

VERMONT NEWS/POLITICS

# Now Who's Turning Their Backs?



PHOTO: LYNN MCNICOL

## Protestors Show Up for Governor's Talk

BY LYNN MCNICOL

**COLCHESTER** — As dark rain clouds threatened to chase everyone inside, a crowd of protestors gathered at the entrance to St. Michael's College to protest a speech being given by Gov. Jim Douglas on the last day of May.

Douglas was speaking at a diversity conference, "Welcoming Communities," at the college for teachers to expand their social horizons.

Ironically, for the GLBT crowd who recently witnessed

the governor's veto of the Gender Identity and Expression bill, Douglas spoke at some length about actions he's taken to end discrimination, including safe schools and anti-bullying legislation. The bill Douglas vetoed (H.865) included a provision to protect students from harassment regarding their gender identity and expression.

The protestors carried their signs toward the auditorium where Douglas was to speak in a few minutes, but campus security asked them to leave the signs outside. They did.

As Douglas spoke, about 25 people in the audience stood silently and turned their backs to the governor, who continued

speaking as if nothing unusual had happened. The storm outside erupted into thunder and pouring rain as Douglas continued to speak, and the protestors continued to stand.

After speaking for about six minutes, Douglas ended his discourse on eliminating discrimination through scholarship programs and enriching cultures, to light applause from the approximately 50 people who remained sitting in the audience.

The audience then slowly filed out, into the soggy spring air. The dark clouds had rolled away and the protestors stood outside again with their signs in the last falling drops of rain. ▼

### Day celebration this year?

Douglas: I don't know the answer to that. If requested, I'm happy to take a look at it.

### OITM: Will you attend the celebration?

Douglas: I'd rather see opportunities to include everyone, not categorize Vermonters by sexual orientation, and find a more inclusive way to participate.

OITM: As Governor, you could issue an executive order prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression, any way you want to define it, in state govern-

### ment. Will you consider this until the legislature revisits the issue?

Douglas: I don't know if that is true or not. We have laws on hiring and contracts with unions so I'm not sure if the basis of your question is correct or not.

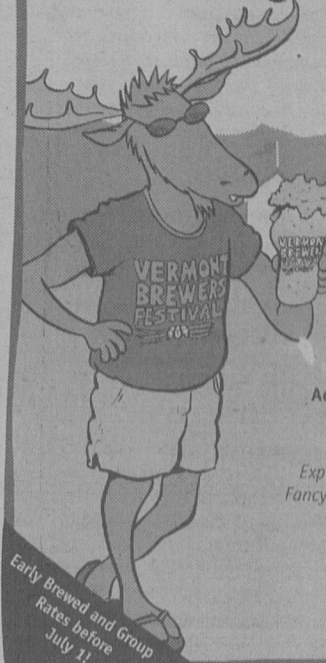
OITM: You oppose gay marriage and civil unions, won't commit to appointing a GLBT person to the HRC, didn't issue a Pride Day proclamation last year, let medical marijuana become law without your signature, and vetoed H.865. Why should GLBT Vermonters support your re-election?

Douglas: I believe all Vermonters should support my re-election because I'm focused on making this an affordable place to live for everyone. We've done well economically over the past few years and the state is fiscally strong, but I worry about the affordability of housing, higher education, and property taxes. I'm focused on making this a place where everybody can live regardless of race, creed, sexual orientation or any other category. ▼

➔ Paul Olsen is the Vermont Correspondent for Boston's *In Newsweekly*.

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