

THE PROGRESSION OF PROGRESSIVES:

Continued from page 1

Bailey stated that Brownell takes a "myopic view of government. He's not into making a scene. He comes from a place of accepting the status quo. If you don't work hard to include those who have been excluded, to say out loud 'gay and lesbian issues', they are naturally excluded by the system."

Since the Progressives are very open to gay and lesbian issues, their return to power in Burlington could lead to increased statewide awareness. "We'll see more organizing on a state level," Bailey continued, citing the Vermont Coalition of Lesbian and Gay Men Conference, held in December 1993, as an example. "Gays and lesbians stand to have a real powerful voice in politics." In order to get this voice, however, "the community must be forward and out front." Bailey cited many issues where the Progressives and the gay and lesbian community could make a huge impact on a statewide level, such as domestic partnership benefits, same sex marriage, and health care. Bailey and the Progressives favor a single payer system of health care; she believes that health care should not be tied to your job "for fear of losing a job (to) homophobia or AIDS...Long term care is important for anyone fighting AIDS."

The Progressive Coalition, which prides itself on "inclusion of the

disenfranchised", also seems to be stealing gays and lesbians away from their traditional political home, the Democratic Party. According to Bailey, "If you talk to a Democrat, they'll say 'You have to all think alike to be a Progressive'." She said that the Progressives have a "wide tent", but "Democrats are spreading themselves too thin, trying to include conservatives and moderates." While Democrats are still part of the political machine, Bailey continued, "Progressives want change, real change."

Howard Russell, who ran as an openly gay Democratic candidate for state senate from Chittenden County in 1990 and 1992, said that he "feels fine" about the Progressive win in Burlington. In a recent phone interview, Russell called himself a "progressive Democrat" who supports the "politics of those I like." He did agree, however, that the Progressive Coalition has taken gay and lesbian votes away from the Democratic Party in Burlington. "The Progressives have dared to lead" on issues that pertain to gays and lesbians. "The Progressives are leading the fight on a more progressive tax structure (taxing the rich at a higher rate than the poor and middle class), that affects gay people. The Progressives took the lead on domestic partnership benefits. Some Democrats were right there, some were not."

Russell did dispute the view of many Progressives that Chittenden County and the state will follow Burlington's lead on progressive issues. "Burlington is one of only 23 cities and towns in Chittenden County. It's not the majority outside of Burlington, the progressive people are Democrats." He cited both Burlington

and Brattleboro as "unique areas" in the state, but doubted that the Progressive Coalition would be taking over state politics anytime soon. He views their win in Burlington, however, as positive and said it "will benefit the state."

He does see the rise of the Progressives as taking a toll on the Democratic Party. "As the Progressive Coalition takes on more power, Democrats reach out to Republicans for votes. I think it's really unfortunate. (The Democrats) have no one to blame but themselves." He has noticed that Democrats in Burlington are more conservative than the rest of Chittenden County due to losing votes to the Progressives. As the Progressive Coalition grows beyond Burlington, the Democrats will react in one of two ways, according to Russell. "The Democrats will become more conservative and look for conservative votes (or) the Democrats will get the message (that) if you want Progressive and gay and lesbian votes, you'll have to listen to those concerns and issues."

Russell made some predictions about the future of state politics even though he himself said that this was "impossible to predict." If the Progressive Coalition "gets stronger in the state, but not too strong, Democrats will go to the right (while) the Progressives will continue to be a minority party. If the Progressives become really strong, Democrats will move to the left (and) try to get the gay and lesbian vote." Statewide, he continued, the Democratic Party still leads on gay and lesbian issues, "but in Burlington the Progressives are leading." When asked why many Democrats have not taken the lead on issues pertaining to gays and lesbians, Russell said, "They're wimps." ▼

Give a subscription to
Out In The Mountains
as a gift!

SUSAN M. MURRAY

LANGROCK SPERRY & WOOL
ATTORNEYS AT LAW
15 SOUTH PLEASANT STREET
MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT
05753

BURLINGTON OFFICE:
275 COLLEGE STREET
BURLINGTON, VERMONT 05402
802-864-0217

AREA CODE: 802
TELEPHONE: 388-6356
HOME PHONE: 877-3165
FAX #: 388-6149


WOMEN'S CHOICE
GYNECOLOGIC ASSOCIATES

Cheryl A. Gibson M.D.
Susan F. Smith M.D.

23 Mansfield Avenue,
Burlington, Vermont 05401
802-863-9001
Fax: 802-863-4951