

# Torie Osborn Comes Back to Vermont

Fred Kuhr

"Janet Reno is not a lesbian, but she is America's new butch role model. And we love it!" This queer insight into American politics today was just part of the humor and the message that Torie Osborn, Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), brought to her Burlington audience as she spoke in front of more than 100 people in the Billings Theater on the University of Vermont campus on the evening of October 12.

Ms. Osborn, who spoke at her alma mater, Middlebury College, the day before, praised Vermont for its progressive politics both then and now. She attended UVM and Middlebury during the seventies and calls Burling-

ton "the place that nurtured my identity as a lifelong activist". She credits Vermont's lesbian/feminist movement of the time as her inspiration.

She was also impressed by how much had changed over the years. Upon visiting Middlebury's campus on Coming Out Day, she saw about 50% of the students wearing buttons with a pink triangle proclaiming "Straight But Not Narrow." "I can't believe it!"

Ms. Osborn emphasized that since everyone has a "sphere of influence" of 200-300 people with whom one comes in contact, "coming out is the core issue of our movement". She spoke of the social and cultural "revolution" of the past year citing the 1992 Democratic and Republican conventions, Bill Clinton's

presidential victory, and the gays in the military issue. Events such as the rise of the right wing, the amendment fights in Colorado and Oregon, and thirteen years of the AIDS epidemic build our community and increase our visibility, she said. She cited a recent statistic that stated that 53% of the U.S. population say they know someone who is gay or lesbian up from 39% a year ago.

Politically, she continued, the gay and lesbian movement needs to refocus and restructure. "They (the Religious Right) accuse us of (having) the gay agenda. I don't think we know what it is." She said that we are in a "battle for the soul of America" - a battle between the Religious Right and everyone else. Our core issues, such as health care, childrens' issues, and the redefinition of family are

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