

Out in the Mountains

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Vote 92

Keith Goslant, Co-Chair
Vermont Coalition of Lesbians & Gay Men

This is a crucial election for Vermont's lesbian, gay, and bisexual community. We gained strong antidiscrimination protection during the past legislative session with the passage of S-131. It would be easy to become complacent. This was a major victory for our community, but there is more we need to do. We must ensure these protections are not taken away, while still looking towards the future needs of our community. Recent court decisions in the areas of child custody and adoptions as well as the extension of employment benefits to domestic partners are examples of the work yet before us.

Our opposition has been well organized in the past and there is every indication that this election year is no different. The Vermont Chapter of Lesbian and Gay and Bisexual Veterans recently received a letter from an incumbent Senator asking for help as he had been "targeted by the fundamentalists" partly due to his support of S-131. Both parties, conservatives, moderates, and progressives are hoping to gain a majority in the legislature for the next biennium. During a recent discussion on ETV's *Vermont This Week*, the lesbian, gay and bisexual community was identified as the new force on the political scene. We need to be active in our support of those incumbents who supported S-131 and the candidates who will be our future advocates and friends.

The Coalition did not survey candidates this year regarding their support of the lesbian, gay and bisexual community, so it is not possible to give a fully detailed list of all the candidates' viewpoints. However, some candidates have met individually with members of our community and some are well known friends.

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Lesbian and Gay Issues Move to Center of Presidential Race

Terje Anderson

Lesbian and gay issues appear set to play a more prominent role in this year's presidential election than ever before. The combination of a Democratic platform and candidate, Bill Clinton, supportive of our community and a Republican strategy of attacking us, sets the stage for contentious debate.

The Democratic platform calls for passage of national legislation outlawing discrimination based on sexual orientation, lifting the military's ban on gay men and lesbians, and a concerted national effort against AIDS. The Republican platform, by contrast, says "We oppose efforts by the Democratic Party to include sexual preference as a protected minority receiving preferential status under civil rights statutes...."

Nowhere was the contrast between the two parties greater than at their national conventions held this summer. In New York, the Democratic Convention was hailed by many national activists as a new high point in lesbian and gay electoral politics. More than 100 openly gay and lesbian delegates, alternates and committee members attended the convention, producing the largest lesbian and gay caucus ever. Throughout the convention, those delegates were visible on television and in newspapers, waving signs saying "Lesbian and Gay Rights Now," and wearing gay and AIDS buttons.

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UVM Faculty File Grievance

Deborah Lashman

Five faculty members at the University of Vermont have filed a grievance with the State Labor Relations Board, claiming that refusal of domestic partner benefits is discriminatory and violates internal university policy.

After a two year fight to obtain benefits for their partners, the faculty exhausted administrative appeals when interim president Thomas Salmon rejected a conclusion of the Faculty Grievance Committee, which had recommended that benefits be allowed. The Grievance Committee said the university's regulations are discriminatory because they restrict benefits to employees, spouses and dependent children.

University lawyer Lee Liggett claims the policy is not discriminatory because the school does not provide benefits to unmarried partners of heterosexual faculty members. Faculty filing the grievance point out that unlike heterosexuals, they do not have the option to marry and thus obtain "spousal" benefits.

The case played a part in the compromises activists made to ensure passage of the civil rights bill. During debate on the law Rep. Ruth Stokes (R) Burlington, who also sits on the Board of Trustees of the University of Vermont and thus knew of the faculty grievance, added language to the bill to say that it should "not be construed to change the definition of family or dependent in employee benefit plans."

While the case precedes the enactment of the civil rights law by two years (though filing with the state Labor Relations Board came nine days after the law went into effect on July 1) it may well be seen as the first test of the new law.

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