

Montpelier's Dimmest Bulbs

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MONTPELIER — In an article in The Progressive magazine, author Ken Silverstein highlighted ten elected officials who represented the "dimmest bulbs" in Washington, D.C. After reading the article the natural next question became: which politicians are the dimmest bulbs in Vermont? A non-scientific survey was conducted to determine the elected and/or appointed officials representing the biggest dimwits in Montpelier. In generating the list of nitwits a number of lobbyists, political activists, Democrats, Republicans, Independents, current and former members of the Legislature, and journalists were consulted. Votes on legislation of specific concern to Vermont's lesbian, gay and bisexual community were also considered. With that in mind, here's the list (in alphabetical order) of Montpelier's dimmest bulbs:

Representative Donald Brunelle (R-Winooski)

Brunelle, 58, is "vengeance motivated" and "says way too much for a freshman" according to fellow state representatives. Prior to being elected to the House, Brunelle served as the Chair of the Winooski School District where, in 1994, he supported attempts to kick Vermont CARES, the state's largest AIDS service organization, and Outright Vermont, the Burlington-based g/l/b/q youth group, out of Winooski High School. Committee: Local Government.

Senator Julius Canns (R-Caledonia)

"He's a real treat," "clueless," "unbelievable," "absolutely ignorant," and "he doesn't think things through" is how survey participants described Canns. Canns was born in 1923 and, according to one lobbyist "has been fixated on the flag ever since." Canns has served in the Senate since 1993, is a member of both the Northeast Taxpayers Association and the Northeast Kingdom Skeet Club. Committees: Institutions; Natural Resources and Energy.

State Representative Joan Conant (R-Colchester)

Strongly "pro-life," Conant was, ironically, a supporter of Operation Desert Storm (as Dennis Miller says "it's all in the timing"). During the Gay Rights Bill debate, Conant cited concerns of creating "special rights" and voted against civil rights legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Descriptions of Conant included "dimwit," "loud," "easily persuaded," and "doesn't have a mind of her own." Conant, 52, has represented Colchester in the House since 1989 and is a member of the Colchester Community Chorus. Committee: General, Housing and Military Affairs.

Senator Bill Doyle (R-Washington)

When it comes to Senate votes, Doyle's behavior is described as "never can decide how to vote on a bill so he votes differently on each reading" and "I think he's slipping ... I can't believe he's always been this stupid." According to observers, Doyle is "wishy, washy," "wants to be a friend to all," and although he has served since 1969 "writes books about the importance of a citizen legislature." Doyle, born in 1926, is a professor of government at Johnson State College. Committees: Government Operations, Chair; Institutions; Rules, Vice-Chair.

Representative Ruth Dwyer (R-Thetford Center)

Although a freshman in the House, Dwyer, 37, was frequently mentioned as a dim bulb candidate. Dwyer once recommended "means testing" SRS child custody decisions. A survey participant explained that Dwyer's suggestions would play out this way: "O.K. little girl, because your father makes \$100,000 per year, you're going to have to ignore the fact that he's sexually abusing you." According to a fellow state representative, Dwyer "thinks she's very bright but her logic doesn't make sense." Committee: Appropriations, Clerk.

Senator Betty Ferraro (R-Rutland)

"A major durr," "dumber than nails," and "she gives impassioned speeches on things she knows nothing about" is how Ferraro is described. Although apparently loved by her constituents, one Senate watcher indicated that "your eyes just roll to the back of your head when she speaks on the floor." Ferraro, born 1925, is a member of the National Association of Women in Construction, was a member of the House from 1991-1992, and was elected to the Senate in 1993. Committees: Education, Vice-Chair; Transportation, Clerk.

Agricultural Commissioner Leon Graves (D)

Graves, 44, makes the list for one incredible display of imbecility: his infamous anti-gay amendment to Vermont's adoption reform bill. Graves, a former Democratic State Senator representing Franklin County, introduced an amendment to the adoption reform bill that would prohibit same-sex couples from adopting children. According to one survey participant, "A more appropriate amendment would have been one prohibiting adoption by overweight bigots from Franklin County." "A major opportunist" and "well meaning but confused" is how Democratic party activists described Graves. According to one journalist, Graves suffers from "delusions of grandeur." Prior to serving in the Senate, Graves served in the House since 1987.

