

news

Rouse Leaves MassEquality for HRC

BOSTON, MA/RICHMOND, VT – Political consultant and organizer Marty Rouse, a resident of Richmond, is moving on from his leadership of Boston-based MassEquality to a position as field director of the national advocacy and lobbying group Human Rights Campaign.

“The battle for our rights at the statewide level has national implications,” Rouse said in a phone interview from Boston. “HRC needs to be involved at the state level.”

MassEquality successfully defended marriage equality in the Bay State from several right wing attempts to overturn the 2003 Supreme Judicial Court marriage equality ruling by constitutionally banning same-gender marriages.

Former MassEquality Political Director Marc Solomon accepted an appointment last month by the organization’s board of directors to Rouse’s former position as Campaign Director.

When Rouse became involved, MassEquality was an all-volunteer loose coalition of grassroots organizations. Rouse and a handful of staff members turned the group into a political and fundraising powerhouse that has prevailed by dint of neighborhood organizing, recruiting candidates to oppose anti-gay incumbents, and turning out voters and volunteers to support pro-equality candidates for legislative office. The Boston-area LGBT weekly *Bay Windows* reported that the organization took in more than \$2 million in fiscal 2004.

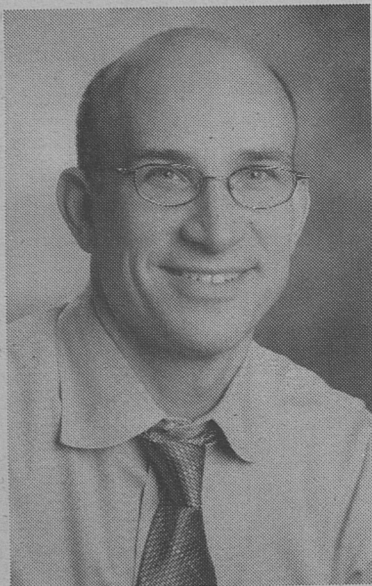
Rouse’s move to HRC is part of a change of focus for the Washington-based group away from congressional lobbying and presidential campaigns under past leadership and toward more involvement in state struggles as a way to reach members of Congress who have been less than responsive to traditional lobbying.

“ENDA [the Employment Non-Discrimination Act] won’t pass by lobbying Congresspeople on the Hill,” Rouse declared. “We can have the best lobbyists in the world, but if the legislator doesn’t hear the message from his or her constituents at home, we’re doomed.”

Rouse plans to take the model he successfully developed and

showcased in Massachusetts to HRC and make it available to targeted states.

“I want to be part of developing five- and 10-year plans, not just fighting anti-gay legislation,” Rouse said, pointing out



that responding to anti-gay measures puts LGBT voters and organizations on the defensive. He mentioned Montana as a state on the verge, where LGBT organizations can move forward. HRC President Joe Solmonese cited Wisconsin and California as states facing marriage fights, along with Washington state, which is expecting a court ruling on marriage following the heart-breaking defeat of a gay rights bill by a single vote. “We have to be smart and strategic,” Rouse said. “HRC has the responsibility to help state organizations play offense, build political power, and flex their muscles.”

Meanwhile, Massachusetts is facing yet another campaign to put a constitutional gay-marriage ban to a vote in 2008. According to press releases, the petitioning group, VoteOnMarriage.org, submitted 170,000 signatures, of which 147,000 were reportedly verified by local town clerks. The measure will reach the ballot if 50 legislators in two sequential constitutional conventions agree to support it.

Rouse, however, isn’t worried. “MassEquality has a great board, skilled and experienced lobbyists, and a professional staff. I can now move on, and the need is so urgent nationally.”

Elyse Cherry, the president of the MassEquality board of direc-

tors, values highly Rouse’s skills and contributions to the organization. “He has been both shrewd political tactician and elegant ambassador for our cause. As a central architect of our electoral strategy, Marty knew how to

campaign. Following stints in that administration in the departments of Health and Human Services and Housing and Urban Development, he returned to Vermont to help Democrats retain a majority in the state sen-

both parties, Rouse received a ringing endorsement from the Democrats. “I congratulate HRC for bringing Marty’s professionalism to the national stage. HRC has chosen an outstanding organizer,” said Democratic National

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– ORGANIZER MARTY ROUSE

focus resources and message,” she said in a press statement. “He also knew how to solidify support in the community, so that we would have the funds necessary to do our work. We are more prepared for what lies ahead because of Marty’s leadership.”

Rouse honed his organizing skills in Vermont campaigns beginning in 1996, working on the Clinton/Gore re-election

ate in the civil union backlash election of 2000. He and his partner Scott Sherman (who has written movie and television reviews for *OITM*) and son Sasha (now six) moved to Richmond in 2002. Rouse began the long commute to Boston to work with MassEquality in January 2004.

While HRC is committed to working with legislators from

Committee chairman Howard Dean in a press release. “For close to ten years, I have seen Marty’s political organizing skills firsthand in Vermont. Today, there are dozens more fair-minded legislators in Vermont because of Marty’s personal commitment to fairness, his tremendous work ethic, and his unmatched political savvy.” ▼

Equality VT Partners with Queer Center

BURLINGTON – Equality Vermont, which monitors legislation with potential impact on the state’s LGBT communities, is soon to be officially partnered with the R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center.

Both groups are currently recognized as tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organizations by the Internal Revenue Service. Under the new plan, Equality Vermont will reorganize as a 501(c)(4) political group, without tax-exempt status, associated with the tax-exempt R.U.1.2? Center.

“It’s similar to having a PAC [political action committee],” explained R.U.1.2? Director Christopher Kaufman. “I wouldn’t characterize it as a merger.”

“It’s a great fit. We’ve already been working together on Queer Summits and Queer Visibility Days at the legislature. R.U.1.2? is a strong organization,” said Equality Vermont’s

Virginia Renfrew.

The boards of the two organizations will have considerable overlap in members.

Equality Vermont recently sent out a fundraising plea for the \$500 it needs to apply for “C-4” status.

“Everyone at the Center will work for the C-4, which will bill the C-3 for 97 percent of the expenditures,” Kaufman said.

“The C-4 is intended to be low-key. We hope to do candidate forums for the mayoral elections in Burlington,” he continued. “Later on we’ll do some get-out-the-vote activities and candidate surveys with ratings based on the answers on issues important to our community. We could endorse candidates, but we’re not likely to. We expect to spend about \$2-3 thousand on C-4 activities.”

Donations to the Center will be assumed to be non-tax-deductible gifts to the C-4 group

unless they are specifically directed to the C-3 Community Center, Kaufman said. The change will not affect the Center’s ability to continue as a worksite for Americorps Vista workers like CyberCenter director Peggy Luhrs. Luhrs technically does not work for the Center, but for the City of Burlington, although Kaufman counts her as a “staff member.”

“This will broaden our reach politically and make us more effective,” Kaufman declared. He also said that the board of the C-4 group will decide which issues the group will take on. “Currently the only issue we’re working on is H.478,” the gender identity and expression bill introduced last session, he added.

Kaufman cautioned, “This does not mean we have the capacity to take on extra work.” ▼