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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of Out In The Mountains (OITM) is to serve as a voice for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, and our supporters in Vermont. We wish the newspaper to be a source of information, insight, and affirmation. We also see OITM as a vehicle for the celebration of the culture and diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities here in Vermont and elsewhere.

Editorial Policy

We will consider for publication any material that broadens our understanding of our lifestyles and of each other. Views and opinions appearing in the paper do not necessarily represent those of Out In The Mountains. This paper, as a non-profit organization, cannot and will not endorse any political candidates. We reserve the right not to publish any material deemed to be overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist, classist, xenophobic, or homophobic.

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guest editorial

Marriage: How Do We Get There From Here?

The Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force has argued persuasively in its three-part series that we must continue to work toward full equality – marriage rights – for glb Vermonters. So, how do we get there from here? It's an ongoing discussion, and our own thinking, as well as that of other leaders in the Vermont freedom to marry movement, will no doubt continue to evolve. We welcome your input. For what it's worth, our current view is that we need to focus our collective energies on two important goals through the coming months and, perhaps, years:

Rebuild and Retrain The Troops

We learned from Hawaii that marching into battle before the troops are trained and ready can be dangerous. As a result, our organizing in Vermont from 1995 to 2000 became a national model. For nearly two years before we filed the *Baker* case, the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force recruited volunteers, trained speakers, produced a video, sent speakers to churches and civic associations, organized regional chapters, and began quietly educating our allies in Montpelier. In December 1999, when the Vermont Supreme Court handed down its surprise mixed decision, we were ready. Although our success in the statehouse was mixed, there is no doubt that the reason we were able to accomplish as much as we did (i.e., the civil union law) was that we had taken the time to organize, train, and lay the groundwork.

We're starting a new chapter now. Vermont's a different place; people have come and gone; and the issues involved in the transition from *civil union* to marriage are different in many ways from the question of moving from *nothing* to marriage. We need to learn from our own successes and begin vigorously, but patiently, laying the groundwork (both within our community and beyond) for the next step.

The Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force, which has led the public education effort since 1995, is reinvigorated with

this goal in mind. Get involved! Get trained, come to a regional meeting, host a gathering, speak to a local organization, and keep telling your story to friends, co-workers, and neighbors.

No matter what form the next step takes – whether a lawsuit or a bill in the legislature – we know it would be a mistake to jump too soon, before we've gotten our ducks in a row. (We just can't get away from ducks – little yellow ones – when it comes to this issue ...)

Restore a Gay-Friendly Legislature

We don't need to remind anyone who was here in 2000 of the mean-spiritedness of the backlash, or the toll it took on our support in the statehouse. Anti-civil union forces staged a dramatic takeover of the House in November, 2000. As a result, we spent much of 2001 working hard in the Legislature to hang on to the civil union law.

Freedom to marry boosters worked incredibly hard in the 2002 campaign, and helped restore the Senate firmly to friendly hands. We played a role in turning the tide in the House as well, yielding a House that was nearly evenly divided between civil union foes and supporters (though still controlled by foes).

The 2004 election will be vital. We have a shot at returning Vermont's House to supportive hands, hanging on to the Senate, and electing a Governor and Lieutenant Governor more deeply committed to our rights. Does this mean that if we can just win back a few more seats in the Legislature, we'll quickly get marriage? Probably not. We're still far from a pro-marriage majority in the House, and probably in the Senate, though the national tide is turning.

But the 2004 election is vital for several reasons: First, all five Vermont Supreme Court justices face retention hearings in 2005. It is absolutely essential, both for us here in Vermont and for the movement nationally, that these justices remain secure

in their jobs after their groundbreaking, albeit quite conservative, *Baker* decision. Justices in Oregon, Washington, California, New York, and New Jersey will be watching closely (there are marriage cases pending in all of these states). Our own ability to rely on the Court in the future to correctly answer the question it left open in *Baker* (Do same-sex couples have a constitutional right to a marriage license, in addition to the other tangible benefits of marriage?) depends in part on the confidence of the justices that they can safely do the right thing.

Second, the possibility of a federal constitutional amendment that would prohibit states from recognizing same-sex marriages, as well as civil unions and domestic partnerships, is very real. We might find ourselves in a ratification struggle here in Vermont. We need to build the strongest political position possible in the event that happens.

Third, when the time comes – when the grassroots is organized, trained, and ready, when we've engaged our friends, neighbors and coworkers, and when it's time to press the issue in the courts or in the legislature – we know it will be vital to have as supportive a legislature as possible.

As November approaches, volunteer for the best possible candidates in your district, or contact Vermont Fund for Families www.vermontfundforfamilies.org, to figure out how you can help.

Beth
Susan Murray

Beth Robinson and Susan Murray

Beth Robinson and Susan Murray co-founded the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force in 1995, represented the plaintiffs in Baker v. State, led the lobbying effort that culminated in the passage of the civil union law, and ran two political action committees dedicated to electing supportive candidates.