

The Gay Vote

Op-Ed by Paul Olsen

The results of the 1998 elections will impact the lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered Vermonters. Gay marriage, funding for AIDS services and education, national gay rights legislation, and the future of legislation proposing citizen initiatives in Vermont are issues that likely will be impacted by the outcome of the November elections. As a preview to *OITM's* election year coverage I'd like to discuss the role the GLBT community can play in the campaign season and provide an overview the races to watch.

While the GLBT community mirrors that of the general population when it comes to both political activism and apathy, many members of the GLBT community are politically active. The Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force demonstrates the importance of grassroots activism and the maintenance of a presence at the State House in Montpelier. What role can individual members of Vermont's GLBT community play in the outcome of the 1998 elections? Firstly, register to vote and vote. Many local elections are decided by only a few votes. We can and do make a difference. Secondly, run for office or volunteer to work for the campaign of a candidate that most closely represents your views. They'll need people to make phone calls, write letters, campaign door-to-door, and hang signs. Thirdly, donate money to a candidate or cause that you support. It takes money to win. Lastly, volunteer to interview candidates and write for *OITM*. While *OITM* readers are quick to criticize our work (Amber LaMe...sorry...LeMay's monthly rants come to mind), we've always had trouble finding people willing to do the heavy lifting. While *OITM* is not allowed to make endorsements, the paper does serve as a forum to question candidates about their positions on GLBT issues and to communicate those positions to members of our community. While the work is thankless, help surveying candidates is needed. Having said that, here is a list of the key races to watch in 1998:

Governor: Incumbent Democratic Governor Howard Dean will face Republican Bernard Rome if Rome survives a primary challenge by conservative State Representative Ruth Dwyer (R-Thetford). Interviews with Rome and Dean appear in this issue of *OITM*. For the most part Dean has been a friend to the gay and lesbian community. While we are certain to disagree with Rome on some issues, he is not the villain VCLGR would like us to believe. As a result of her extreme right wing rhetoric Dwyer has earned a reputation as, well, a crackpot.

Lieutenant Governor: In a race that may have implications for future races for Governor, incumbent Democrat Lieutenant Governor Doug Racine will likely face a challenge from former Lieutenant Governor and current Chittenden County State Senator Republican Barbara Snelling. This political rematch is the race to watch as Snelling narrowly defeated Racine when they last met in 1994.

US Senate: Incumbent Senator Patrick Leahy, a Democrat, will face a challenge from Republican Jack McMullen. With the exception of his vote in favor of the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) Leahy has a good record on gay rights. At this point, little is known about McMullen or his positions.

US House of Representatives: Incumbent Independent Bernie Sanders will again square off against Republican Jack Long (Long ran as a Democrat in 1996). According to the Human Rights Campaign, Sanders has a 100% record of support for the GLBT community. Long's positions are unknown although he describes himself as a moderate on social issues.

Attorney General: Having been appointed by Governor Howard Dean, Democrat Bill Sorrell is likely to seek election to his first full term as Vermont's Attorney General. The GOP will likely field a strong candidate against Sorrell and he may also face a primary challenge.

Secretary of State: While usually not an office of high concern to the GLBT community, this race may receive national attention if openly gay State Representative Steve Howard (D-Rutland) survives the Democratic primary against Montpelier attorney Deb Markowitz. To date, Howard's campaign has been marred by a series of missteps that have not played well in the press. Both Howard and Markowitz would like to challenge incumbent Republican Jim Milne.

Auditor of Accounts: Openly gay State Auditor Ed Flanagan will seek reelection as State Auditor. Flanagan made national history as the first openly gay official elected statewide. At press time, no Republican had yet formally announced plans to challenge Flanagan.

Vermont Senate and House of Representatives: Democrats currently control both the Vermont Senate and House of Representatives. Republicans plan, in part, to use their opposition to Act 60 to regain control of the legislative branch. Democrats will contend that their tenure has been productive and successful. Openly gay State Representative Bill Lippert (D-Hinesburg) is running for reelection.

◆ *OITM* invited representatives from each of the three parties to write Op-Ed pieces about the Gay Vote in the up-coming election. The GOP did not respond.

Op-ed: What the 1998 Elections Mean to GLBT Vermonters

by Steve Hingtgen, Co-Chair of the Burlington Progressive Coalition

With so many Republicans and Democrats following the lead of the Radical Right these days, it will be more important than ever to know where individual candidates stand on the issues.

That can be confusing, but fortunately in Vermont there is a clear alternative. Independent Congressman Bernie Sanders and Progressive Coalition candidates have strong public records in support of equal protection and civil rights for all Vermonters.

