

Community Lauds Amestoy Appointment

by Paul Olsen

Governor Howard Dean's appointment of Republican Jeff Amestoy to be Chief Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court has been well received by Vermont's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community. Amestoy, who was unanimously confirmed by the Vermont State Senate in January, replaces Chief Justice Frederic Allen, who retired December 31.

Jeff Amestoy has served as Vermont's Attorney General since 1985. Amestoy, 50, has historically backed gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered priorities in the Vermont Legislature. He supported both Vermont's Hate Crimes and Gay Rights bills. In a 1992 letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee regarding the then-proposed Gay Rights bill, Amestoy wrote, "I write to once again reaffirm my support for S. 131, an act prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation... It is appropriate as a matter of public policy to prohibit the use of a person's sexual orientation as an irrational factor in decisions made in the state regulated activities of banking, insurance, credit, labor relations, public accommodations, employment, and prevention of abuse. This bill does just that, and nothing more." Amestoy's public support was seen as important to the bill's final passage.

Leaders of Vermont's g/l/b/t community hold Amestoy in high regard. David Curtis, a member of the Judicial Nominating Board and the President of the American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont,

praised the appointment. "I'm always impressed with his willingness and ability to be sensitive to the issues surrounding human rights. His philosophy of the law will serve Vermont and the gay and lesbian community well," Curtis said. "Amestoy has been personally supportive of issues surrounding AIDS and HIV over the years," Curtis added.

Middlebury attorney and Freedom to Marry Task Force co-chair Susan Murray also praised Governor Dean's choice of Amestoy. "He has a good track record of support for the gay and lesbian community, and he's very strong on civil rights," said Murray, "He has a lot of integrity."

During his tenure on the Supreme Court Chief Justice Jeff Amestoy will likely be faced with cases that will have an impact on the lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Vermonters. In light of Amestoy's record as Attorney General, members of the g/l/b/t community have reason to remain optimistic about the future.

Governor Howard Dean is expected to appoint Amestoy's successor to the post of Attorney General sometime this Spring. The Vermont Democratic Party has nominated State Representative Thomas Costello and former State Senators Mary Just Skinner and Peter Welch for Dean's consideration. Vermont Republicans have nominated Peter Hall, John Thomas Quinn and Joan Loring Wing.

Men's and Women's Discussion Groups Forming

The Burlington Women's Council and the Vermont CARES Men's Health Project are currently gathering names for newly forming lesbian/bisexual and gay/bisexual discussion groups.

Anyone interested in participating in a women's discussion group can contact Jen Matthews of the Women's Council (contact information below). When enough names are gathered, a first meeting will be arranged, at which point the group can set its own guidelines. Specific considerations, such as meeting length, topics to be addressed, and facilitation are open to the desires of those who participate.


Men's Health Project will be offering two men's groups: a group for HIV negative gay and bisexual men subtitled "How the Uninfected can be Affected by HIV/AIDS," and a general gay/bi men's discussion group which will meet in the Johnson/Morrisville area (location to be announced). Both will meet for 6-8 weeks beginning in April, after which group members

can determine if they wish to continue.

"A lot of people wonder what the necessity is for an HIV negative group," says Tebbetts, "but there's a growing awareness that being negative in a community so hard hit by the virus can be stressful. These groups are a chance to talk about those issues." The group will be co-facilitated by Brian Gilbar and psychotherapist Jim Nelson, M.A.

The general men's group meeting in Lamoille County will be more self-defined, allowing group members to decide what will be addressed. The idea was initiated by a Men's Health Project volunteer as an attempt to create opportunities for men outside of the Burlington area.

For more information on women's groups, call Jen Matthews at the Burlington Women's Council, 802-865-7200. For information on the two men's groups, or on creating a discussion group in your area, contact Chris Tebbetts of the Vermont CARES Men's Health Project at 800-649-2437. ▼




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