Representative Roger Kayhart (I-Waltham)

Although he recently resigned from the House, Kayhart was a popular choice for dim bulb candidacy. "Not real bright and famous for singing at the Brown Derby," "just loves the fact that he's in the building," "doesn't take his role too seriously," and "he's just confused a lot" is how Kayhart was described by lobbyists and fellow legislators. Kayhart, born in 1922, served in the House since 1983 and among his affiliations is the Addison County Farm Bureau. Kayhart opposed the use of BST but reportedly softened his position when he learned that his own son used it on his cows.

Representative Paul Knox (R-Northfield)

At a Montpelier watering hole and after a few drinks, Knox got voted the stupidest representative by a bipartisan group of legislators. "He's a real idiot," "the worst," "totally clueless," and "the Christian Right embodied" is how Knox is characterized by colleagues under the Golden Dome. Committee: Government Operations.

Senator Thomas Macaulay (R-Rutland)

Descriptions of Macaulay, born 1951, include "he gets ideas firmly planted in his head and he can't get them out," "ambitious," and "a horror show." Macaulay has served in the Senate since 1991 and is a member of the Marble Valley Players. Committees: Appropriations, Chair; Natural Resources and Energy.

State Representative Nancy Sheltra (R-Derby)

"I may not be objective but I think she's pretty dumb," "she's an easy one to add to the list," "she's so wacky," and "befuddled by the modern world"

were just some of the comments heard when people suggested Sheltra. Sheltra, 47, has served in the House since 1989. Sheltra fought hard against passage of Vermont's Gay Rights Bill. A running joke in the House is Sheltra's regular introduction of a bill to limit the authority of a local sheriff because he arrested her brother. Committee: Fish, Wildlife and Water Resources.

State Representative Gene Sweetser (R-Essex Town)

"He's a pig and he's stupid," "he'd be up there," "he doesn't say anything ... he just votes dumb" and "not full of creative ideas" were some of the comments that accompanied Sweetser's nomination. Sweetser's claim to fame is his former wife Susan. A member of the Air Guard and flag burning (read: free speech) opponent, Sweetser voted against the Gay Rights Bill claiming gay men and lesbians "are protected by the constitution." This blunder was made in spite of the fact that Attorney General Jeff Amestoy (R) testified that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was, at the time, legal in Vermont. Sweetser, born in 1948, was elected in 1991. Committee: Ways and Means.

State Senator Susan Sweetser (R-Chittenden)

Like her former husband Gene, Susan Sweetser was mentioned as a dim bulb. Sweetser, who is currently seeking the Republican nomination for the U.S. House, is best known for going public with the fact that she was raped and then announcing her run for the State Senate. "A major opportunist," "she has a one dimensional approach to crime," "oblivious to substantial issues," and "she digs into something and facts do not get in her way" is how Sweetser, 33, was described by journalists and colleagues in Montpelier. According to one political activist, Sweetser's slow-wittedness is evidenced by her sponsorship of HIV testing legislation that "ignores the facts surrounding the transmission of HIV" and her proposal to "gut the authority of Vermont's Human Rights Commission." Committees: Judiciary, Chair; Appropriations.

State Representative Richard (Ricky) Westman (R-Cambridge)

In spite of his reputation as a dim bulb, Ricky Westman obtained a leadership position with Vermont's GOP. "He has the brain power but doesn't use it" was how Westman was described by a fellow legislator. "He actually considered a run for the U.S. House against Bernie" is how one lobbyist characterized Westman's stupidity. Westman's hypocritical vote against the Gay Rights Bill sealed his position as a dim bulb. According to one survey participant, Westman is Montpelier's "Queen of De-Nile." Westman, born 1959, has served in the House since 1983. Committees: Health and Welfare; Rules.

As the legislative session gets under way, Montpelier's dimmest bulbs will be faced with innumerable opportunities to let their bulbs grow even dimmer. While there was general consensus on who represents the dimmest bulbs, it was made clear that, sadly, this list is not exhaustive. ▼

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