

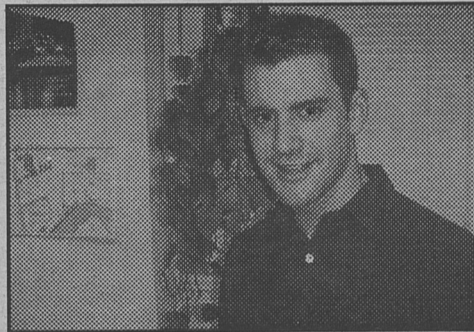
Gays for Dean **1**

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the story of meeting an 80-year-old veteran in South Carolina who told him about being gay in the military. The experience changed Dean's perception of gays and lesbians in the military and also his perception about the South," related Cooper.

"I asked him if he had had any similar situations in his life that informed his understanding of TG [transgender] issues and, if not, how he came to his position on TG equality."

Dean, wrote Cooper in an email, told of an encounter with transgender health issues when a personnel manager asked Dean "whether or not their health insurance was going to cover sex-change operations, etc. He said, 'Well ... I dunno ... I have to sit and think about that one. But I can't imagine that it's a question that comes up very often.' The manager said, 'You'd better think quick because we had 3 requests just last year.'" The incident

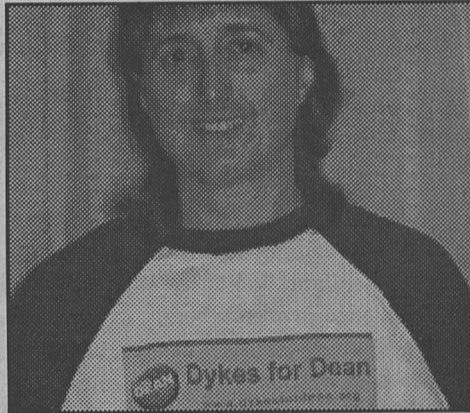


Chris Cooper of OutforDean.com (L) and Jan Cadoret of Dykes for Dean (R)

happened early in Dean's governorship.

"Then he articulated his vision for a world where TG is recognized the same as any other gender. He articulated his position about TG equality and how he would fight for insurance coverage of sex-change operations, etc.," Cooper concluded.

Asked whether he thought gays and lesbians nationally are ready for a serious back-



lash, especially on gay marriage, Cooper declared, "We can win by telling our own stories. The Republican Party and the press identify the issue as gay marriage, when it's really about lgbt equality. We need to package it in terms of the ability of an lgbt partner to visit the hospital, in terms of real people, real issues. It's our responsibility to make the distinction between 'marriage' and 'equality.'"

Cadoret wrote in an email, "Gay and lesbian Americans may not have much choice as to whether they can endure [a potentially dirty] campaign, since the right wing is already gearing up to make gay rights a main divisive issue. I think that the backlash will happen anyway because most of the Democratic candidates are supportive of gay rights. Since Gov. Dean already knows, from his Vermont experience, what right wing opponents are capable of, he may be able to handle it best."

"On Don't Ask/Don't Tell, employment equality, hate crime, hospital visitation — on every issue the polling breaks our way. Except for gay marriage," Cooper said. And as for the common wisdom that Dean's support for lgbt rights makes him unpalatable in the South, Cooper pointed out, "The only Southern state we have to win is Florida, and the vote there will be under more scrutiny" in the upcoming election because of the debacle of the 2000 election. "But we've gotta win by a lot." ▼

Polish Visitor Asks About Queer Rights

Waldemar Rataj is a slightly built man, especially standing next to Nick Korzistka, his tall, solidly built translator. He is also Vice President of the Scientific Society, touring the United States on behalf of the Institute for Civil Society, Pro Publico Bono, shepherded through Vermont by the Vermont Council on World Affairs. He can ordinarily be found in Krakow, Poland. But on October 10, he is at the R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center, wanting to hear about lesbian and gay rights and programs in Vermont.

The conversation goes quickly,

Korzistka providing verbatim simultaneous translation, occasionally interrupting himself for clarification. R.U.1.2? Executive Director Christopher Kaufman outlines the center's five-year history and programs, ranging from an archive project specific to Vermont's rural gays and lesbians to the Diversity Health Project directory of lgbt-friendly health practitioners, from the Queer Summits to the Stonewall-Juneteenth celebration this year. The significance of the Stonewall Rebellion is one of those interruptions for clarification, and Kaufman explains Juneteenth, as well.

The questions are few and direct: "We met yesterday with the [Vermont] Attorney General and the Human Rights Commission and they say they are doing all these education programs in schools. Are they? What is your opinion?"

Kaufman agrees that there are some pro-diversity, anti-harassment programs in schools, and that state law mandates that schools be a safe space for every Vermont student. But, he adds, many of those programs exist only on paper because the funds either were never appropriated or were cut. He also mentions political pressure involved in diverting funds, citing the decision by the Education Department to stop reimbursing Outright Vermont for its workshops in schools during the backlash against civil unions.

Kaufman also describes the work of the Vermont Anti-Racism Action Team in schools, leading into an explanation that much of the anti-discrimination work for the lgbt community — and for African Americans — is done by volunteers, not paid staff members.

Asked what he will use the information for, Rataj says he is "gathering general information on human rights, what are the most important issues, where are there problems. Finding out what problems there are with public organizations, this information supplements what we hear from the official [state-funded] organizations."

Rataj asks whether discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people is widespread among many parts of society. Kaufman's answer is yes: in housing, employment, health care, and public accommodation, despite the existence of state laws making such discrimination illegal.

Kaufman is quick to add that there has been progress, and that access to culturally competent health care of the lgbt community is improving. He mentions the Diversity Health

Project's upcoming pilot program of practitioner training. Rataj's translator asks whether R.U.1.2? does any legal work, and Kaufman clarifies R.U.1.2?'s role as a referral source, pointing community members to agencies like SafeSpace and the Boston-based GLAD for legal and advocacy services related to discrimination.

Rataj, a consultant to the human rights ombudsman in Poland, was hosted by Radha Tereska Buko of the Vermont Council on World Affairs. He got here by being recommended by the U.S. Ambassador to Poland to the State Department for a U.S. tour invitation. The State Department's Bureau for International Visitors makes the invitation to the individual, then canvasses select states to take on hosting the visitor and creating a program of special interest, according to Buko.

"We get a share of these visitors, and someone like me as a volunteer offers to create the visiting program," Buko explained in an email after the visit. "I'm given a theme or topic, and I then set up appropriate meetings with government and non-government agencies."

The theme for Mr. Rataj was human and civil rights and how different agencies work together to improve and uphold them. Rataj, wrote Buko, "was also interested in the Freedom of Information Act, though I wasn't specifically asked to cover that. It was my choice to include R.U.1.2?."

Buko, who has traveled in Poland, said afterward that Rataj "was just interested in how human rights issues are dealt with here. There, it all comes from the state government," she said, as opposed to the grassroots.

"My best friend in Krakow is gay and he has not been allowed to be very open about that fact," she added. "I included R.U.1.2? [on the tour] because we had gotten the government angle, but I thought no one would have spoken much about gender rights." ▼



About 60 LGBT Democrats partied and talked politics in mid-October, gathering at the Richmond home of former Vermont Democratic Party organizer Marty Rouse. The attendees came from nine of Vermont's 14 counties: Windsor, Rutland, Addison, Orange, Chittenden, Washington, Caledonia, Lamoille, and Franklin. One possibility under consideration is forming a Vermont chapter of the National Stonewall Democrats.