

Clavelle Launches Gubernatorial Bid

BY PAUL OLSEN

Burlington Mayor Peter Clavelle came across the river to his boyhood home to announce his plan to unseat incumbent Republican Governor James Douglas in November. In a speech to a group of 500 supporters in Winooski's Champlain Mill, Clavelle said the race is about either letting "a Republican minority become entrenched in Montpelier or electing a government that truly represents all of us."

Clavelle, 54, is currently serving his seventh term as mayor of Vermont's largest city. He was first elected in 1989 as an Independent. After joining Burlington's left-leaning Progressive Party, he was reelected in 1991. His 1993 mayoral defeat is attributed, in part, to his support for the extension of domestic partner benefits to city employees. After a 2-year hiatus, Burlington voters returned him to office.

Prior to announcing his candidacy for governor, Clavelle joined the Democratic Party. His campaign web site calls for "bold leadership, a clear vision, and a commitment to make government work for ordinary citizens." His priorities include health care for all Vermonters, a sustainable economy, a rational energy policy, and a healthy environment.

At his campaign announcement speech, Clavelle said Vermont is a wonderful state that can do better. "With this goal of making this state better for us and our neighbors today, and for our children and grandchildren tomorrow that I announce, here in Winooski, that I am running to become Vermont's next governor," he said to spirited applause. "What I have done in my 30 years of public service is committed myself to building stronger communities, stronger communities where everyone has the chance to build a better life for them and for their family. Together we have made a dramatic difference in the life of the people of the city of Burlington."

In an interview with *OITM*, Clavelle said he hopes to earn the support of gay and lesbian Vermonters. "I will bring a record of 30 years of experience to the governor's office, a vision for Vermont that I think is lacking today, and a proven record of addressing and taking on the issues that are important to Vermont's glbt community," he said. "Protecting workers' rights, creating jobs with livable wages, affordable housing, protecting the environment, and standing up for civil rights for all of us."

When questioned on specific issues currently facing the Vermont legislature, Clavelle said he supports strengthening the state's anti-harassment laws in schools, supports the use of marijuana for medical purposes, and opposes discrimination on the basis of gender identity. "I'm not familiar with that particular bill but certainly every Vermonter should be protected from discrimination," he said.

Clavelle supports Vermont's civil union law and opposes the Federal Marriage

Amendment which would make gay marriages illegal nationwide. "I am opposed to the effort of the Bush administration to amend the (U.S.) Constitution," he said. Clavelle also opposes a similar amendment to the Vermont Constitution.

The mayor's campaign strategy seems to be aimed at aligning first-term Gov. James Douglas (R) with President George W. Bush. "Our current Governor leads George Bush's reelection effort in Vermont," Clavelle said in his campaign announcement speech. "Our current Governor is long on rhetoric and short on action, action that will really help Vermonters. Vermont must do better. As Governor, I will not be the cheerleader for George W. Bush." ▼

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Lieut. Governor Campaign Heats Up

Former state Senator Cheryl Rivers, a Democrat, formally announced her candidacy for lieutenant governor as we were going to press. Rivers has been endorsed by openly gay state Representative Bill Lippert (D-Hinesburg). Rivers was in the Senate for 11 years, and was the first woman elected to the Senate from Windham County.

Former state Sen. Jan Backus also has been running since last October, although she has not yet held a formal campaign kickoff party. Backus is working with Orange County Democratic Party activist Linda Weiss, who engineered state Sen. Mark McDonald's return to office two years after he was defeated following his vote to support civil unions. Backus served in the state Senate for a decade and has run two statewide campaigns for U.S. Senate, in 1994 and 2000.

Both women are focused on health

care issues and on defeating current Lt. Governor Brian Dubie, citing his opposition to civil unions and women's right to choose abortion, and his support for school vouchers. At a campaign appearance in Franklin County, Backus asked rhetorically whether Vermonters wanted a man with those beliefs to be casting tie-breaking votes in the Senate. However, with the Senate currently split 19 Democrats to 11 Republicans, tie-breakers appear unlikely, at least this session.

The campaign buzz suggests that Rep. Steve Hingten (P-Burlington) is joining the field of lieutenant gubernatorial candidates, and Progressive Anthony Pollina's plans are still a question mark. The Progressives say they offer an alternative to politics as usual under the Democrats and Republicans, while Democrats point to the splitting of votes between Democratic and Progressive Party

candidates as responsible for the election of Dubie and Republican Governor James Douglas.

Other Campaign Notes

And in a long-awaited announcement, former Governor Howard Dean put an end to his active campaign for the Democratic Party nomination for president of the United States. The now former candidate thanked his many supporters, celebrated his campaign's success in restoring a backbone and a sense of mission to the national Democratic Party, and vowed to keep presenting issues. Dean declined to endorse any other candidate for the moment, declared he would not run as a third-party or independent candidate, and urged his supporters not to vote for any third-party candidate.

Meanwhile, the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force has apparently begun its

campaign to replace civil unions with equal marriage (see Sherry Corbin's opinion piece in this month's Views section). As we reported last month, state Rep. David Zuckerman (P-Burlington) introduced a bill that would allow marriage licenses to be issued to same-sex couples. Couples with civil unions could convert their status to marriage by filling out an application. The bill is not expected to be discussed this session.

In poll results announced last month by the Human Rights Campaign, 87 percent of the glbt respondents were registered voters, and about three-quarters voted in the last election, with 81 percent voting in the last presidential election. We're here, we're queer, and we're going to the voting booth.

Stay tuned. It's going to be a long and bumpy ride. ▼

NGLTF to Honor Gay Bishop

On March 15, in New York City, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force will honor V. Gene Robinson, the first openly gay man to be named a bishop in the Anglican Communion, at the organization's 15th Annual Leadership Awards. The event will be held at New York University School of Law and will be the first time Bishop Robinson has been honored since his consecration in November.

"Bishop Robinson's courage, compassion and quiet perseverance in the face of vilification by his opponents worldwide and

threats of violence against him has been an inspiration to us all," said Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman. "We are incredibly proud that he is honoring us with his presence."

Bishop Robinson said, "I am deeply honored to be recognized by one of the preeminent social justice groups working for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights. I look forward to celebrating with those at the Task Force Leadership Awards event the many advances achieved on so many fronts."

Bishop Robinson's consecration

attracted worldwide attention, with some leaders of the Anglican Communion moving to sever relations with the Episcopal Church of the United States. Right wing "family" organizations have joined in the chorus of denunciation. In the weeks leading up to his consecration, Robinson was deluged with hate mail and, following threats on his life, was placed under round-the-clock FBI protection. In the face of all of this, Bishop Robinson has repeatedly called for understanding, love and dialogue with his detractors. At his consecration, for example, he said, "There are faithful,

wonderful Christian people for whom this is a moment of great pain and confusion and anger."

The Task Force Leadership Awards pay tribute to community leaders and allies who help pave the way for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality, freedom and justice. Past award recipients include Coretta Scott King; then-South African Pres. Nelson Mandela; Senator Ted Kennedy; and Kelli & Rosie O'Donnell. Comedian Kate Clinton will serve as Emcee for the evening. ▼