

# Mayor

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talk about the sanctity of marriage, but Brittany Spears can get married over a weekend as a joke, and that's OK? I just don't understand that."

The couple recently attended a Human Rights Campaign event honoring gay media figures, including *The Advocate* magazine. "Rosie O'Donnell was there," Stewart smiled. "And Hillary Clinton. Jon is a huge fan of Hillary."

"I like to call her my new best friend, since I've met her now," Recor laughed. "But even though I've never been an issue person, this event amazed me because it showed me the civil rights that we don't have."

Citing issues of survivorship, social security and taxation, Stewart said, "In six months, I've changed my position on civil unions. I used to be for them, but now I can see that there is no equality under civil unions."

"It amazes me that I have to pay taxes on things that I'm not eligible for," Recor added. "This is the civil rights fight of my generation. If I can't get married, what next? Do you want me to sit on the back of the bus?"

"This issue is speaking to the heart of gay America," Stewart rejoined. "We're on the cutting edge of history. If we don't go for full equality, if we accept second-class status, then we're going contra to the women's movement, contra to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and contra to all the progress that was made in the civil rights movement. They did not accept delaying rights and freedoms, and neither should we."

Despite advocacy by Empire State Pride Agenda and Log Cabin Republicans for an incremental approach to gay marriage, Stewart does not see a civil union in his future. "We love each other very much, and I hope we get married. When it's time, we'll know." He paused and smiled. "Peter [Clavelle] offered to officiate—even if it's in the middle of his campaign. But I think we'll go to Massachusetts" to get married.

Asked about the upcoming gubernatorial race in Vermont, Stewart replied, "I think I'll be keeping my nose out of this one. I've supported Peter, I've supported Jim Douglas." As to murmurs that he would be joining with Providence, Rhode Island's

out gay Mayor David Cicilline to endorse Clavelle, Stewart claims no knowledge.

In a 2000 interview, Stewart said, "The important issues of lesbian and gay people in 'real America' are the same issues facing straight people—things like jobs, taxes, crime, activities for young people." His administration has focused on economic development, with major projects, including a revitalization of Plattsburgh's historic downtown, well underway. But that doesn't mean gay community issues have fallen by the wayside.

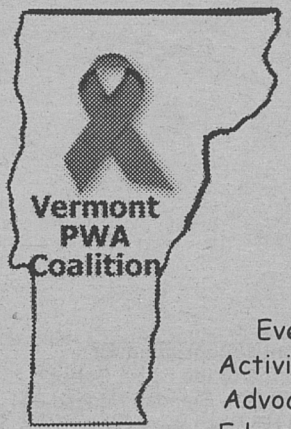
With a gay population of slightly less than 10 percent, Plattsburgh was one of the first cities to pass domestic partnership benefits. Although groundbreaking, that legislation was fairly limited, applicable only to couples with mutually adopted children. "That sort of left gay people out of the loop," Stewart explained. "Since then, we've passed hate crime legislation, worked on sexual orientation non-discrimination legislation...in many cases, federal law has over-ridden our local laws."

Stewart feels that his tenure as Mayor has had a positive impact upon the local gay community.

"Undoubtedly, many people who thought they'd never known

a gay man now have met one. Many people who never thought they'd vote for a gay candidate have voted for me. I'd like to think that a lot of preconceived notions have been changed." He concluded, "And now, gay kids can see that they can make a change, that they can achieve anything. That's the most important thing I've done." ▼

*Cynthia Potts lives with her family and an ever-growing collection of animals in Plattsburgh, NY. She welcomes reader comments and can be reached at ctpotts@juno.com*



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