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Lesbian/Gay Liasons meet with Kunin

by Beth Dingman

On Thursday, July 3rd, Terje Anderson and I met with Governor Kunin. Terje began by describing the current situation with regard to AIDS education. The State Dept. of Health recently received a \$100,000 grant to do preventative education. Terje stressed that these programs work best when administered by community-based groups. He asked that the Health Dept. work more closely with gays, and that the department concern itself not only with education and diagnosis, but with coordination of follow up services. The Governor's aide, Liz Bankowsky, promised to talk with the Health Dept. concerning these issues.

I brought up our concern with the fact that many supporters of the Equal Rights Amendment are working hard to dissociate themselves from any connections to lesbian or gay rights. We pointed out that anti-ERA people are making the connections with lesbian and gay issues as a scare tactic, and we hoped that ERA supporters would respond to that by affirming the rights of lesbian and gays, not just denying that the ERA relates in any way to gay and lesbian issues. Madeleine replied that you can't fight too many battles over one issue, but that she understood the problem and would try to be conscious of it when she spoke about the ERA. We also stressed that ERA supporters should go on the offensive, pointing out the bigotry and sexism in the absurd accusations of those campaigning against the ERA.

We said that one of our main problems was trying to fight negative stereotyping, and that we would appreciate any help we could get with presenting positive images of lesbians and gay.

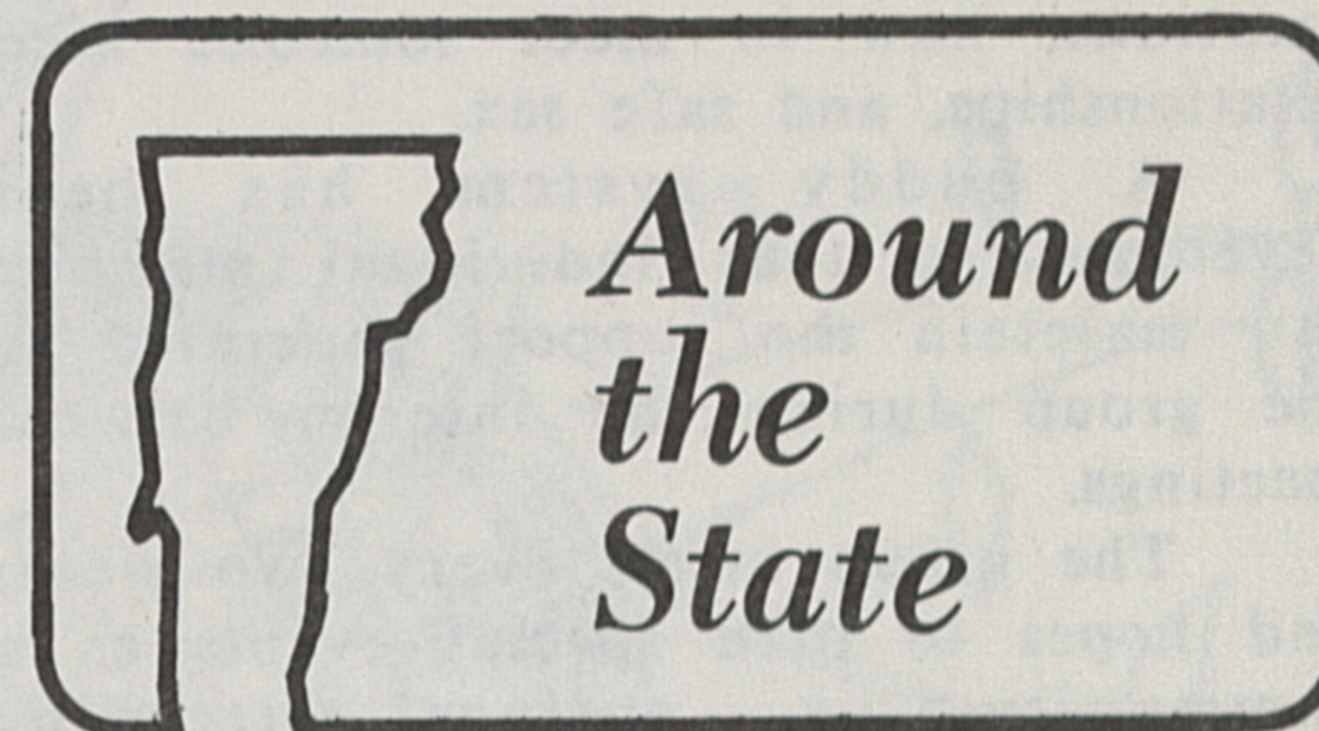
Vermont at present has no law preventing discrimination in housing or employment based on sexual preference. The governor asked if we knew of any specific cases of discrimination, because until there are documented cases, no one in state government will consider it a problem worth addressing. Terje said

he knew of three cases of people being fired for being gay. He suggested that the Governor reinstate the Vermont State Human Rights Commission. This commission could then investigate cases of discrimination and encourage the legislature to pass laws preventing such abuses. Liz Bankowski said she wasn't sure that resurrecting the commission was the best way to proceed, but promised to look into it and come up with some recommendations.

I came away from the meeting with some very positive impressions. I realized how difficult it had been for Madeleine to appear at the Lesbian and Gay Rights rally in Burlington, and yet she came (after some encouragement) because she felt it was the right thing to do. When I asked her if she had gotten much negative feedback after attending the rally, she told the story of going into a small country store and seeing her picture (cut from the Burlington Free Press) with the banner proclaiming the Lesbian and Gay Pride Rally behind her, taped up on the cash register. She said that she hadn't gotten that many negative letters, but she didn't know how many cash registers there were around the state with her picture pasted to them.

I think it is important that we realize that Governor Kunin is at least conscious of the issues and that she does believe that discrimination, based on religion, sexual preference or whatever, is wrong. Terje later told me that Madeleine is the first governor in Vermont to attend a Lesbian and Gay Rights Rally. This is impressive and attests not only to Madeline's courage, but, probably even more significantly, to the efforts of the lesbian and gay community to make her aware of these issues.

Of course, no politician, or politician's aide, will champion the cause of gay and lesbian rights without some real encouragement from her constituency. So keep those cards and letters coming. If we wish to be equally protected under the laws of this state, then we have to make that happen.



VLGR meets with Snelling

Members of Vermonters for Lesbian and Gay Rights (VLGR), Nancy Spannauer, Jim Morgan, and Philip Roberts, met recently with former Governor Richard Snelling in South Burlington. The former Governor is a Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate who is running against incumbent Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy. Members of the lesbian/gay community were surprised Snelling agreed to a meeting, considering the lack of interest from many state-wide officials. (But this is an election year...)

The purpose of the meeting was to introduce ourselves to Snelling and let him know that there are lesbian and gay voters in the state.

The following issues were discussed at the thirty minute meeting: would candidate Snelling support and co-sponsor a national Lesbian/Gay Rights bill, would he support continued/increased funding for AIDS research and education, and would he encourage liberalization of immigration laws pertaining to openly lesbian/gay persons entering the U.S.

Snelling had previously answered a questionnaire sent to him by VLGR. Those answers appeared to be relatively positive. But it was the general consensus of the VLGR members present at the meeting that Snelling's verbal answers were not as positive, being typically generic and somewhat evasive. Snelling stated repeatedly that he would have to examine each piece of lesbian/gay legislation, and then he would decide whether or not the support pro-gay bills.

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