union law to include other types of families including "spinster aunts." This move is seen by many members of Vermont's gay community see as an attempt to undermine the significance of the landmark law.

"I would be amenable to considering legal recognition of other types of loving family relationships," Douglas said. "There has been discussion of family members having various types of benefits that might be helpful and I'm certainly willing to consider those." Hogan agrees with Douglas but doesn't feel now is the time to revisit law. "I think there will come a day when people will examine what has been created and say simply that these privileges and opportunities should be available to others who live together for other kinds of reasons," he said.

For his part, Douglas Racine says he would leave the civil union law alone. "I'd leave it the way it is," he said. "It is a good law and those who are affected by it are happy with it and people who aren't directly affected, I think, are becoming more accepting of it." continued on page 13

VT CARES Continues Needle Exchange Despite Opposition

BY STACEY HORN

Vermont Cares Director Kendall Farrell, responding to the opposition of the St. Johnsbury Selectboard to its needle exchange program, said that the needle exchange program would continue until the Department of Health completes its review. Complicating that picture is a report in the *Caledonian Record* that the Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital Board of Trustees may consider evicting the program.

The selectboard is requesting that the DOH rescind the organization's permit to run its needle exchange program in St. Johnsbury, saying the group had violated the Department's guideline

requiring a showing of "cooperation" from the community in which an exchange program would be located.

"There are a couple of issues that the selectboard has with the program," said Farrell. "There's a discrepancy about whether we contacted local government. But Vermont CARES has really put forth an effort to participate in a process with members of the community. We are and have been willing to meet with whoever we need to meet with, go where we need to go."

Farrell said the St. Johnsbury needle exchange program has been operating over a month. "A majority of the folks we've come into contact with - from the selectboard and at a forum in the community - have been in favor



of the program," Farrell said. "When only a handful of people show up at the widely publicized forum we held in the community, you have to assume that there's some support. There are a few loud voices in opposition," Farrell con-

tinued. "We didn't expect to have consensus on a program as controversial as this."

One question the CARES director said needed to be answered was whether a vote by any local selectboard could supercede the law allowing establishment of the needle exchange programs under the auspices of the Department of Health. "Nowhere in the guidelines does it say the programs have to have a yay vote from the selectboard of the community," Farrell pointed out.

"Right now, we're focusing our energies on continuing the programming and serving folks who need our help," Farrell concluded. "Our mission is to stop the spread of HIV, and

because it involves sex and drugs, it's controversial. We're an easy target, something tangible they can latch onto. Our job is not to weigh the moral implications, we're not here to judge people's behaviors, but to give people the tools to stop the spread of the virus."

Vermont CARES will continue to work with the DOH, looking to them for guidance on how to proceed. Farrell noted that needle exchange programs have been going on in Burlington and Brattleboro for over a year, without official objections or appeals to the Department of Health. The lack of prior appeals means the procedure is untested and could, potentially, end up in court. ▼

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