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Legislative Process 101

by Keith Goslant

Since this is the beginning of a new biennium (a two year legislative session), all legislative action must be introduced as a new bills. This process is both lengthy and precise.

1. A sponsor must submit proposed legislation to the Legislative Council for drafting and reserve space on the legislative calendar. For introduction into the House this must be completed before March and for the Senate before the end of February.

2. The bill is then officially introduced in a "first reading" by the presiding officer of the chamber (either House or Senate).

3. The bill is then assigned to a committee for consideration and action. In the past our bill has been assigned to the Judiciary Committee.

4. The committee then makes a decision regarding the bill's priority and what course of action to take. This may include holding public hearings, soliciting written

testimony, etc. (See related articlepage 7). A committee can decide to take no action on a bill thereby effectively killing it. Or a committee can vote it back onto the floor with recommendations for action.

5. The bill then has its "second reading" before the chamber. The merits of the bill are debated and voted on by the full chamber. If voted favorably, the bill is held over for its "third reading." If the vote is negative, the bill dies and cannot be reintroduced until the beginning of the next biennium.

6. The "third reading" is the final and substantive vote. If the vote is negative, the bill dies. If the vote is favorable, it is forwarded to the other chamber for consideration.

7. If both chambers vote favorably on a bill within a biennium, it is sent to the Governor for signing. The Governor has veto power on any bill which requires a 2/3 majority in both chambers to override.

What a Party!

by Lynette

Last winter, Laura and I hosted two letter-writing parties to garner legislative support for the anti-discrimination bill. Although there were pretty small turn-outs for these events, the women who came worked very hard; a total of about two hundred individually written letters and postcards were mailed to Vermont state senators and representatives.

I think a letter writing party is an idea that could be duplicated without much effort all over the state. For those of you who want to give it a try, I have written up the following "game plan".

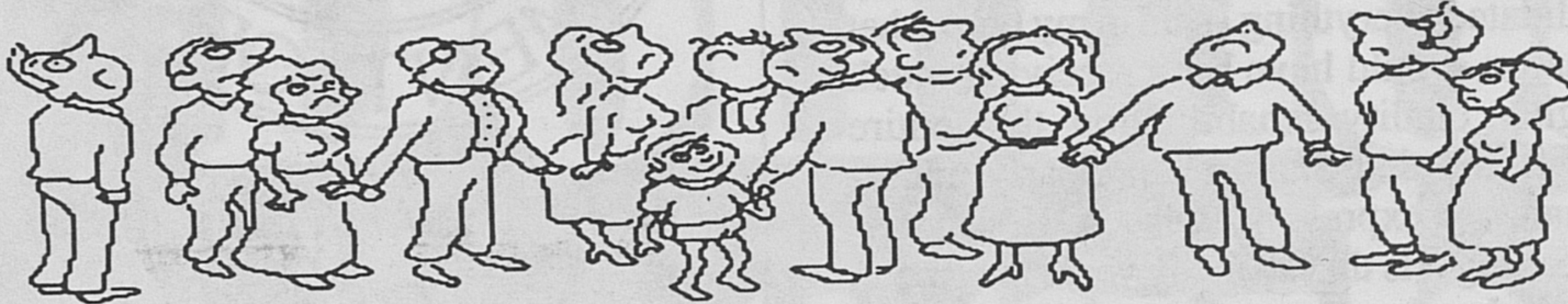
Before the party, we spent some time educating ourselves about the bill and the basics of the legislative process. A good source of information is the Coalition of Lesbians and Gay Men (See VT Resources page for address). We also gathered basic print information for the party-goers; such as, facts sheets from the Coalition, back issues of OITMs that dealt with the bill and from the Legislative Council (828-2231) a map of the various districts of Burlington and a list of the senators and representatives by region.

Using large sheets of newsprint, we listed the legislators that we wanted to target- generally those that sit on the committee where the bill is housed. Also, we wrote up a simple description of the process a bill goes through to become law.

We bought about a dozen pens, a ream of white paper, a hundred stamped envelopes and fifty stamped postcards (we should have bought more postcards - they went fast). Invitations to the parties included flyers distributed at the bar, phone calls, and word of mouth. We billed these events as potluck parties, and ate while we wrote, then partied to dance tapes afterwards.

The completed cards and letters were divided up to be brought to various local post offices for mailing. I put out about forty dollars for the supplies which I didn't bother to try to recoup, but I don't think this would have been difficult.

I learned a lot personally from the experience, met some nice people, and felt we had some kind of effect on the legislators. There is a good chance that we will be doing this again this year in the Burlington area. Want to come and see for yourself how its done? You can contact me through OITM for more information.



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