

Ruth Dwyer: The OITM Interview

BY PAUL OLSEN

Optimistic that she will defeat Bill Meub in the September 12 GOP gubernatorial primary, Ruth Dwyer has been traveling the state campaigning against incumbent Gov. Howard Dean.

Dwyer, 42, served in the Vermont House of Representatives from 1994-1998 and was the Republican nominee for Governor in 1998. Her campaign calls for repeal of Act 60, school choice, safer roads and bridges, responsible environmentalism, and increased consumer choice in health care.

Campaigning on a theme of "listening to Vermont," Dwyer has held town meetings throughout the state to hear just what the concerns of Vermonters are.

Her campaign literature emphasizes "Community, Common Sense and Fairness."

In July, Dwyer met with *Out in the Mountains* and discussed a number of issues of specific concern to Vermont's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community. Excerpts from the interview:

OITM: Why should gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Vermonters support your candidacy for Governor?

Dwyer: The issues that affect all Vermonters like health care, property taxes, education, and permit issues affect gays and lesbians as well as they do everybody else. My concern is that they should be focused on the issues that affect them everyday financially and businesswise because clearly that is what we all think about during the day, not cultural issues.

OITM: As Governor would you appoint openly gay men and lesbians to the Legislature, state commissions, and/or your Cabinet?

Dwyer: I don't think that would be criteria for me. It would be the skills and what talent they have and what experience they have. I would never look at that as a determining factor for anybody.

OITM: In the state budget, \$12,000 has been provided to Outright Vermont for support services for gay and lesbian youth. As Governor, what would your position be on this funding?

Dwyer: I don't agree with that. To me, that would be the same as appropriating money to the N.R.A. or to Right to Life or any other private group to advocate a position. I don't think it is appropriate for taxpayer money to be given to any private group for any reason. I would just have a policy that no special interest group gets taxpayer money. They should

raise their own private funds and do advocating based on that.

OITM: At a recent debate you indicated that you posted a "Take Back Vermont" sign at your farm in Thetford. Who is it that you'd like to take Vermont back from?

Dwyer: I think the "Take Back Vermont" slogan is to give Vermont back to the people. The press has given the impression that people are putting them up just because of the civil union issue and I don't find that at all. Their whole feeling is that two years ago we wanted to take back Vermont for the people because we felt the government was too intrusive. Two years later, we feel it is even more intrusive and we want Vermont to go back to the people so that the peoples' voices govern rather than the court and rather than the Legislature promoting a political agenda that maybe isn't what the people want.

OITM: Had you been Governor in 1992, what would your position have been on legislation prohibiting sexual orientation based discrimination in housing, employment, credit and public accommodations?

Dwyer: I've never read the bill, so I don't know what's in it, but I don't think we should ever discriminate for any reason. We should have the same standards for everybody and I assume that's what the law says.

OITM: What role, if any, do you think homophobia played in the civil union debate?

Dwyer: As far as legislators are concerned, I think very little. I don't think that was a big issue for most legislators at all. They were much more wrapped up in the Constitution, some of them cared about what their constituents wanted and that's what they were going to do, and some had a real emotional involvement because of a family member.

For the vast majority of people that I talk to out there, that is not an issue for them. The issue that I hear, Take Back Vermont and what does that mean to people, is not an

expression of homophobia in any way. What it is is that people feel that they truly didn't have a voice. They should have been able to vote on it like they did in California and Hawaii and that it was an issue that the [Supreme] Court dictated and they didn't want to be excluded from that process and they feel that they were.

OITM: You've called for repeal of Vermont's new civil union law. What are your concerns with the new law?

Dwyer: If the message in November is clearly that the voters want it repealed, then I think that is what we should do and I still believe we should go forward with the [constitutional amendment] process that lets them decide the issue. I don't think you can repeal the law and say that everything is going to be the way it was before. You are still going to have to have that dialogue and have a process that goes forward where people finally make a decision. You can start from scratch and do what I think we should have done in the first place, which is go ahead with the constitutional amendment process and let the people vote and decide.

OITM: Like gay marriage, another contentious social issue is abortion. Polls consistently show that the majority of Vermonters support abortion rights. If the majority of Vermonters were to support a constitutional amendment supporting freedom of choice, would you change your position on abortion?

Dwyer: No. The majority of Vermonters are going to do what the majority of Vermonters are going to do. My personal position is that I need to be honest about it. I've always have been. I don't pretend that a majority of Vermonters agree with me. I know they don't.

OITM: The State Senate considered and rejected a constitutional amendment defining marriage as one man and one woman. Should they have just passed it for the sake of giving Vermonters an opportunity to vote on the issue?

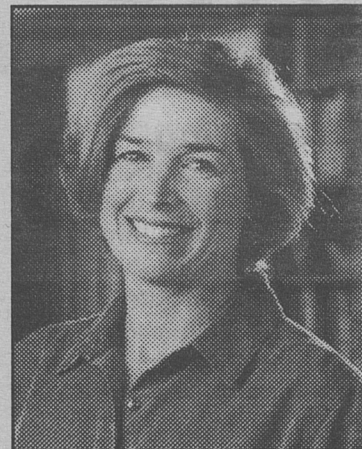
Dwyer: I think they should have passed it for no other reason than the fact that I don't think the mandate from the [Supreme] Court was constitutional. The only way to deal with that would have been to start the amendment process. I truly believe the Court would have respected that and would not have taken the case back and changed its decision. I think that would have been the healthier way to go.

OITM: Specifically, which benefits do you think that committed gay and lesbian couples should not be entitled to?

Dwyer: I have absolutely no problem with people making medical, funeral, or inheritance decisions. People do that now. I'm not against that. But the people were very clear in saying that we don't want gay marriage and we don't want the institution of marriage to have a counterpart. The new law is very deceptive because it attempts to be marriage only they use two or three different words so that it is just a little different and is separate but equal. Clearly it is as close as you can get [to marriage] and I just think that is deceptive and it goes against what people were saying they wanted.

OITM: Approximately six Town Clerks have indicated that they will refuse to issue civil union licenses to gay and lesbian couples. If you were denied a marriage license because you are divorced, would you feel discriminated against? Divorce and remarriage run counter to some religions.

Dwyer: Probably. I have never thought about it. If that violated that Town Clerk's religious principles I would respect the fact that she would-



n't want to issue it to me. Someone else would have to do it, which I guess is what they are doing with civil unions.

OITM: Will you accept an endorsement from State Rep. Nancy Sheltra's STARS anti civil union PAC?

Dwyer: I don't know how you accept or reject an endorsement but we certainly won't ask for one. I'm not real familiar with what they are advocating.

OITM: What is your position on the medical use of marijuana by people living with HIV/AIDS?

Dwyer: I never really thought about it. I'd have to know more from the physicians. My concern is, is that a first step towards legalizing other drugs?

OITM: Would you support Vermont's federal "presumed eligibility" application that would make Vermonters living with HIV automatically eligible for Medicaid?

Dwyer: Is that true with other diseases as well? I wouldn't want to single out one disease and say because it is HIV yes and because it is leukemia no. I don't see that that makes any sense.

OITM: As Governor would you maintain a relationship with Vermont's gay and lesbian community through an official liaison?

Dwyer: I don't think I

DWYER > 6

WE OPEN THE DOORS TO HOMES ALL OVER VERMONT!



*Mortgages For People,
Not For Profit*

1-800-865-VDCU(8328)

Real Ale For Real People

Proud Brewer of Gay Pride Beer available statewide

Liz Trott • Janice Moran
PO Box 837
So. Royalton, VT 05068
802.763.7539

Tours Saturday Afternoon
and by Appointment