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morality and allowing them enough rope to do themselves in." Lippert said the "fair-minded" committee "is not going to be swayed by arguments based in prejudice and bigotry."

The House Judiciary Committee also has jurisdiction over the Definition of Marriage Bill introduced last session by Representative George Schiavone. Although its author has renewed efforts to see it passed, the bill, which would restrict same gender couples from marriage, has been stalled in committee since it was assigned there early last year.

Opening Day Demonstration

Early assumptions following the Court's December 20 decision were that domestic partnership is the only real plan of action. Governor Howard Dean has said on several occasions that he would support domestic partnership legislation, but is uncomfortable with the idea of actual gay

marriage. Dean has recently clarified his position, declaring in a radio interview, "I'm against gay marriage."

"Dean is out of touch with folks. I'm pretty sure that separate but equal isn't going to fly," said Judy Sargent of Marshfield, VT. "We should save ourselves a lot of trouble and time and just make it marriage."

Sargent was among a group of about 30 people who waited in vain for Kansas-based hate group Westboro Baptist Church to appear for an announced protest in front of the Statehouse on the legislature's opening day.

Although Fred Phelps and his followers did not show up as promised, two residents of Waterbury did offer some distraction, carrying signs that read "Pass the law and they will come" and "Vermont's too small to hold them all."

Chris Viens was there to voice his fear that an influx of marriage-minded homosexuals would crowd Vermonters out of their jobs and state. "If even

five percent of the country's homosexuals move in here, we're going to be over-run," said Viens. "We'll all lose our jobs." Viens later admitted he was a contractor who would potentially benefit if such growth did occur.

The two men stood their ground and engaged the gay rights supporters in lively conversation for about an hour.

Support for Marriage Grows

On January 14, House Bill 694, "An act relating to the ability to marry," was introduced by a tri-partisan group of representatives.

Dean Corren of Burlington, lead sponsor of the bill, said the proposed legislation would make marriages between two people valid without regard to the gender of either person, provided they meet the requirements prescribed in the rest of Vermont's existing marriage statutes.

Co-sponsors Republican Gordon Bristol of Brattleboro,

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photo Maxwell Stroud

About 30 demonstrators turned out in Montpelier on opening day of the legislature prepared to counter members of the Westboro Baptist Church who never appeared.

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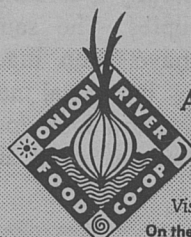
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