

BY EUAN BEAR

Depending on the outcome of the November elections, the gay caucus in the Vermont House of Representatives could double. Jason Lorber, a Democrat running for the Burlington seat vacated by Progressive Steve Hingten (running for lieutenant governor), and Steve Howard, a Democrat running from Rutland, would join incumbent Democrats Bill Lippert of Hinesburg and Robert Dostis of Waterbury, assuming they are re-elected.

In Vermont the entire legislature and all holders of statewide office face re-election every two years.

A consultant for nonprofit organizations, particularly in healthcare, Lorber is also a stand-up comedian. He moved to Vermont from California two years ago. His partner, Nathaniel Lew, is a professor at St. Michael's College.

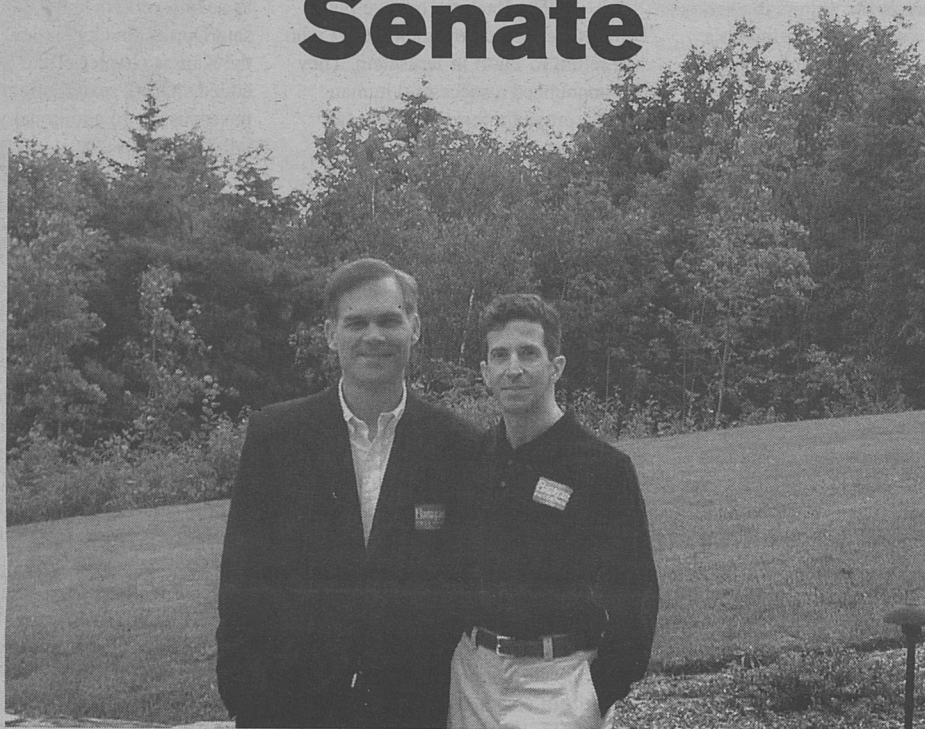
Lorber and incumbent Democrat John Tracy face two Progressive opponents in the two-seat Chittenden 3-3 district: Barbara Nolfi, a long-time resident and activist and former four-term member of the Burlington City Council, and Beckie Taylor, a relative newcomer to Burlington, having moved here four years ago. No Republicans are running in the district.

He cites health care as his primary issue. "Healthcare comes up over and over in conversations door to door," Lorber said. "People in this district talk about how they have to choose between having healthcare or buying groceries. The first step is to acknowledge the value of having everyone insured for healthcare. My background is in working with national, statewide, regional and local organizations on healthcare issues."

Incumbent Democratic Rep. Bill Lippert, faces Republican Margery Sharpe, also of Hinesburg. Lippert is a veteran of four-plus terms in the House, first appointed in 1994 by then-Governor Howard Dean, and re-elected in his own right. Sharpe has been active locally in Hinesburg with the Lions Club and the Farmers' Market.

