

news

Vermonters Hailed at Millennium March on Washington

BY KENDRA HENSON

"Two, Four, Six, Eight, Civil Unions in our state!" exclaimed Vermonters at the Millennium March on Washington. More than one hundred proud Vermont residents made the journey to Washington, DC, for the April 30 march and rally.

Crowds estimated at more than 100,000 people cheered and bowed down as the Vermont contingent made its way through the streets of DC. As supportive bystanders watched and celebrated the march, people recognized the importance of the Vermont marchers by shouting out "Thank you, Vermont!" and "Way to go, Vermont!"

One Vermont marcher proudly expressed a feeling of 'superstardom' as she passed the supporters. The Freedom to Marry Task Force led the Vermont marchers

with a banner and civil rights signs. While there were rumors of a petition floating around to put Vermont at the head of the parade, a group decision was made to all stick together in the parade and turn down the option of just letting two Vermont marchers head up the parade.

The Vermont group included a range of folks, from children to college students to civil union heroes, including attorneys Beth Robinson and Susan Murray, plaintiffs Stan Baker and Peter Harrigan, and Representative Bill Lippert, to name just a few.

Although controversy had long dogged the MMOW, with opponents saying the organizers were not focussing on all-inclusive efforts to represent the diversity in the queer community, the crowd grew into a large and powerful movement through the DC streets. Some marchers who had attended previous march-

es on Washington did comment that past marches appeared to have larger numbers of leather, drag, and non-white marchers.

Other points of contention included criticism of the organizers' lack of queer community demands for the Federal Government. Many critics noted that previous

marches had a greater sense of purpose and direction, while the MMOW appeared to focus mainly on entertainment and corporate sponsorship.

The Human Rights Campaign organized volunteers to register voters during the march and rally. Many speakers at the rally also encouraged the movement to register to vote and to learn more about the 2000 elections. One speaker encouraged more representatives of the queer population to get out and run for office as a way to have a powerful impact on social justice issues affecting the GLBTQA community.

While some controversy bubbled up around the organization of the march, it seemed to have no effect on the event that took place the Saturday before the march and rally: the mass wedding held on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Hundreds of couples participated in the wedding on the sunny Saturday afternoon, which

was presided over by the Reverend Troy Perry, founder of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

A handful of protesters from an ex-gay church, holding signs with messages such as 'Got AIDS Yet' and 'Gays Go to Hell,' were barely noticed during the course of the ceremony.

Reverend Jimmy Creech also spoke at the ceremony encouraging the couples to celebrate the joy of their unions. Creech was stripped of his credentials by the United Methodist Church after performing holy union ceremonies for gay couples.

The couples participating in the wedding were very aware that they were becoming part of a holy union not yet recognized by federal and state governments. As Reverend Elder Darlene Garner stated during the ceremony, "As couples, we are human beings without the legal benefits of marriage in 49 states, but we only have 49 states to go."▼

Photo: Max Stroud



Burlington Church Awaits Decision

A ruling from the Presbyterian Church is expected this week in the case of a local congregation that voted to reject a national church guideline that forbids gay men and lesbians from holding official positions in the denomination.

Burlington's Christ Church, Presbyterian congregation was ordered by a regional church court to comply with the national rule and refuse church offices to openly homosexual congregants. Its appeal to the denomination's highest court was heard in late May.

Peter Oddleifson told the court that the entire denomination was agonizing over the issue, and that forcing the rul-

ing on individual congregations "threatens to destroy or seriously damage a church." Representing proponents of the legislation, Gordon Fish argued that it is allowing individual interpretations of dictates that threatens unity.

Any decision handed down at this level can only be overruled by the church's General Assembly, which is expected to discuss the issue when it meets at the end of June.

At that time, the assembly is also expected to discuss a same-gender marriage ceremony performed in a Dobbs Ferry, NY, congregation, as well as a proposal that would forbid same-gender marriages completely.▼

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there is anguish and there is pain, and it affects real people."

He also pointed to his successful efforts to encourage tougher enforcement of laws that protect health care consumers, insure that tax dollars slated for environmental protection are not used to fund bureaucracy, expose waste in state government's contracting practices, and remedy the compromised quality of care at a veterans' nursing home and the state's second largest community mental health center.

The 49-year-old Waterbury resident announced his agenda for work in the senate which includes universal health care, a patient's bill of rights, and campaign finance reform.

"This is when I start to get angry," said Flanagan as he launched an attack on the current US Senate for what he called "unconscionable" behavior in recent years. "There are decent hard-work-

ing Americans who find it more difficult now than 15 years ago to make a living," he said, "That is the sin which this Senate with its agenda has committed and that I will attempt to change."

"I am running for the US Senate seat because of Jim Jefford's voting record," Flanagan told supporters. He said he would be a "different kind of senator," from Jeffords, who he acknowledged as a nice man. "But in the end, a voting record is the final and ultimate work product of a US senator," he said.

Responding to questions about Jeffords' highly publicized support of HIV/AIDS funding and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, Flanagan said, "Of course, I'll acknowledge those votes, but they pale in comparison to the \$181 billion he voted to take away from Vermont in Medicare financing." He also said that Jeffords had not supported the Patient's Bill of Rights or efforts to allow Vermonters to obtain cheaper

prescription medicines from Canada. Jeffords also voted to pass the Defense of Marriage Act, which Flanagan said he would eagerly vote to repeal.

He never mentioned his primary opponent Sen. Jan Backus, D-Chittenden, and when asked about her he said, "I think the small group of Democrats who vote in the primary will see I am the better choice." The last official reports show Backus lagging far behind Flanagan in campaign contributions.

In his remarks, Flanagan noted his Vermont roots. He was not born in Vermont, due to his father's position working for a US senator in Washington. "However, my mother and I have checked the calendar carefully, noting the frequent trips my parents made back and forth" he said, "and it is apparent that I was conceived here."▼

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