With a 100% Human Rights Campaign voting record, it's always a pleasure to support Independent Bernie Sanders for Congress. Bernie has worked to stop discrimination in the workplace based on sexual orientation, and has supported funding for AIDS training for Federal workers, domestic partner health benefits for DC government employees, and increased funding for housing opportunities for people with AIDS.

Bernie fought vigorously against the "Defense of Marriage Act" by offering various amendments to weaken it. And he voted to repeal the law requiring the discharge of HIV+ members of the military.

Currently, Bernie is a co-sponsor of the Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA) which is under consideration in the US House.

At the State level, the Progressive Coalition currently hold just three seats in the Ver-

The Democrats

by Dave Curtis

The Vermont Democratic Party looks forward to the 1998 elections. As a party, we have much to be proud of in our accomplishments that are of direct interest to the GLBT community, including the passage of the Anti-discrimination Act in 1991 with Governor Dean's leadership and continued support for HIV/AIDS programs in Vermont.

We are proud that the Democratic Party as of this writing has the only openly gay candidates, including our State Auditor, Ed Flanagan; Secretary of State candidate Steve Howard; and Rep. Bill Lippert from Hinesburg. We are also proud of the leadership that Senator Leahy, Governor Dean, and Lt. Gov. Racine have shown during their tenure in office on GLBT issues. The fact that the Democratic State Committee elected an openly gay person living with AIDS as State Chair is a statement to all that as a party we are prepared to act upon the principles that we espouse in our platform.

In 1996, Vermont Democrats ran on a platform emphasizing property tax reform in order to provide more equal educational opportunity for all Vermont children. Last year, with the passage of Act 60, we kept our promise to Vermont. With the leadership of Democrats, we have adopted welfare reform that is a model for other states, have expanded insurance coverage for low income Vermonters and their children, and have kept our environmental protections in place despite attacks.

Since the election of Philip Hoff as Vermont's first Democratic Governor thirty-five years ago, the Vermont Democratic Party has been the party of the people and continues that tradition to this day. We are in the process of developing our 1998 platform, once again under the leadership of Ed Flanagan. If you wish to have input in the development of that platform or volunteer to help in the '98 campaign, call the State Headquarters at 660-4900 or stop in at our office in the Wing Building.

mont House. Too bad. With the recent launch of TIP, the well-funded right-wing effort to deny the equal protection of marriage to same-sex couples, we will need more legislators willing to stand up and speak out against the politics of hate.

We've all seen the outrageous propaganda that arrived in our newspapers, but you can bet this is just the TIP of the iceberg. This group figures an attack on same-sex marriage is an inflammatory way to mobilize more like-minded people, but as their coalition strengthens, the Radical Right will no

doubt go after a whole host of civil rights. All Progressive Legislators will strongly speak out against their efforts.

A lot is at stake in this November's elections. By voting for Bernie Sanders and Progressive candidates, you'll know you're supporting candidates who are firmly dedicated to protecting the civil rights of GLBT Vermonters.

Better yet, how about running as a Progressive? Offer your neighbors a choice—you can bet they'll thank you. Please call me at 864-8204 if the idea appeals to you.

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tion on the basis of sexual orientation. Dean also supported the extension of benefits to the domestic partners of Vermont state employees. In 1994, Dean appointed Democrat Bill Lippert, an openly gay man, to fill a vacant seat in the House of Representatives representing Hinesburg.

Dean recently met with *Out in the Mountains* to discuss the legislative session and his 1998 reelection campaign where he will face either Republican businessman Bernard Rome or State Representative Ruth Dwyer (R-Thetford). Excerpts from the interview:

OITM: Why should gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Vermonters vote for you?

Dean: Because I probably have the best record of any

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ment speech Rome said "Our Governor and our legislature have demonstrated — through Act 60 — their appetite for centralized state control. Such lawmaking sharply illustrates their belief that the average Vermonter is not smart enough and does not have enough common sense to make his or her own decisions — and that he or she needs to hire people in Montpelier to handle things for them." "I see a beautiful, small state, a jewel in the crown of democracy, whose ruggedly individualistic citizens are plainspoken and tolerant and whose culture has traditionally embodied a wholesome work ethic," Rome added. In response to a question at his campaign announcement Rome stated his opposition to same gender marriage.

Three weeks after declaring his candidacy Rome met with *OITM* in Montpelier. Excerpts from the interview:

OITM: What does your candidacy offer gay, lesbian, bi-

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Governor on the issues that they care about which are civil rights and equity. I've been pretty vocal about standing up for kids who are at risk. I think we are still the only state in the country that guarantees do-

mestic partner benefits for state employees. I think Vermont has been a Mecca of tolerance and I think that that tolerance starts at the top.

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