

# OUT IN THE MOUNTAINS

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## OUR KIND OF MAYOR

**P**lattsburgh Mayor Dan Stewart first came to elected office in 1993, capturing a seat on the City Council. In 2000, he defeated long-term incumbent Mayor Clyde Rabideau, making Stewart the first openly gay mayor in New York. In a brief between-meetings interview last month with *Out in the Mountains* writer Cynthia Potts, Mayor Stewart weighed in on current events.

"At first, the Constitution outlined the rights of white, property-owning males," said Dan Stewart, the Republican mayor of Plattsburgh, NY. "Then it was amended to expand those rights to white men who didn't own property. Then women got the vote. Then came civil rights – every time the Constitution has been amended, it has been for an expansion of rights, to make our society more inclusive."

At the exact moment Mayor Stewart was making his comments, protesters were gathering outside the Massachusetts State House, where legislators were considering an amendment to the State Constitution which would define marriage as consisting of one man and one woman. Many believe this to be the precursor of a national trend, spurred on by President Bush's State of the Union address.

"This will be the first negative amendment to the Constitution, designed to deny rights rather than expand them," Stewart

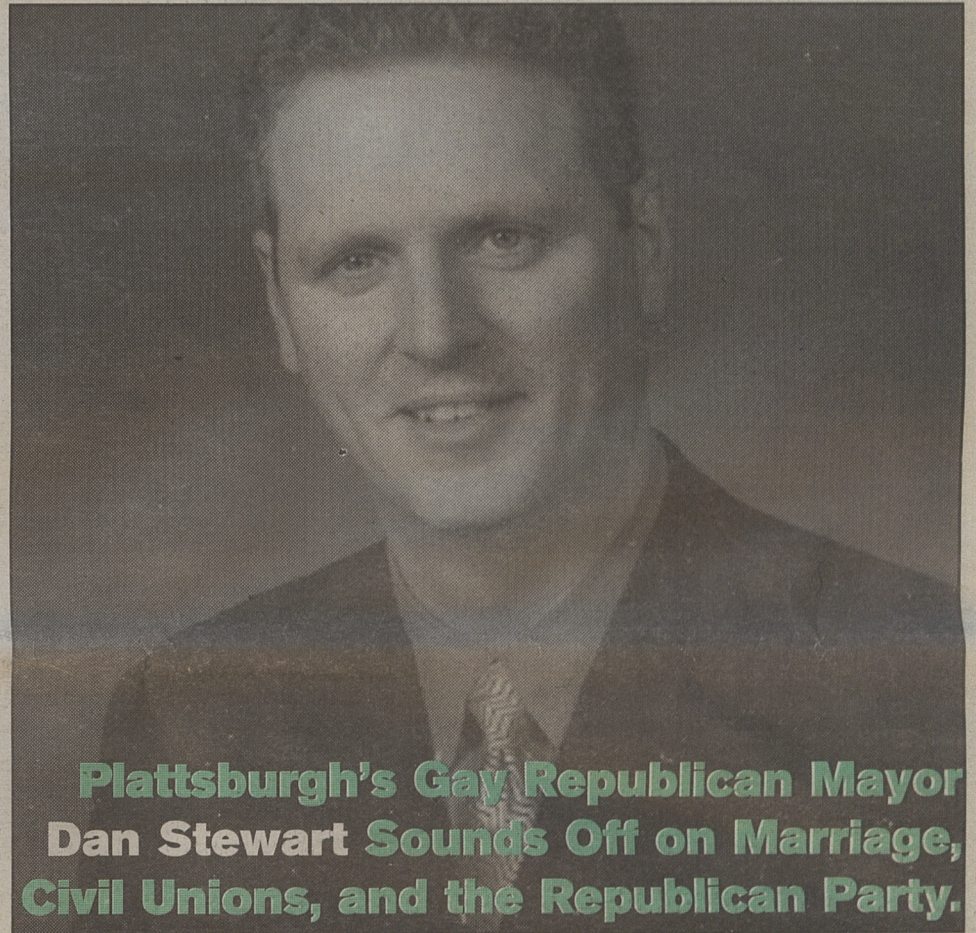
continued. "The only other time this has been tried was Prohibition. The administration needed a scapegoat. By using gay marriage as a wedge issue, it diverts attention from other serious problems."

He had been in office just six months when Stewart was one of a dozen gay and lesbian leaders invited to meet with then-presidential-candidate George W. Bush in 2000. During a four-hour meeting, Bush was quoted as saying, "We judge people based on their heart and soul. That's what the campaign is all about ... I'm mindful that we're all God's children."

Yet now, Stewart finds himself "in direct opposition to the president and the national Republican party. This [federal marriage amendment] policy is one of open, blatant discrimination."

"All this to protect marriage," Stewart said, with a bitter chuckle. "Many, many of the people in the House and Senate who will vote on this legislation have been divorced. Many more of those who will be casting their opinions on this issue have been divorced. The same people who are so determined to 'protect' marriage as an institution have played a very large part in making it a dysfunctional institution."

Contacted by phone, Stewart's long-time partner, Jon Recor, agreed. "They cont'd on p. 28



**Plattsburgh's Gay Republican Mayor Dan Stewart Sounds Off on Marriage, Civil Unions, and the Republican Party.**

## Dodging Bullets, Breaking Laws: Marriage Equality Marches On

BY MARGARET PORTER

**W**hether we're for or against marriage as an institution, whether we lgbs assimilate, ignore or rebel, there's no getting past the fact that equal marriage rights for same-sex couples has become a defining issue for the first decade of the new century. Here's the score: San Francisco has issued thousands of licenses, Massachusetts is a draw, and Ohio

is a total loss as the governor signed a rabidly anti-gay measure into law.

Last month, MassEquality.org and other pro-marriage equality organizations achieved a measure of victory when the Massachusetts legislature adjourned its two-day constitutional convention without passing any of several amendments excluding same-gender couples from the right to marry. The legislature reconvenes the session this

month – March 11 – to try again.

And in what amounts to an act of civil disobedience, San Francisco's recently elected mayor Gavin Newsom directed county clerks to issue marriage licenses to same-gender couples on Lincoln's birthday, February 12. The first couple married were lesbian activist icons Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, who have been together 51 years. They were married two days before their anniversary.

"Phyllis and I demonstrated our commitment to one another more than half a century ago," said Martin. "Today, San Francisco has demonstrated its commitment to us through equality and fairness."

On that first day, 95 marriage licenses were issued, according to news reports, with no publicity but increasing word of mouth and eventual news reports. Some couples had arrived expecting the repeat of an annual demon-

stration, requesting licenses and being denied. Other couples dropped everything to rush down to City Hall, pay their \$82, and be married. Lines extended the length of the hallways, out the doors and down the steps. On the second day, same-gender couples from across the state began arriving. In the following days couples arrived from around the country, as opposing court action was held off for more than a week. cont'd on p. 8

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