Lippert said he feels he has a strong record to run on. Looking ahead, he wants to

Gay Men Run For VT House and Senate



Democratic state Senate candidate Ed Flanagan (left) with his partner Issac Lustgarten. Flanagan could be VT's first gay state Senator.

work on issues of mental health, substance abuse, healthcare, and HIV/AIDS. "I've spent a great deal of time and energy fighting for [equal] marriage and against harassment. I will be redirecting some of my attention toward healthcare issues." He cited the "deteriorating" system of substance abuse and accessible mental health services and characterized the de-certification of the State Hospital in Waterbury as "emblematic" of a broken system.

Incumbent Democrat Robert Dostis lives in Waterbury and represents a district that straddles the Washington and Chittenden County line, including Huntington, Waterbury, Duxbury, and Buel's Gore. The two-term representative has been campaigning almost since

the moment the legislature adjourned, going door to door in his wide-spread and mountainous district.

When he's not in the legislature, he is director of the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger, a position he has held for 5 years. He connects particularly strongly to youth and childhood issues, having spent time in his own childhood in the fostercare system. Dostis is one of only two legislators nationwide who is a nutritionist, which gives him a unique perspective on health issues.

The issue he hears repeatedly in his door-to-door campaigning is early education and affordable childcare. His record in the last session of the legislature was established in the

Commerce Committee, where he was vice chair. "We have focused on the environment, responsible development – not sprawl – concentrated in village centers. What we need is renewable energy, windpower, conservation."

Steve Howard, a former Democratic member of the Vermont House, has been a tenant organizer in Rutland, and was working on highway safety issues nationally. His primary campaign issues are economic reform for the middle class and universal healthcare. "It is unfair to employers to have to bear expense of healthcare," Howard said. He has been campaigning door to door since June and says he's finding and registering lots of previously uninvolved citizens.

In the Senate

Former state auditor Ed Flanagan hopes to become Vermont's first openly gay Senator. If he succeeds, it would not be his first groundbreaking office. When he was auditor, he was the country's first openly gay state elected official. Flanagan was elected auditor in 1992, came out publicly in 1995, and continued to hold the office until he left to run against then-Republican U.S. Senator James Jeffords in 2000 and was defeated in a lopsided vote. In 2002, Flanagan ran for state treasurer against fellow Democrat and former state Senator Jeb Spaulding, who won both the primary and the election. Since then Flanagan has been practicing law.

Flanagan is one of a six-member Democratic slate facing four Republicans for six Senate seats from Chittenden County. Flanagan's recent experience with nursing homes – his mother was a resident while healing from injuries suffered in a car accident last year – has led him to embrace elder and health care as significant issues. In a spring letter to friends and supporters, he cited drug and insurance costs, support for small business, and livable wages as among his concerns.

While campaigning this fall, Flanagan will also be teaching students at Champlain College in a course called "Social Injustice in a Diverse Society." The course, which examines prejudice against marginalized groups, was set up before the former auditor knew he would be running for office. ▼

Legal Eagle?

The only other LGBT candidate we could identify as running for major office is Republican Karen Kerin, running in a three-way primary for attorney general. She faces Republicans Dennis Carver and Marianne Kennedy. The general election in November will also be a three-way race, between

incumbent Democrat William Sorrell, Progressive Boots Wardinski, and the successful Republican candidate. Kerin has identified as a transwoman, not through choice but because of medically necessary treatments related to cancer. Within the last ten years, she, earned a Master's in

Environmental Law and a Juris Doctor degree at Vermont Law School, followed by a summer course at Pepperdine in dispute resolution, and an LLM (Legum Magister) in human rights and international law from the University of Nottingham, England. Her legal experience includes a clerkship with the Rutland Public Defender and consultancies in treaty law. According to her website, Kerin's campaign is based on protecting from encroachment the liberties and rights

built into the U.S. and Vermont constitutions: "I will assign staff attorneys to represent the people in cases where liberty interests are threatened in the courts ... to review proposed legislation to ensure that liberties are not statutorily infringed ... [and] to review existing statutes, rules and regulations to provide the legislature and the administration with suggestions to restore liberties, where they have been diminished."

At 60 years of age, she

writes on her website, "I am old enough to know something and young enough to do something about the threats to liberty."

To read more, go to www.kerin04.us. Only Kennedy is listed as an announced candidate for attorney general on the official party website (www.vtgop.org), and her campaign treasurer is listed as Walter Freed, the now-retired Speaker of the House. Carver confirmed by phone that he is still a candidate. ▼