

Politics

Rita Mae Brown Speaks

Well-known writer Rita Mae Brown brought her sharp wit and sassy one-liners to a packed Burlington performance on September 17. Brown, whose groundbreaking novel *Rubyfruit Jungle* was the first novel with a lesbian theme to sell widely in this country, appeared in a fundraising event for the Howard Russell for Senate campaign.

Speaking in her mildly souther accent, Brown took note of the cultural differences between her native South and "Yankee New England," while she held forth on topics as diverse as fundamentalist preachers, European unification, the Civil War (or "The War of Northern Aggression," as she terms it), the state of American education, Senator Jesse Helms ("a man with a very bad haircut"), and American religion.

Brown paid particular attention to Howard Russell's candidacy as an openly gay man - hailing the honesty and courage such a candidacy takes. She contrasted Russell's campaign with that of Gary Hart in his recent presidential bid, when voters rejected him because "if he would lie to his wife and the American people about (his infidelity), what else would he lie to the

American people about?" Voters should appreciate, said Brown, "that Howard Russell isn't lying to them about anything."

"But," Brown continued, "I can't really criticize Gary Hart for having a taste for beautiful women. I myself have been accused of singlehandedly converting women to lesbianism. That simply is not true - it takes both hands."

Brown also scored big points with the audience when she noted that "the difference between the Republicans and the Democrats is like the difference between syphilis and gonorrhea - but I'm a Democrat. There really is no choice - you have to be involved."

She expressed alarm about the way the New Right in American politics has made overt expressions of racism, sexism, and other prejudices both commonplace and acceptable. "It is as though we turned the clock back more than twenty years, that everything we fought for is disappearing. We cannot allow that to happen."

A crowd of nearly 500 people attended the event, raising several thousand dollars for the Howard Russell campaign.

Russell Campaign Heads for Finish

With election day rapidly nearing, Howard Russell's campaign for State Senate is gearing up for the final push.

"I am confident that we can win," says Russell, "but we also anticipate that it will be a very close race. Every vote is going to count, because there are six strong candidates competing for three open slots."

Three incumbents - Democrats Sally Conrad and Doug Racine and Republican George Little - seem certain to be re-elected in the six-member Chittenden Senate district.

That means that Russell is competing for one of the remaining three seats against Republican Hilton Wick (who many view as vulnerable) and former State Senator Dennis Delaney, and against fellow Democrats Althea Kroger, Caryl Stewart, and Ed Granai - all of whom ran even with Russell in the September primary. Three other Republicans and two independents in the race seem unlikely to be significant factors in the final standings.

Campaign manager Terje Anderson estimates that it will take approximately 18,000-20,000 votes to win.

In the closing days, the Russell campaign will continue to emphasize a progressive message of tax reform, protecting human services and children's needs in tough economic times, environmental protection, and a pro-choice/civil rights position.

The campaign will spread that message through personal campaigning by the candidate, door-to-door literature drops, newspaper advertising, direct mail, and radio advertising.

"The campaign has already made history in Chittenden County," according to Anderson. "Most of the political pros didn't think an openly gay candidate would put together a campaign this solid or garner this much public support. That is a step forward for all of us. The next step is when Howard Russell wins on November 6."

Russell's campaign picked up additional momentum recently with the endorsements of the Vermont chapter of the National Education Association and the Rainbow Coalition of Vermont.

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