

## ELECTIONS

# Gay Victories in Vermont

## Five Incumbents to Return to Statehouse

BY PAUL OLSEN

MONTPELIER - Vermont's Election Day results were not unexpected. The Vermont Legislature will again see five openly gay men serving in the statehouse, incumbent politicians retained their seats, and the state's Congressional delegation in Washington will be represented by supporters of the GLBT community.

State Reps. Bill Lippert (D-Hinesburg), Robert Dostis (D-Waterbury), Steve Howard (D-Rutland), and Jason Lorber (D-Burlington) were re-elected to the House of Representatives; and state Sen. Ed Flanagan (D-Chittenden County) won re-election to the Senate. Progressive Jean Szilva, a lesbian from Winooski, fell short in her bid to serve in Montpelier.

In an election night interview with *OITM*, state Rep. Jason Lorber said his sexual orientation played no role in his re-election campaign. "I don't think the gay issue was an issue in this race," he said. "On my campaign literature I wrote that I am in favor of equal marriage rights for gays and lesbians, and we won overwhelmingly in our district."

Gay rights advocates were pleased with the results of legislative races in the state. "Here in Vermont, we picked up more friends in both the House and Senate," Robyn Maguire, Field Director for the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force, wrote in an email to supporters. "Our potential allies now outnumber those who oppose recognition of our relationships by a nearly 2-1 margin in both chambers! And we've seen that support for marriage equality is not a political liability. Long-time supporter Rep. Mark Larson, who introduced a marriage equality bill in 2006, won his race by a 2-1 margin!"

In the race for Governor, incumbent Gov. Jim Douglas (R) defeated Democrat Scudder Parker, 57 percent to 41 percent of the votes. As Governor, Douglas has not supported Vermont's GLBT community. He opposes gay marriage and civil unions, declines to issue a proclamation recognizing Vermont's Pride Day celebration, and vetoed legisla-

tion banning discrimination on the basis of gender identity or expression.

Lieutenant Gov. Brian Dubie (R) also won re-election, narrowly defeating state Sen. Matt Dunne (D) and Progressive Marvin Malek. Like Douglas, Dubie opposes gay marriage and civil unions, and opposes legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity in Vermont.

In her first run for statewide elective office, Progressive Martha Abbott came in last in a three-way race for state Auditor. Abbott, who lives in Underhill with partner Barbara Brody, formerly served as chair of Vermont's Progressive Party.

The outcome of the race to fill the seat of retiring U.S. Sen. James Jeffords (I) was good news for GLBT Vermonters. Independent U.S. Rep. Bernie Sanders easily defeated GOP businessman Rich Tarrant, 65 percent to 32 percent of the votes.

In the U.S. House of Representatives, Sanders consistently earned 100 percent ratings from the Human Rights Campaign, a Washington D.C.-based gay advocacy group. He also received a 100 percent rating from AIDS Action, a group representing more than 1,000 community-based AIDS service organizations.

Throughout his campaign, Rich Tarrant sent mixed signals regarding his support for gay rights. In an interview with *OITM*, Tarrant said he would cosponsor the Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA). However, in a subsequent interview with *Vermont Woman* newspaper, Tarrant offered only qualified support for the bill.

Shortly after being declared winner of the U.S. Senate race, Sanders promised to represent the underdog in Washington. "It is time for Congress to turn this nation around so that government represents all of us and not just wealthy and powerful special interests," he told a group of supporters at Burlington's Wyndham Hotel. "This state can lead the nation in a new direction."

Having defeated Republican Martha Rainville, state Sen. Peter Welch (D) will represent Vermont in the U.S. House of Representatives. Throughout his campaign, Welch promised to fight for gay and lesbian equality. He opposes the antigay Federal Marriage Amendment and plans to cosponsor ENDA, the Uniting American Families Act, and the Domestic Partner Health Benefits Equity Act. ▼



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

## Joanna Cole Comes in Fifth for JP; Incumbent Thom Fleury Takes Biggest Share of Votes

BURLINGTON - Joanna Cole, in her second try for office, successfully won a justice of the peace slot for the city's New North End. Cole, a member of R.U.1.2?, came in fifth out of a field of 42 candidates for 15 JP seats. Cole, garnering 5,055 votes, said she received more votes than any other non-incumbent.

Thomas Fleury, a former MPM board member, *OITM* volunteer, and Burlington school board member, came in first in the field with 5,756 votes. Fleury, who is the associate principal at Hinesburg Community School, said he has served as JP "off and on" since the '80s, in both Burlington and Winooski.

Cole launched her first bid for office this spring when she ran for City Council in Ward 7. She received 503 votes in the four-way race, coming close to upsetting incumbent Ellie Blais who took 534 votes in the March 7 election.

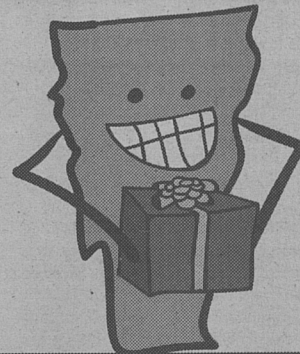
JPs are authorized to perform marriages and civil unions, serve as election officials, and hear tax grievances.

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-Ed.

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