

Commentary

Gene and Susan Sweetser: Opposites Attract?

Paul Olsen

On election day residents of Essex are faced with the opportunity to re-elect Gene Sweetser as their State Representative and elect his wife, Susan Sweetser, as one of the six Senators from Chittenden County. Historically, Gene has not served as an ally to the lesbian and gay community and the question now is whether Susan, a long time advocate for victim's rights, will be a voice for lesbians and gay men in Montpelier.

Gene and Susan Sweetser were both delegates to the Republican Convention in Houston where they heard the homophobic rhetoric of Pat Robertson and Dan Quayle. In the last legislative session, Gene Sweetser voted against the Gay Rights Bill. Prior to the vote I spoke with him regarding his position. Demonstrating a complete misunderstanding of the law, he explained that he would not vote for it as lesbians and gays are already protected under the constitution. In light of her husband's lack of understanding of even the most basic civil rights legislation, I was interested in talking with Susan (who is an attorney) regarding her position on lesbian and gay

issues. During our conversation Susan expressed her disappointment with the tone of the Republican National Convention, explained that she would have supported the Gay Rights Bill, and believes that lesbians and gays just want to be treated "fairly". In response to questions about domestic partnership legislation Susan indicated that she would have to think about her position but that the issue of health benefits would be solved when the state establishes universal access as a result of the recommendations of the Vermont Health Care Authority (this position fails to address even the most basic argument for domestic partner benefits).

Not surprisingly the campaign literature of both Gene and Susan Sweetser contains no reference to their lesbian and gay constituents. If elected they clearly are committed to their crusade for victim's rights. While appearing more moderate, Susan's commitment to "fairness" is not shared by her husband Gene. Like fellow Republican Patrick Buchanan, Gene Sweetser fails to understand that, like survivors of crime, lesbians and gay men can also be victims. ▼

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Out in the Mountains

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By subscribing now to *OITM*, not only will you guarantee delivery to your mailbox (in a discreet envelope, of course), but you will also help underwrite the rising costs of publishing the newspaper. We also welcome any additional contributions you can make to support our continuing existence. Checks should be made payable to *OITM* and sent, along with this form, to: *OITM*, P.O. Box 177, Burlington, Vermont 05402-0177.

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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of *Out in the Mountains* is to serve as a voice for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and our supporters in Vermont. We wish the newspaper to be a source of information, support and affirmation. We also see *OITM* as a vehicle for celebration of the goodness and diversity of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities.

Editorial Policy

We will consider for publication any material which broadens our understanding of our lifestyles and of each other. Views and opinions appearing in the paper do not necessarily represent those of the staff. This paper cannot and will not endorse any candidates and actions of public officials on issues of importance to lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals.

We will not publish any material which is overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist, classist, or homophobic.

All materials submitted must be signed so we can contact the author should we need to consider editorial revisions. However, within the pages of the newspaper, articles may appear anonymously, upon request, and strict confidentiality will be observed.

We welcome and encourage all readers to submit materials for publication and to share your comments, criticisms, and positive feelings with us. This paper is here for you. The deadline for submitting material for each issue is the 1st of the month prior to publication.

Materials should be sent to:

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OITM welcomes letters to the Editor and will withhold your name or use your initials or first name only on request. However, we must have your full name and address for our files if we are to print your letter. Letters may be edited for length or clarity. ▼