

Liaison interviewed

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step for the highest levels of state government to be hearing our concerns and taking them seriously. A lot of what we have to do is just be persistent, and to learn how decisions are made at every level of state government, and be around to make sure we are heard when decisions affecting our lives are made.

Q: In your co-liaison position with Beth, do you see yourself as just representing gay men?

A: Well, certainly part of the reason for two liaisons is recognition of the fact that there are some serious divisions in the community, and to make sure that both men and women are represented. That is important, but I think the role goes beyond just speaking for gay men. Certainly my agenda includes going to bat for women's issues, and I hope that both lesbians and gay men will feel comfortable calling me about concerns they have.

Q: A lot of discussion has taken place about whether this position is Governor Kunin's liaison to us, or our liaison to

her. What is your perspective?

A: The primary role of the position is to make sure that the Governor hears our concern, so I definitely view the position as being the community liaison's to her. On the other hand, it is important we keep the community informed about developments with the Governor's office, so communication becomes a two way street. In that sense, I guess, we also serve as her liaison to the community.

Governor Kunin demonstrated a lot of good sense in setting up this communication mechanism, and if we use it properly, I think we can see a lot of positive things coming out of it. She's been very good about defending the decision when she has been challenged on it by the right wing. That is a very encouraging sigh about her willingness to take it seriously. There is a good chance that the fact that she created these positions, the simple fact that she is willing to hear from a significant section of the Vermont community, will become a political issue. In that sense, the liaison position becomes both a symbolic and a practical position. It could get very interesting.

Q: How do you intend to make sure that you always are representing the community?

A: That is not going to be easy. Certainly the statewide network that has been meeting is an important place for defining the community's concerns, and I will look to that a lot for guidance. I am also willing to travel around the state and talk with lesbian and gay groups, whether they be formally existing groups of informal networks, to get feedback and ideas. And I encourage people to call me with whatever specific concerns they have. I can be reached at 862-5917, during the day and early evening.

Housing bill defeated

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James Morgan, who heads the Lesbian and Gay Issues Committee of the Vermont Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, lobbied earlier this year, without success, to encourage the House Judiciary Committee to include sexual orientation in the draft of the landlord/tenant bill. He said he appreciated Youngbear's support for non-discrimination, but hoped that in the future any effort to include such language involve the lesbian and gay community.

"The amendment still may have been defeated even if the lesbian and gay community had the opportunity to contact their legislators" said Morgan, "But perhaps not with such a resounding 'no'. It is important for legislators to remember that they have lesbian and gay constituents."

Other community activists agreed with Morgan, expressing the view that such legislation will not pass without significant lobbying.

The issue may be raised again when the Senate Judiciary Committee considers the bill.

Governor Madeline Kunin, when asked about the sexual orientation amendment at a press conference several days after the vote, expressed her support for legislation to end such discrimination.

Correction

The alternate liaison to the lesbian community is Debbie Alicen, who can be reached at 456-8745.

Public hearing on HTLV-3

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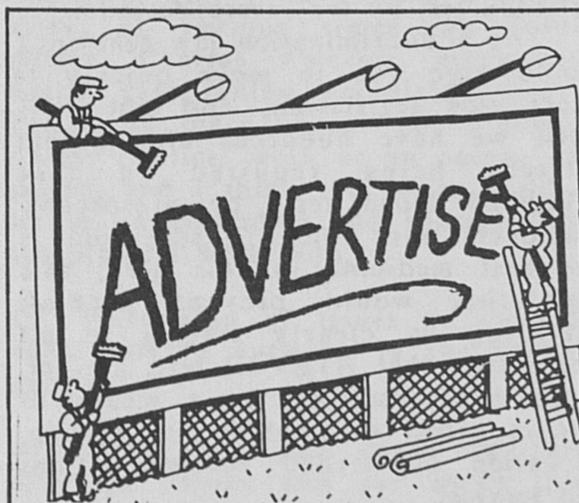
Approximately 60 people, including 18 legislators, attended for forum. Discussion focused on the error rate of the ELISA test for HTLV-III antibodies, the fact that AIDS is not spread by casual contact, and the current lack of anti-discrimination protection.

Panel members included John Calvi, consultant to AIDS organizations around the country; Dr. Philip Howard, Associate Medical Director of the VT/NH Red Cross; Dr. Philip Mead, epidemiologist in charge of infection control at the Medical Center Hospital of Vermont; Deborah Kutzko, a Burlington nurse who has been involved with several Boston area AIDS studies;

Heather Wishik, Professor of Law at Vermont Law School and a member of the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women; and Scott Skinner, Executive Director of the Vermont Civil Liberties Union.

Terje Anderson, co-liaison to the Governor's Office from the lesbian/gay community, felt that "the information given during the panel discussion should help legislators understand the real and immediate need for this legislation."

When questioned, Rep. Toby Young, chair of the House Health and Welfare Committee, indicated that she would bring the issue before the committee for possible action.



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