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SACRAMENTO, CA Governor Receives Nods and Nays

"Log Cabin (Republicans) thanks Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger for signing a record number of pro-gay bills during his term in office," said Jeff Bissiri, Log Cabin's California Director. "The Governor has been true to his word that he supports basic fairness and equality for our families (...). His record shows that inclusion wins," Bissiri said in a September press release.

Included in bills favoring the LGBT community are the Non-discrimination in State Programs and Activities Act; the Panic Excuse Prevention Act, which limits the use of the so-called "gay panic" defense in criminal trials; and the Omnibus Housing Nondiscrimination Act.

Meanwhile, in San Francisco, the Respect for All Project of Women's Educational Media condemned Schwarzenegger's veto of Assembly Bill 606, the Safe Place to Learn Act. The legislation would have strengthened existing state law prohibiting anti-LGBT harassment and discrimination in California's public schools, the group said.

"Studies show that LGBT students hear anti-gay slurs about 26 times a day at school and that every year, more than 30 percent of LGBT students report being threatened or injured at school. This is simply unacceptable," said Debra Chasnoff, executive director of Women's Educational Media and co-founder of the Respect for All Project.

NEW YORK

Japanese City Urged to Keep Rights Policy

A move to eliminate "sexual orientation" from a Japanese city's three-year-old antidiscrimination ordinance would be a damaging blow to the cause of full equality, Human Rights Watch said last month in a letter to the city's mayor. The city assembly of Miyakonojo was scheduled to debate the issue in September, the HRW said.

"Rights should never be subject to repeal," said Scott Long, director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights Program at Human Rights Watch. "A city that became a model of progress by affirming equal rights must not break its promises now."

In 2003 the southern Japanese city of Miyakonojo, located in Miyazaki prefecture, became one of the first cities in the country to include "sexual orientation" in its gender-equality ordinance.

ATLANTA, GA Lesbian Mom Given Custody of Daughter

In a decision handed down in September, the Georgia Court of Appeals ruled that a parent's custody or visitation rights cannot be limited just because that parent is gay or lesbian, and lives with their partner, when there is no adverse effect on the child, Lambda Legal reported.

"This is really great news for our client and gay and lesbian parents in Georgia," said Jack Senterfitt, Senior Staff Attorney in Lambda Legal's Southern Regional Office in Atlanta. "It means custody arrangements can't be challenged just because a parent is gay or lesbian."

Victoria Moses and Kelvin King had a daughter together. After the couple split, primary custody of the child was awarded to Moses. After Ms. Moses' partner moved into her home, King sued to change custody. A lower court did so, even though King had not paid child support for over a year and a half.

NEW YORK

Jamaican and Montreal AIDS Activists Recognized

Gareth Williams, a leading AIDS activist and voice for the rights of sexual minorities in Jamaica and the English-speaking Caribbean, is the recipient of the 2006 International Award for Action on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and Human Rights Watch announced last month. Stella, a Montreal-based support and information group organized by and for sex workers, is the recipient of the Canadian award.

"Against enormous odds and at great risk to his own physical safety, Gareth Williams has been a courageous campaigner against human rights violations targeting lesbians, gay men and HIV-positive Jamaicans," said Rebecca Schleifer, a researcher with Human Rights Watch's HIV/AIDS Program.

Stella, the recipient of the Canadian Award, serves women, transvestites and transsexuals. The group maintains an ongoing presence in sex work venues, including streets, escort agencies, massage parlors and strip bars.

"Since 1995, Stella has worked to improve the quality of life and working conditions of sex workers so that they may work and live in safety and with dignity," said Joanne Csete, Executive Director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network.

vermont news

VERMONT ELECTIONS

Four Vie for Two Legislative Seats

Democrats and Progressives Run in Winooski

BY LYNN MCNICOL

WINOOSKI - Only Progressive and Democratic candidates - two in each party - are running for the slots in Chittenden 3-6. No Republicans are in this race to fill two seats in Vermont's assembly. One of the seats is being vacated by outgoing Rep. George Cross, while the other is held by incumbent Rep. Kenneth W. Atkins, a Democrat.

Besides Atkins, Winooski's Mayor Clem Bissonnette, also a Democrat, is hoping to win a seat; and two Progressive candidates, Jean Szilva and Israel Smith, are also running. If Szilva wins a seat, she will be the only out lesbian serving in the legislature.

Atkins, who has served in the House since 1999, earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees at UVM. He taught elementary education and was a coach in Vermont schools for 34 years until his retirement in 1998. Atkins voted against the civil union law on the final reading, although he approved it in

earlier votes. He also voted against the attempt to repeal civil unions the following year.

Atkins voted for the Gender Identity Nondiscrimination bill that was vetoed by Gov. Douglas this year.

According to the Vermont Secretary of State website, Atkins is also a justice of the peace, is a charter member of the Winooski Spar'an Boosters, and enjoys competitive pistol shooting and fishing.

Bissonnette, mayor of Winooski since 1999, is making his first bid for a legislative seat. He retired from IBM after 36 years and is a life-long resident of Winooski.

Last year, Bissonnette said he wanted Winooski to have town meetings to discuss the town's budget, like other Vermont towns, the *Burlington Free Press* reported. He expressed concern that there was little debate prior to voting for the municipal budget.

Bissonnette has served as mayor during the recent redevelopment in the center of Winooski.

Neither Atkins nor Bissonnette returned phone calls from *OITM*.

Progressive Smith, an architect at Truex Cullins and Partners in Burlington, has lived in

Winooski since 2004 and serves on the city's Advisory Planning Council. He says he supports same-sex marriage and the Gender Identity bill.

Smith told *OITM* that "basing taxes on property value is not fair and it isn't working. Taxes should be based on income and ability to pay."

"I will also push for expansion of clean and sustainable energy and energy conservation programs in Vermont," Smith continued. "We have to move forward towards making so-called 'alternative' energy the standard. This is not only the right thing to do environmentally for our future, but if the state had a real strategy for building Vermont up as the nation's leading center for 'green' energy and technology research, development, and implementation, then we could really secure our state's economic future as well."

Szilva, the other Progressive candidate, was profiled in our last issue (Oct. '06 *OITM*). Szilva, a former physician, favors a universal, single-payer health care system. She has served on the Winooski school board and currently teaches at the University of Vermont College of Medicine. ▼



Scudder Parker chats with Jessica Oski of Burlington.

Gubernatorial candidate Democrat Scudder Parker hosted a LGBT fundraiser in October, drawing an enthusiastic crowd that packed the reception room at Burlington's boathouse. Parker drew laughter and applause when he said he plans to "take back Vermont" as the state's new governor.

"Part of the 'homosexual agenda,'" Parker said to the cheering crowd, "... is not to infiltrate all of society, but to stand up with pride in every walk of life in this state." ▼ -Ed.