

Political Profile

Russelling Up the Votes *(continued from page 1)*

OITM: Do you see education as part of your strategy?

HR: This will be a campaign of real education. For example, a lot of people are surprised to realize that virtually all candidates share their sexual orientation in the course of a campaign – except it's not called that. When Joe Smith talks about his wife and kids, it's seen in a very different light than when we as gay candidates share who we are.

We're also educating people that someone can openly present himself as gay and still advocate on a whole array of other issues.

We're educating people about the common threads throughout our issues – from tax reform to pro-choice legislation.

OITM: What is that common thread?

HR: The word for me is empowerment. These and other issues all involve empowering people who've traditionally been disempowered. Many of us – gay people, women, poor people – have been oppressed in certain ways. I've said before, the masks are each unique but the face underneath is the same.

Oppression happens for a reason. It has to do with disempowering a whole lot of people to the benefit of a much smaller number. It's not by chance that the middle class has been pitted against the poor people in battles over taxes and services. I don't believe the tax revolts have as much to do with spending too much for services as they do with who we're asking to foot the bill. We're asking the wrong people.

In empowering people you bring about change. One of the real messages of the campaign is understanding these links between different oppressions.

Another example is my commitment as a gay man to pro-choice issues. In my life I have known what it is like to be denied choice over what I do with my body. That should help me understand the issue for women in a different light.

We need leaders and spokespersons who are pointing out the common threads.

OITM: What kind of reaction have you had so far?
HR: Overwhelmingly positive. People are excited; they sense that this campaign is different from campaigns they're used to. People are registering to vote. People who have never volunteered are volunteering.

People who have worked on other campaigns are bringing a new level of excitement and energy.

I've been encouraged by the diversity of people who are excited. Many people beyond the lesbian and gay community are actively involved and have said my candidacy is refreshing.

OITM: Is the Democratic Party taking your candidacy seriously?

HR: My sense is that the party is responding in a very positive way and taking it seriously.

This candidacy is very important in continuing to push the Democratic Party to take on a progressive agenda and continue to work toward innovative solutions to problems as well as to be more inclusive.

We're at a turning point. I see my candidacy as a part of a litmus test of whether Vermont is going to continue to chart its own course or begin falling in line with many other parts of the country – and take a more vindictive approach to challenge out there.

By and large Vermont in the last ten years has taken a very caring, progressive approach to difficult issues. The challenge for Democrats is to continue in that direction.

OITM: Is there a significance for this campaign outside Chittenden County?

HR: I mentioned before that I believe we're at a turning point in Vermont. It's important for a lot of reasons that people with progressive ideas are elected across the state.

Reapportionment happens in 1990. It makes a difference who's in power when district lines are redrawn. A conservative legislature will draw the lines to their favor and make it easier for that group to remain in power.

Another reason is that regardless of the district from which they're elected, legislators make decisions important to all of us. If this campaign is successful, it will have implications well beyond Chittenden County.

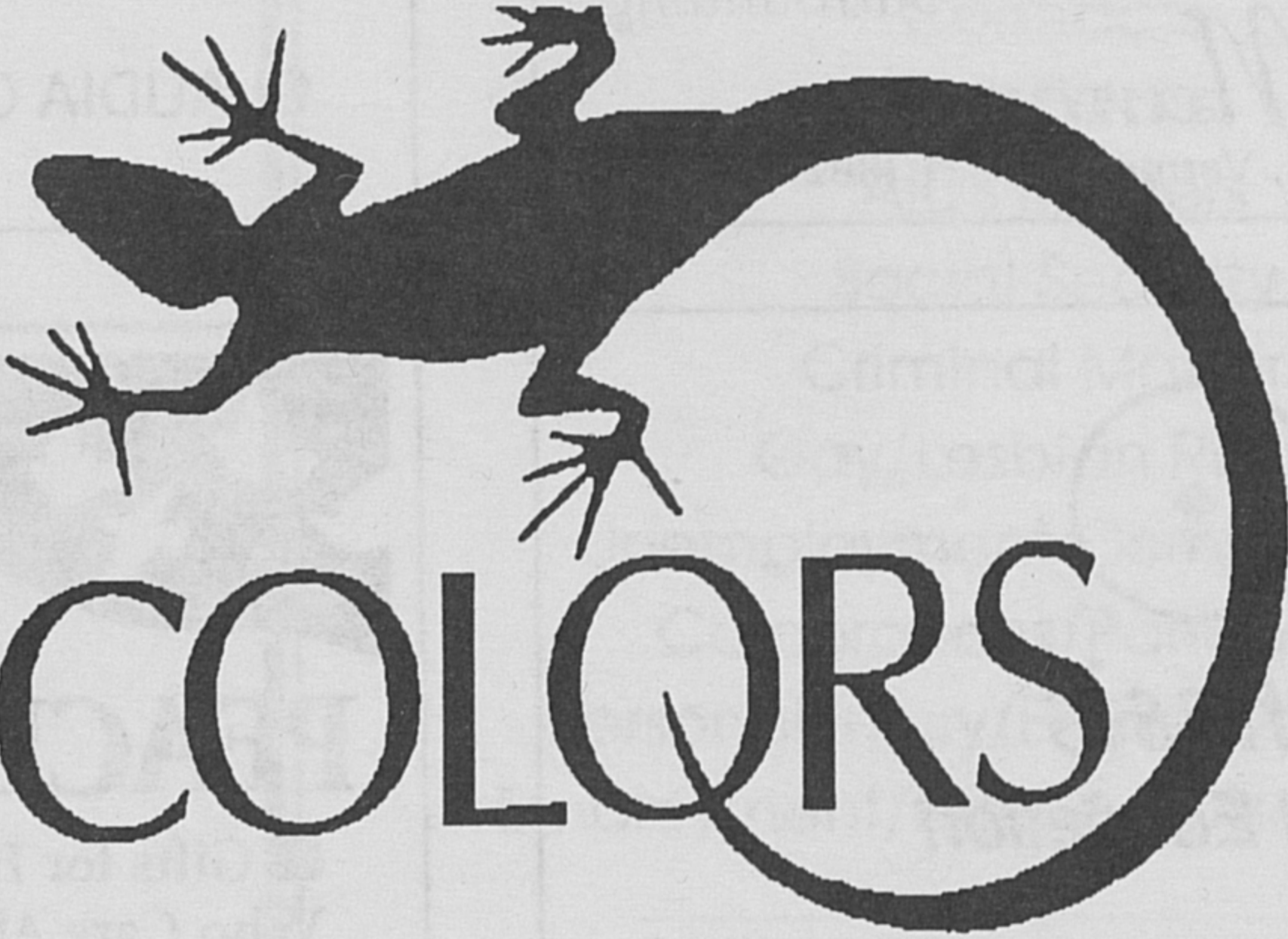
OITM: By successful, do you mean that you get elected?

HR: Ultimately yes. The aim in this campaign is to be elected. Yes, a whole lot of good will come out of this campaign all along the way, whether or not I'm elected. That good, however, will be geometrically increased by a campaign victory.

A victory will energize a whole group of people who have been waiting for something like this. Significant changes can happen throughout Vermont as a result of people seeing that this kind of election is possible.

More and more, as time goes on, I'm believing this is a winnable campaign – and realizing that winning will require a very volunteer-intensive effort. This is a grassroots campaign and that's the way we want it to be. We want to involve lots of people and welcome anyone to get in touch with us.

(For information on how to get involved, write: Russell for Senate, PO Box 465, Hinesburg VT 05461, or call 434-3670.)



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