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Out in the Mountains

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Madeleine Kunin: A Fond Farewell JAN 3 1991

by Keith Goslant

Since Governor Kunin announced last spring that she would not seek a fourth term in office, I have wondered how to say goodbye and thank you to someone who has been a strong supporter and a friend of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community. It is not enough merely to list accomplishments, though they are significant. Lists do not tell of the interactions that occurred or how many opinions were solicited and respected. During my four years as liaison, my phone calls were always returned, my voice was always heard, and there was always a response to concerns.

Reviewing state policy development and legislation signed into law by Governor Kunin also reflects our growth as a community, growth that would not have been possible without her support. During her first year as Governor, Kunin recognized the increasing visibility and strength of Vermont's lesbian, gay, and bisexual community. She responded by taking the unprecedented action of recognizing liaisons from our community to her office and administration. The legislation passed during her tenure as Governor attests to how her administration truly heard the concerns voiced by these liaisons.

During Madeleine Kunin's six years as governor, we have seen legislation signed into law providing antidiscrimination protections for people living with HIV infections; statutes that guarantee protection in employment, housing, access to medical care, public accommodations, and court proceedings; the development of the AIDS education program and the anonymous HIV antibody test sites by the Department of Health; and the formation of Vermont's AIDS Task Force, which produced a manual establishing standards for care that became a model for other states.

These laws and policies do not tell of the personal letters and phone calls from Madeleine Kunin to family, friends, and lovers surviving losses from AIDS. They



Madeleine Kunin (center) with liaisons Holly Perdue (left) and Keith Goslant (right)

do not tell of Madeleine's presence at candlelight vigils. They do not tell of the inclusion of lesbians and gay men in the passage of legislation and development of policies, inclusion encouraged and supported by the Governor. They also do not tell of her recent actions within the Governors' Association to prevent the loss of federal funds for AIDS education and prevention programs.

Since 1986, when Madeleine became the first incumbent Governor to speak at a Pride Day rally, the sexual orientation antidiscrimination bill has been on her list of legislative priorities. The support has remained unwavering, even when photographs of Kunin at Pride Day began to appear taped to the cash registers in country stores during her re-election bid. She was a strong voice when legislative committees wanted to avoid voting on the bill. She asserted that civil rights legislation could

not be held hostage. Governor Kunin realized that although it might not be the easiest action to take, it was certainly the right one.

When the Human Rights Commission was re-established, Governor Kunin asked for recommendations from the lesbian and gay community. When Commissioners were appointed, Governor Kunin named an openly gay social worker to the commission, thereby ensuring a voice and ongoing presence from our community.

Perhaps what I will remember most of Madeleine Kunin's tenure as governor will be her response to the beating on Easter outside of Pearls. She phoned the next day to express her outrage at this act of violence and to pledge her support for the passage of the Hate Crimes bill. It was in support of this bill that she made her only appearance as Governor before a legislative committee. She spoke of how it is the government's

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