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VERMONT'S FORUM FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER ISSUES

# OUT IN THE MOUNTAINS

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## Youth Meet the Governor

### • Dean Commits to Safe Schools for Vermont's GLBTQ Youth

BY ANDREW J. CAMPBELL

MONTPELIER — On November 19, seventeen gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and questioning (GLBTQ) teenagers met with Governor Howard Dean. With pizza and soda as an icebreaker, the youth held an important dialogue with Governor Dean — a meeting VCLGR's liaison, Keith Goslant, had been longing for. The teens, coming from many organizations, including

OutRight Vermont, Central Vermont OutRight, Youth Aware of Addison County, G/LEARN- Upper Valley OutRight and a group from Rutland, spoke about issues concerning GLBTQ youth.

The topic of safe schools was a highlight of the meeting. Youth spoke about harassment in public high schools, and the need for gay/straight alliances and other safe spaces within the school environment. Governor Dean supported the formation of gay/straight alliances.

State law requires public schools to adopt and enforce policies that deals with harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. Dean stressed the importance of these laws, and committed

to making sure they are complied with. He plans to work with the State Board of Education to enlighten teachers about sexual orientation and homophobia. He plans to send a letter to all public schools in Vermont, making it clear that homophobic harassment can not be tolerated in an educational environment.

The Governor had celebrated his birthday earlier that week, so the meeting ended with a few surprise gifts — freedom rings, a pin and an OutRight Vermont water bottle. The youth who attended seemed to walk away pleased. I'd say, we had a silent ally for a governor, but he's just found his voice.

## Judge Dismisses VT Gay Marriage Suit

Chittenden Superior Court Judge Linda Levitt surprised observers when she issued her decision quickly on the motion to dismiss by the Attorney General. The suit was thrown out citing only one of the seven arguments the Attorney General mentioned in his brief. In the seventeen page document, the judge addressed the rest of the points as "Invalid," "Speculative," "Difficult to grasp," and "With out common sense or logical basis."

The one point that was accepted was the states interest in maintaining a link between marriage and child rearing.

The plaintiffs will file an appeal sometime after the first of the year, according to Beth Robinson, one of the attorneys for the three couples suing the state. She expects the Supreme Court to start hearing arguments this spring.

The attorney general's office and lawyers seeking the right of gays and lesbians to marry have exchanged a series of sometimes pointed and sarcastic legal arguments. The three couples' lawyers last filing totaled 108 pages of arguments, legal analysis and citations of previous cases. The state responded with a final 29-page volley.

The state has made clear that it would oppose a swift decision without testimony and possibly a full-blown trial. Instead, it would seek an exchange of evidence and potentially a trial.

In his final response, Sorrell said he would argue that gays and lesbians are not hurt by the denial of marriage rights because they can obtain the benefits associated with marriage elsewhere and he would seek to prove that in the runup to a trial.

"Many of the statutory 'benefits' described by plaintiffs can be obtained through private contracts," he wrote. "Indeed, if this case were to proceed to discovery, it might be learned that some or all of the plaintiffs already possess some of the benefits they seek in this case."

There was not a lot of new ground broken in the final filings of the two sides. The couples continued to maintain that marriage is a fundamental foundation of society and should not



Lippert being sworn in as State Representative to Hinesburg.

## Bill Lippert: Making a Difference in Vermont

BY KERRY A. SLORA

Currently serving as Interim Executive Director at the Lund Family Center in Burlington, State Representative and gay rights activist Bill Lippert is surrounded by women: teen mothers and expectant parents, female volunteers and staff. In an office of a building combining the facilities of a clinic with the comforts of a second home, Bill has become a minority within a minority, taking meetings in rooms graced with photos of mothers and infants, and dodging stuffed animals on his way out the door. "I think it's good modeling to be a gay man providing leadership in a setting that traditionally hasn't had men," he says, smiling.

Indeed Bill Lippert has

spent years challenging the status quo, and becoming involved in not only the struggle for gay rights, but for human rights as well. "If we really want to build a powerful coalition to end [GLBT] oppression," Bill says, "we need to think about what's happening to other people. There is a linkage between what happens to us and what happens to people of color, people with disabilities, poor women . . . These oppressions interact with each other."

When Bill Lippert came out in 1972, and later that year came to Vermont from Pennsylvania, "there was no organization in the state for openly gay people." Consequently, Bill helped establish and sustain the first gay men's support group in Vermont. This endeavor also spawned other ef-

orts, such as the first gay dances, and the first political organization for gay people in the state. "We here in Vermont have made tremendous strides," says Bill fervently. "[These strides] are the result of many risks by gay and lesbian people . . . it didn't just happen!"

For many years Bill Lippert worked as a psychotherapist in Vermont while simultaneously lobbying for the gay rights bill and helping to establish gay and lesbian organizations. He has been working with non-profit organizations extensively for years, including a collaboration with others eight years ago to create Outright Vermont. The group saw Vermont youth battling with the same depression and alienation that they had felt as young people, and thus felt there was a great need for an organization like Outright. In 1985 Bill was hired as Executive Director of the Counseling Services of Addison County, making him one of the first openly gay people to head a mental health organization in the state of Vermont.

When appointed to the Vermont Legislature a few years ago, Bill decided to step back from the many organizations he was involved in, including Vermont CARES, to focus more on his role as State Representative for the town of Hinesburg. Before Representa-