

Against the Tide

Vermont's GLBT Community Wins and Loses on Election Day

BY PAUL OLSEN

Montpelier, Vt. – While the national political landscape looks bleak for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Americans after Election Day, the political picture in Vermont looks much brighter.

Come January, five openly gay men will serve in the Vermont Legislature. State Reps. Bill Lippert (D-Hinesburg) and Robert Dostis (D-Waterbury) were reelected and will be joined by Steve Howard (D-Rutland) and Jason Lorber (D-Burlington) in the House. Former state Auditor Ed Flanagan (D) made history by becoming the state's first openly gay member of the state Senate.

Flanagan was first elected state Auditor in 1992 and publicly came out as a

gay man in 1995. He made national history when, in 1996, he became the first openly gay statewide elected official in the United States. He left the Auditor's post in 2000 to run for the United States Senate.

"I am proud to be Vermont's first openly gay state senator, but I must say that it never came up in the campaign," Flanagan told *OITM*. "My agenda is really to be as good a Senator as I can. I am going down there (Montpelier) to address the issues that I talked about – health care, our economy, and our schools."

In other election news, a number of antigay legislators, including state Reps. Nancy Sheltra (R-Derby), Gene Sweetser (R-Essex), Spike Robinson (R-Richmond), and Frank Mazur (R-South Burlington), were defeated on Election Day. Two founders of the antigay group Take it to the People (TIP), Republicans Craig Bensen

and Jerry Smiley, were also defeated in their bids for elective office.

Democrats increased their majority in the state Senate, 21 to 9. Overturning the civil unions backlash election results of 2000, Democrats also regained control of the House, winning 83 seats compared to 60 for Republicans. Six Progressives and one independent hold the remaining seats.

But in the race for Governor, Republican Gov. James Douglas defeated Burlington Mayor Peter Clavelle (D) 59 percent to 38 percent. Clavelle's loss is attributed to his lackluster campaign and the moderate positions staked out by Douglas. Throughout the campaign, Clavelle appeared to enjoy the support of many gay and lesbian Vermonters. His campaign spokesman, B.J. Rogers, is well known in the gay community as the former executive director of Outright Vermont, a gay youth advocacy and support group.

Vermont's representation in Washington, DC will remain gay-friendly. Incumbent U.S. Rep. Bernie Sanders defeated Greg Parke by 46 percentage points. Parke is an antigay conservative Republican who pledged to promote "conservative val-

ues and principles" including "combating the homosexual agenda."

In an interview with *OITM* at his victory party, Sanders expressed his gratitude: "I want to thank the gay and lesbian community for its support and they have my word that we're going to continue the fight for human dignity in America and oppose any constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage," he said.

The outcome of the race for the U.S. Senate also bodes well for gay and lesbian Vermonters. Pro-gay incumbent Sen. Patrick Leahy (D) defeated GOP businessman Jack McMullen 71 percent to 24 percent.

Shortly after his victory speech, Leahy told *OITM* he will continue his fight for equal rights for gay Americans. "I have always expressed tolerance in every aspect of life and that reflects how most Vermonters feel," he said. "Most Vermonters are tolerant people and they should be. We're a better state when we are." ▼

Paul Olsen, Ed.D., lives in Colchester and also writes for in.newsweekly.

Gay Mayor Re-Elected

BY CYNTHIA POTTS

Plattsburgh – Two terms filled with economic development and community-building convinced Plattsburgh voters that they wanted

incumbent Mayor Dan Stewart in office for another three years. In a landslide victory, Stewart, who ran as both a Republican and an Independent, captured 74 percent of the vote, defeating Democratic candidate Robert Hall. Final vote

counts were 4756-1688.

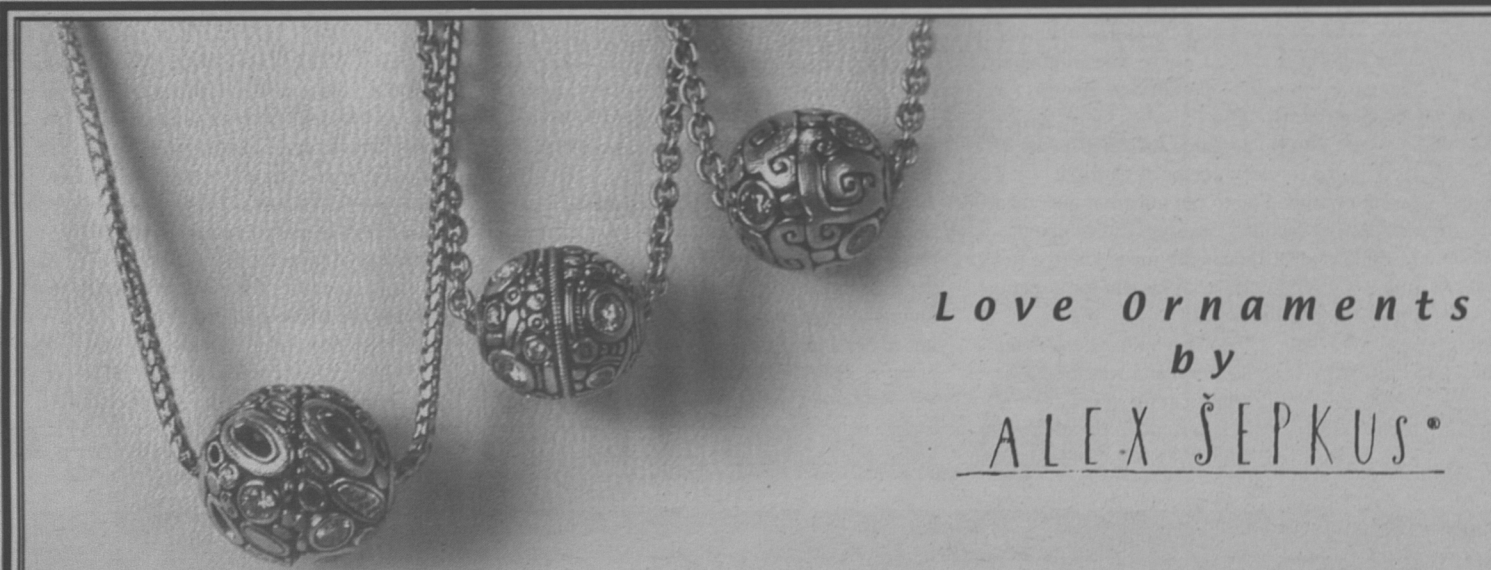
Hall, a retired businessman and bar owner, has been a candidate before, having run against incumbent Mayor Clyde Rabideau before Rabideau was defeated by Stewart.

Stewart's campaign was based on his continuing plans of transforming Plattsburgh into a des-

tinuation city. Development plans include the construction of a hotel and conference center along the city's waterfront, and the creation of an arts and cultural community. The plan includes the renovation of the historic Strand Theater on Brinkerhoff Street, and the on-going metamorphosis of the City Farmer's Market to include live entertainment

and antique and collectible vendors. Recently, Stewart has called for property taxes on the SUNY Plattsburgh campus as a way to augment city funds.

The Plattsburgh mayor has been quoted as being in firm opposition to his party's stance against gay marriage, but said he has no plans to leave the GOP. ▼



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