

Curtis Announces State Senate Bid



Photo by Stacianne K. Visco
Candidate David Curtis campaigns at the recent "Pride Without Borders" rally in Burlington.

by Paul Olsen

BURLINGTON -- On May 23, 1996, Burlington Democrat David Curtis announced his candidacy for one of Chittenden County's six seats in the State Senate. If elected, Curtis, who was diagnosed with AIDS in 1994, would become the first openly gay member of the Vermont State Senate.

As evidenced by his activism in Vermont's Democratic party and gay community, Curtis, 58, has a long history of public service. As an attorney, he served in the Vermont House of Representatives from 1975-1976, was appointed Vermont's Defender General from 1985-1987, and has held various positions within the Democratic party. Curtis currently serves on the boards of Vermont CARES, the American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont, and the AIDS Action Council.

Curtis was active in efforts to pass Vermont's Gay Rights Bill, and most recently worked as a member of the Adoption Reform Task Force. At the 1995 Vermont Coalition for Lesbian & Gay Rights (VCLGR) conference, he was awarded the VCLGR Leadership Award for his advocacy work dealing with issues of HIV/AIDS.

Curtis cites property tax reform, the restoration of civility to the State Senate, and continued health care reform as priorities if elected. "We need to begin to look at the issues surrounding managed care. Some states have experienced some major problems with HMOs and managed care. We need to start looking at things like a patient's bill of rights," Curtis said.

When asked to describe the responsibilities that would accompany serving as an openly gay State Senator, Curtis responded "I don't have a sense that being openly gay makes a significant difference in terms of what one should or should not do. I did not have that sense when I was Defender General. Being elected a Senator imposes certain responsibilities to be a leader whether one is gay or straight. As a gay man, I hope I have greater sensitivities to issues that come up surrounding sexual orientation."

Privately or publicly, Curtis' health may be an issue in his State Senate campaign. While his campaign announcement has been greeted with enthusiasm by many, some have expressed concern about the impact this race might have on his health and, if elected, his ability to serve. When asked about these concerns, Curtis said, "Obviously they are things I've thought about. I talked with my family, friends and my physician. They felt that it would not have an adverse impact on my health. There are certainly going to be some limitations. In terms of serving, I talked with a number of people who have been in the Senate who know me and the response I uniformly received was that they felt I was able to serve and that I would do a good job."

Curtis faces a number of challenges in his campaign for the State Senate. As an openly gay candidate, Curtis must deal with homophobia. "Homophobia plays a role in every campaign where we run as openly gay," said Howard Russell, former Chittenden County State Senate candidate. Curtis must also win one of the six nominations in the Democratic primary on September 3. If successful in the primary, Curtis anticipates a difficult race in the November general election. His fourth and perhaps most valiant fight may be the issues he faces living with AIDS.

Russell views Curtis' campaign as significant in many ways for the gay community. "Our whole lives we've been marginalized and on the outside ... this is a step forward saying 'we deserve a place at the table'" Russell said. ▼

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- ALMA (Active Lesbians of the Monadnock Area)**
P.O. Box 6345 • Keene, NH 03431
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- Amelia Earhart**
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- American Civil Liberties Union**
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- Battered Women's Services, Inc.**
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Community Based Police Office
Lieutenant Bill LaWare (802) 658-7658
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26 S. Main St. • Box 181 • Concord, NH 03301
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- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Alliance**
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- Golden Threads**
PO Box 65 • Richford, VT 05476-0065
802-848-7037
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- NEVGALR- North East Vermonters for Gay and Lesbian Rights • c/o Umbrella Women's Center**
One Prospect Ave. • St. Johnsbury, VT 05819
(802) 748-8645

- NH Citizens Alliance for Gay and Lesbian Rights**
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- One in Ten-Castleton State's g/l/b student group.**
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- PFLAG - Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays**
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(802) 257-5409
- Central Vermont**
J. Pecor • 159 Sheridan St. Ext. • Barre, VT 05641
(802) 479-9246
- Lake Champlain Chapter**
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- Manchester Area**
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- Rutland Area**
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(802) 229-1952
- SAGE (A social and support group for gay men over forty)**
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(802) 454-1635
- Social Alternatives for Gay Men (SAM)**
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(802) 649-3133
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One Prospect Ave. • St. Johnsbury, VT 05819
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- Vermont Bisexual Network**
PO Box 8124 • Burlington, VT 05402
- Vermont Coalition for Lesbian & Gay Rights**
P.O. Box 1125 • Montpelier, VT 05602
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- Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights Liaisons to the Governor's Office, Legislature, and State Government**
Susan Aranoff (802) 728-4121
Keith Goslant (802) 454-8552
- Vermont GLBT Pride**
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PO Box 237 • Burlington, VT 05402-0237
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133 State Street • Montpelier, VT 05633-6301
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P.O. Box 1535 • Burlington, VT 05402
Hotline: 658-1996
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79 Hanover Street • Lebanon, NH 03766
Office (603) 448-5922 • Hotline (603) 448-5525
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