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# Views: Storming the Statehouse

**O**n January 30th four youth arrived in Burlington in the gray hours of the morning, ready for coffee, but also ready to "storm the Statehouse." We piled into a car and drove to Montpelier as we talked about what we were going to do when we got there. It sounded pretty simple - go to the Statehouse, set up our trusty Outright Vermont display, and chat it up with the legislators. Our goal was simple: be visible.

When we arrived at the Statehouse (after a stop for bagels and another for coffee) we walked to the Card Room - a small nook near the cafeteria. There, we joined the ranks of a couple other organizations with their own displays. Once we were set up and had gotten a little more coffee, we grabbed some brochures and introduced ourselves to the legislators in the hallway. Their responses were surprisingly supportive. Legislators seemed very willing to talk with us and put up with our unseasoned introductions. The legislators from our own towns received us especially well. They told us to call them with any concerns in the future.

Everybody we talked to received an Outright brochure and we told them why it is an important organization for us. About half of the legislators knew about Outright and the other half seemed interested in learning about it. We didn't encounter anyone who seemed disinterested or set back by us.

At 9:30 the visiting organizations entered the House Chamber and sat in the plush red seats facing the House. After many other introductions and some announcements (including a birthday poem from one member to another), Representative Bill Lippert (D-Hinesburg) introduced us as "members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community." We stood up and received applause - and a couple strange looks. This meeting wasn't so exciting, but it was somewhat interesting to see the process the House goes through every morning.

After that exhilarating meeting, the queer organizations went to the Ethan Allen Room to meet with Rep. Lippert. This was the most interesting part of the day. Rep. Lippert talked about how important it is to get the queer voice out there, and to really get involved in the democratic process. He stressed the importance of getting youth involved and excited about their future voting abilities. We



**lauren  
parker**

were told about ways to get heard that don't require voting. We received information about writing a good letter and making a good phone call to a government official, which was definitely helpful. I've become reliant on the pre-written letters sent from email activism organizations, and I was very glad to learn how to write an effective letter for myself.

In this meeting we also

for about an hour, and the representatives had only discussed about three word changes by the time we left. These changes were necessary to the effectiveness of the bill. For example in one section the word "student" used in the description of what harassment is (unlawful discrimination "based on or motivated by a student's...race, creed, color," etc.). The word had already been changed from "person," but the debate at the meeting was, "What if the student is harassed because of his parent's creed, race, color, etc.? What word will cover the student, the parents, and the friends without being too general like the word 'person'?" The conversation was still continuing when we left.

This was an inspiring day I had never been to the Statehouse before, so just being in that atmosphere was cool in itself. Besides the conversations with legislators, meetings, the ability to be completely

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looked at a new harassment bill and a bill that "proposes to add gender identity to the list of protected classes in various statutes." I had never seen a bill before and didn't realize how much detail and editing is put into one. We learned about this in the Judiciary Committee meeting we attended.

The Judiciary Committee meeting to discuss the harassment bill was ... long ... but it was interesting to see all the work that goes into writing a bill. We sat in on the meeting

visible and out in a governmental arena, and seeing legislators wearing upside down pink triangle stickers in support of queers made it a great education and an awesome day. ▼

*Lauren Parker is a junior at Champlain Valley Union High School in Hinesburg.*