

# Out in the Mountains

APR 13 1988

VERMONT'S NEWSPAPER FOR LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

Volume III, Number 3

April 1988

## S.278 Passes VT Senate: House Awaits

by Heather Wishik

On March 3 the Vermont Senate voted 19-11 in favor of S.278, the bill to prohibit sexual orientation discrimination in Vermont. The bill had a third reading vote in the Senate the next day, and that vote was 17-12: Senator Douglas Baker was absent for the second vote and Senator William Doyle changed his vote from a yes to a no.

The bill must next be assigned to a House committee, voted on by that committee, brought to the House floor, and voted on by the full House. Public statements by the House leadership the day after the Senate vote indicated the bill would be assigned to the House Judiciary Committee, which last year voted in favor of similar legislation. Also, House Democratic Majority leader Paul Poirier indicated publicly on March 4 that he felt the bill had a good chance of passing in the House if the focus remained upon the legislation as a civil rights issue.

S.278 would prohibit sexual orientation discrimination in sales and rentals of housing, public accommodations, public and

private employment, public accommodations, insurance and credit services. Despite objections from lobbyists for the gay and lesbian community, the sections of the bill relating to child custody in divorce and to domestic violence protections were cut



Heather Wishik: Former co-liason to Gov. Kunin and staunch S..278 advocate.

from the bill by the Senate Judiciary Committee; an exemption for non-profit religious organizations which have a doctrinal objection to employing persons due to their sexual orientation was also added to the private employment section by the Committee.

The debate of the bill on the Senate floor began with Senator Chester Ketcham, a Republican Senator from Addison County, who reported the bill out for the Judiciary Committee. In an eloquent ten minute speech Ketcham explained why he had changed from opposition to support of the legislation, and walked the Senate through the sections of the bill. He quoted the Vermont constitution in stating that he had become persuaded at the hearing by both proponents and opponents that sexual orientation discrimination was a serious problem in Vermont.

In response to Senator Gilbert Godnick of Rutland's claim that if the bill passed "people like that" would flock to

(Continued on page 5)

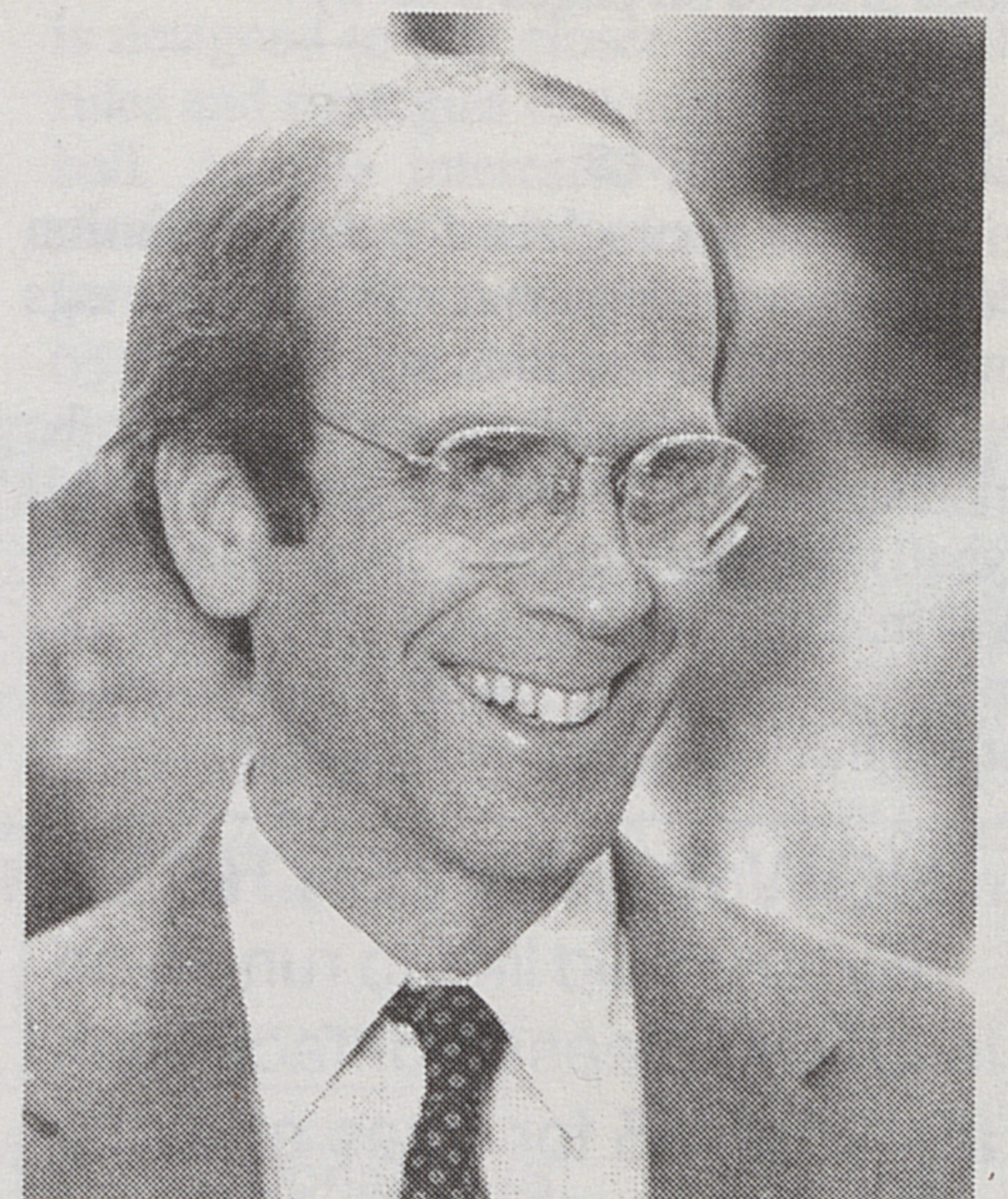
## Welch Speaks Out for Lesbians and Gays

On Wednesday, March 9, 1988, President Pro Tempore of the VT Senate Peter Welch addressed the bi-weekly meeting of the Unitarian/Universalists for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (UULGC) in Burlington. His talk followed close on the heels of the invigorating victory of S-278 in the Senate, a bill strongly supported by Senator Welch.

In the course of his talk and the questions following it, the Senator discussed the passage of the bill and the politics and strategies that will need to be followed as the bill proceeds through the Vermont House. He expressed strong support for lesbian and gay rights, although he concurred with the political decision to drop two sections of the bill, those concerning child custody and domestic abuse. The Senate Judiciary Committee's decision to eliminate these two areas from the

protections of the bill was a disappointment to many of us, but the Senator's arguments were based on political concerns rather than the merits of the clauses.

Perhaps more important to many of us, and certainly to the Senator, was the fact that the UULGC meeting provided the Senator with an opportunity to address lesbians and gays concerning our issues as he launches his campaign for Congress. Senator Welch is pursuing the berth soon to be vacated by Representative James Jeffords. He promised to continue to support gay and lesbian rights and the rights of people with AIDS if he is elected to national office. In light of the conservative trend of today, it is heartening to listen to politicians who do not fear to take a stand on controversial issues such as our human rights.



Peter Welch: Candidate for U.S. Rep.