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Photos: p.1 David Chambers; p.2 courtesy MassEquality; p. 3 Cynthia Potts; p. 14 Julien Roskam; p. 16, Gus Nasmith; p. 18 Focus Features; p. 20, top, Bold Strokes Books; bottom, Euan Bear; p. 21 left, HarperSanFrancisco, right, Thunder's Mouth Press; p. 24 FlynnSpace.

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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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editorial

Déjà Vu All Over Again

Another year, another legislative session begins. Another year, another opportunity to wonder if and when Vermont will finally go all the way to justice and inclusion for its lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens, native and flatlander alike.

There are likely to be two bills at the top of the lgbt fairness and justice agenda (we're always accused of having an agenda, so why not admit it?): H.478, the gender identity and expression nondiscrimination bill, and a yet-to-be-introduced marriage equality bill.

Anyone else getting that déjà vu feeling yet?

As readers of this paper and website know, H.478 is the third attempt in the last six or seven years to provide simple protections to one of the most blatantly discriminated-against minorities in Vermont: transgendered people. They face harassment and violence in their homes, on the street, in classrooms, and in their workplaces. They are refused routine and emergency medical care. Landlords deny them housing. Employers deny them jobs for which they are qualified because they present themselves as a different gender than their identification documents or work histories specify, or fire them when they take steps to change their physical gender.

How insecure are we in our own identities that we can't encompass or offer understanding to others different from ourselves? Passing H.478 should be (as I wrote about another such bill nearly three years ago), a no-brainer.

If Vermonters want to claim that we live in a state of fairness and justice for all, then it should no longer be legal in Vermont to discriminate against people on the basis of gender identity and expression. But it takes more than fairness and justice to pass legislation. As Jes Kraus, a transman who testified last year in support of the bill, said last month, "We can blame Bill Lippert for not moving the bill, or Jim Douglas for imposing his agenda. But in the end we have to sit down and say, 'Where do we go from here, and how do we get there?'"

How we get there is by calling our legislators, emailing them, or writing them letters. Even one constituent expressing support – or opposition – can influence a legislator's vote. That's not just an idealistic dream of democracy – it's the voice of recent direct experience and one of the reasons that I live in Vermont.

And we Ls and Gs and Bs and Qs owe our support to the Ts in our communities. They've taken the heat for us, it's time we stood up with them.

As for the marriage-equality bill, I have been assured it will be introduced early in the session. But the bill's advocates didn't want to go on the record about it in order to prevent any buzz from overshadowing the hoped-for progress of the gender identity bill.

So yes, marriage is on the agenda. And yes, we're still talking about *civil* marriage with ample provision for religious

groups to decline to participate.

And no, I'm not going to rehearse yet again all the reasons it should become law.

With marriage equality to the south in Massachusetts and to our north in Canada, there is no reason for Vermont to oppose it here. We could be part of a greenbelt of equality amid a desert of denial.

If the marriage-equality advocates really do keep their heads down until H.478 is passed out of committee, by the House as a whole, and by the Senate, their bill might not pass this session. In fact, former MassEquality campaign director Marty Rouse, who helped some legislators retain their seats in the Senate during the civil union backlash, said he thinks it won't become law in Vermont until 2009.

But it's a different Vermont now than it was six years ago. For evidence, look at the whole page of supportive letters that were printed in the *Burlington Free Press* on December 11. A month before, the daily had published a profile of gay high school sophomore Connor McFadden. When a self-identified Christian wrote in to castigate the *Free Press* for publishing the story, the response from readers was, in the editors' word, "huge," and much of it was from allies outside our communities.

That's a very different reality than in the spring of 2000,

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when an Outright Vermont volunteer wearing a security uniform came to sit outside the agency's doorway with a big dog because two men had threatened an Outright Vista worker with a gun.

We may finally have healed enough from the frightened attacks of some of our neighbors and shared enough of our lives to look up again, to carry more of our neighbors along with us into a future of full inclusion.

That makes 2006 a year to look forward to, a year when full equality may finally come to the Green Mountains. ▼

Euan Bear,
Editor

Note: Our next print issue – the beginning of our 21st year – will look different, thanks to art director Don Eggert's new vision. And it will be my last issue as editor. We are still looking for your memories and thoughts about how OITM has played a part in your life, whether it was affirming, boring, special, informative, brought you out of the closet or made you want to stay in, cheered you up, brought you down, or made you mad, or something else at various times. Please send your brief thoughts and memories to editor@mountainpridemedial.org. We will publish a selection in the next issue, and perhaps throughout the year.