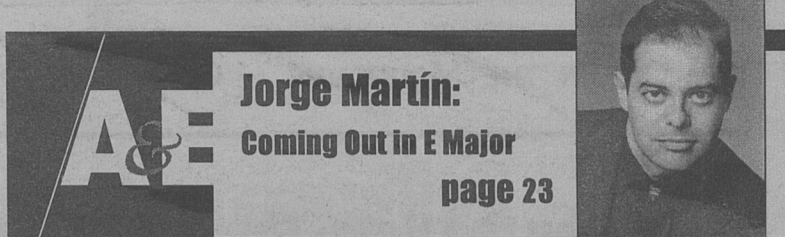


COME OUT, COME OUT WHEREVER YOU ARE!

Alix Olson and others perform for National Coming Out Week across VT

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Jorge Martín:

Coming Out in E Major

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

OUT IN THE MOUNTAINS

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Report Points to Stark Choices for GLBT Voters

The Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force last month released a detailed analysis of the year 2000 presidential candidates and their stand on issues affecting gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

"Courting the Vote: The 2000 Presidential Candidates' Positions on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Issues" documents the positions of two Democrats, nine Republicans and one Independent. It relies on public statements, voting records, and other means of gauging candidates' records on GLBT issues. The report is the first in a series of analytical pieces on electoral politics the NGLTF Policy Institute will publish between now and the November 2000 election.

The Policy Institute is a think-tank based in New York dedicated to research, policy analysis, strategy development, and coalition building to advance the equality and understanding of GLBT people.

NGLTF Executive Director Kerry Lobel noted that many political reporters and editorial writers recently have cast the Republican Party in a favorable light in the GOP's handling of GLBT issues — a conclusion

COURTING, P2

Blue Cross Blue Shield to Cover Domestic Partners

BY BARBARA DOZETOS

Vermonters will soon have access to health insurance coverage for their domestic partners regardless of the size of their employers — but it will cost them marginally more than it does their married counterparts.

Effective January 1, 2000, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont plans to offer domestic partnership coverage to all groups they insure, no longer restricting the benefits to organizations with 50 or more employees.

The insurance company said it will have to process additional paperwork to protect itself against fraud, and will be charging an administrative fee to recoup that cost.

"We bear the risk of someone affiliating solely for insurance purposes and need to own the administration," said Bob Opel, vice president and general counsel to BCBS.

Elizabeth Costle, Commissioner of Vermont's Banking, Insurance, Securities, and Health Care Administration, said that requiring a sworn affidavit is standard practice among insurers in cases of domestic partnership. No such proof is required for heterosexual married couples.

Opel admitted that he did not have an easy explanation for the difference in requirements. "Marriage is a status that's pervasive and legal and has a definition and a reality that is independent of insurance. Domestic partnership really is just an insurance status," he said. "We've tried to

come up with criteria that eliminate the differences to give folks that want it surrogate coverage."

Although the difference in requirements may seem inequitable on the surface, State Representative Bill Lippert of Hinesburg points out that it has a logical basis. "Whether you're required to produce a copy of it or not, there is a sworn legal document to back up a claim of marriage," he said. "Right now, there is no such thing for domestic partners. The affidavit they're requiring serves that purpose."

The amount of the administrative fee has not yet been determined. In the past, companies with more than 50 employees have handled the verification task themselves. BCBS is still unsure what it will cost the company to process the affidavits. "One of the principles of a health plan with limited capitalization is that we can't and won't do things that people won't or can't pay for," Opel said.

The initial plan was to add a monthly charge of about one dollar for each domestic partner rider, but Costle said she thought that would be too high to justify. Opel said the current plan looks more like a one-time set up fee with a goal of merely recovering additional costs. "[Commissioner Costle] has made it clear that there had better be a clear rationale behind the dollar amount," he said.

Opel said his company plans to have the proposed changes filed with the Banking, Insurance, Securities, and Health Care

Administration in early October. BISHCA then has 60 days to respond; if the answer is positive, the company could start offering the benefits immediately.

BCBS might be the first, but soon might not be the only Vermont company offering these benefits. Lippert plans to ask the legislature to "look at requiring

by benefit of coverage for their spouse, as opposed to a heterosexual who isn't married for whatever reason or the gay employee without access to the institution of marriage." He will ask the legislative counsel to draft a bill for consideration in the 2000 session.

Domestic partnership benefits

Blue Cross Blue Shield Qualifications for Domestic Partnership

- Must be an arrangement between two people and only two people.
- Both parties must 18 or over.
- Must share a residence and have done so for at least 6 months prior to application.
- Must not be blood relatives such that they would be precluded from legal marriage.
- Parties must provide mutual support caring and commit and intend to continue indefinitely in that relationship.
- Must assume joint responsibility for living expenses, but not necessarily equal monetary contribution to the household.
- Both parties must agree that both are responsible.
- Neither party may have filed a termination of domestic partnership in the previous 9 months.
- Neither can be married to anyone.

all insurance companies to offer domestic partner benefits to everyone." He called difference in benefits simple inequity.

"It creates unequal compensation for employees who are working side by side," Lippert said. "The married heterosexual gets higher level of compensation

became a priority for BCBS earlier this year when an independent arbitrator ruled that the City of Winooski, a small group employer covered by the Berlin, Vermont-based insurance company, must provide benefits for the partner of one the city's police officers. ▼

Burlington Church Faces Exclusion — Christ Church, Presbyterian fights for GLBT Inclusion

photo Scot Applegate



Members of the Christ Church congregation are regular participants in the Vermont Pride festivities. Leaders of the group say that members are unified in their support of GLBT rights.

WITH FILES FROM DAN PEABODY

A Vermont congregation may soon find itself removed from its parent church for welcoming gays and lesbians into its ministry and lay ministry.

Presbyterian Church USA has ordered Christ Church, Presbyterian to comply with a recent amendment to the national church's constitution that prevents gays and lesbians from serving as ministers, elders or deacons.

The Burlington congregation has repeatedly refused to do so. Now the national body is forcing the issue by putting CCP's direct governing body, the Presbytery of Northern New England, on trial.

CCP says it disagrees with the national church's stance on a bib-

lical level, but that it's more importantly a matter of conscience.

"We cannot ethically turn our backs on people by prohibiting them from leadership or any other way," said Rev. Michael Brown, CCP co-pastor.

CCP, a More Light congregation since 1984, has long stood behind its official statement that it will "welcome and embrace on an equal basis" members regardless of, among other things, sexual orientation.

Because the church's ban on homosexual ordination was only a guideline until recently, the national body was powerless to challenge the CCP stance.

But with the 1997 amendment changing the guideline to a requirement came an order to conform.

CCP refused, calling the amendment a "measure entirely in contradiction to the principles of inclusiveness in membership and service within" the church that "represents an unjust denial of qualified persons' call to office, and is an abridgement of the rights and duties of congregations and presbyteries within this Church."

The regional New England presbytery, which had given the original orders to conform, decided that it agreed with the congregation's assessment of the situation and rescinded its order. It's for that reason that Presbyterian Church USA is taking it to task.

The trial begins in Bedford, New Hampshire, on October 8. ▼