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The OITM/Jeffords Interview

OITM: How do you view the prospects of ENDA passing in the 105th Congress?

Jeffords: It depends on what the scenario is when it comes up. Last time it came up in a way where there would be no filibuster. If we can get it up in a way there's no filibuster then it will pass in my judgment. Getting sixty votes could be quite difficult. The House is looking more optimistic and it could pass in the House to. The Senate is going to be the tough battleground.

OITM: What would the results of a Committee vote on ENDA be if it were held today?

Jeffords: I think it would pass out of Committee.

OITM: Do you plan to hold hearings on ENDA this session?

Jeffords: I haven't talked to Senator Kennedy. He and I work in concert on this and we haven't decided yet on hearings. I would expect we'll hold one but I'm not sure just when. We did it without a hearing last time... so the hearings not a necessity but it's always helpful.

OITM: In 1996 you voted in support of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). How did you come to support DOMA?

Jeffords: Because I think that's too much of a change in one time. I think it would be counter productive. I have to be candid. I don't know just what it means. When you get into all the legal ramifications of a marriage that's traditional dealing with all the laws and common law that we have all those things, I don't know what happens.

OITM: You waited until the last minute to announce your DOMA vote. Was it a difficult vote for you?

Jeffords: Yeah, I had to think a lot about it. I think that anything a gay couple wants to do can be done by contract. Therefore the marriage is not as important as it might otherwise be except in areas where we don't know what it means.

OITM: Through 1,049 statutes the federal government provides marriage benefits, rights, and privileges. Do you think that gay and lesbian couples should be entitled to the same federal benefits provided to heterosexual couples?

Jeffords: I don't know the answer to that. That's a lot of benefits. I don't know whether it makes sense in all of them. I guess I don't know the answer to that.

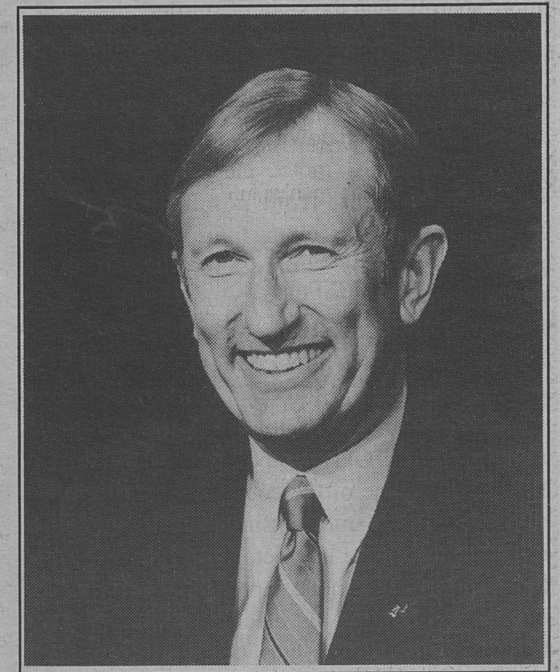
OITM: Do you think that DOMA is anti gay?

Jeffords: I didn't consider it that. I considered it a statement that we really don't know what it does, we don't know how far it goes, or where it should go. I didn't consider it an anti gay bill.

OITM: Since the institution of the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, there has been a 42% increase in discharges for homosexuality. What, if anything, do you think can be done about this?

Jeffords: The whole sexual deal in the military is such a mess right now. It's hard to say what can be done. You've got the same thing with sexual harassment with men against the women. The whole thing is a mess. So I don't

know what can be done. I have to know how those cases came about. I'm troubled by it. I don't know what it means because the purpose of the law was to allow people to privately express their sexuality. It bothers me.



OITM: What do you believe should be the national strategy to combat AIDS?

Jeffords: The money we are spending trying to prevent it and to try to cure it is certainly the best way to end it. Education even more so. Enhancing people to have safe sex. All of those things. It's a troublesome one. Education on safe sex is probably the most effective way.

OITM: Legislation prohibiting sexual orientation-based discrimination has been proposed in the U.S. Congress since 1972 yet it wasn't until 1994 that you cosponsored the Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA). What changed over time for you personally to make you the lead sponsor of ENDA?

Jeffords: It was probably more of a personal awareness of gay friends and the importance that it became as an issue. As more and more people came out, there's more and more alienation and evidence of discrimination which I thought was very unfair. I guess it became more apparent—the unfairness of it.

OITM: How do you explain the lack of openly gay Republican party activists in Vermont?

Jeffords: I hadn't concentrated on that. I've been to the Log Cabin Republicans of Vermont. I met with a group six years ago. I don't know the answer to that.

OITM: Do you have any final message you'd like to share with the readers of OITM?

Jeffords: It's incredibly important that they understand the importance of recognizing the difficulty some people have with going too far like DOMA. I think that people really just don't want to go that far that fast. They think that it's perfectly appropriate that you should not be discriminated against in the workplace but they're not sure about all these other changes.

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