

Ups-N-Downs

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10. On January 1, 1994, Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Vermont, one of the state's top health insurance companies, began offering domestic partnership benefits to its employees. Health insurance companies, usually viewed as politically conservative, are slowly responding to outside pressures to recognize domestic partners and the partner's dependent children. Blue Cross/Blue Shield joins a handful of other employers in Vermont who offer such benefits. The significance of an insurer extending domestic partner benefits is that it opens the doors to other employers' ability to offer these benefits.

9. Kristine Gebbie, former AIDS czar under the Clinton administration, visited Vermont in March. Her whirlwind visit to the state brought her



(OITM photo by John Olson)

Former AIDS czar, Kristine Gebbie, visiting Vermont back in March

to stops at the VT Department of Health, the University Health Center, the state legislature and Gov. Howard Dean, and Vermont CARES. When asked how the needs of Vermonters with HIV/AIDS differ from the needs of others around the country, Gebbie said that "the basic needs are the same - people with this virus need good competent medical care, they need it early, and they need a chance to make their own decisions about treatment, lifestyle and all those things to try to live a healthy life despite the virus." The difference comes in that "the challenge in rural areas is that the general community level of denial of the disease is higher so it's a lot harder to say 'I've got it' or to find somebody that will admit that." Gebbie urged all Vermonters to "stay concerned about this epidemic. Keep speaking up, know that you've got some friends who want to do right by this disease, and let's keep the dialogue going. We're going to save more lives here." Unfortunately, Gebbie was overwhelmed, less by the specific tasks of the job, but by the intense scrutiny placed upon her by the media, politicians, and somewhat surprisingly by many gay- and AIDS-activist groups. She resigned her post as the nation's first AIDS czar only weeks after her Vermont visit.

8. Homosexuality and safe-sex guidelines. Both are subject matters that should be discussed in the classroom--just not at Harwood High School in South Duxbury or Winooski High School. Harwood High School became the first school in Vermont to adopt a condom distribution program for its students. Although the policy, described as a "model" policy by

Vermont CARES Executive Director Kate Hill, was adopted, the teaching of safe-sex guidelines by Vermont CARES was banned by the high school. Because CARES uses both technical and slang terms in its presentation, a vocal minority was able to convince school board officials that the safe-sex guidelines could be better taught by the teachers. Similarly, Vermont CARES and Outright Vermont were both embroiled in a battle to present programs during Winooski High School's Awareness Week. Once again, the vocal minority convinced a scared school board that these groups' programs were inappropriate for students. The Awareness Week programs were moved to an evening schedule where a total of 9 students participated in the two programs. "Shellshocked" initially by these events, CARES and Outright will continue their work with other schools and community organizations. "If we don't provide this information to young people," Hill said, "we ought to be in jail. It's that important!"

7. Let the games begin! June saw an abundance of gay pride activities. The largest of these events being Gay Games IV and Stonewall 25, both in New York City. Vermont was represented in the Games by several capable athletes; Kathy Lehman of Richmond won a bronze in the 50-meter freestyle swim. Other Vermonters enjoyed the spectacle that was Stonewall 25. They marched in parades, marched on the United Nations, and undoubtedly attended many other wild and celebratory festivities. All in the name of history, community and Gay Pride!

6. December 4, 1993 and November 12, 1994. Editorially speaking, one date

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