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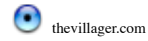
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Villager photo by Elisabeth Robert

Mayor Mike Bloomberg and City Council Speaker Christine Quinn shared a laugh on May 8 at Gansevoort Peninsula when they voiced support for a marine transfer station for recyclable waste at the location. The mayor was teasing Quinn about having worn "comfortable shoes" at a prior event. He told her that he was checking her shoes.

Equality is the goal, from marriage to the military

By Ed Gold

"Basic equality" is the central political goal of the gay community, according to Assemblymember Deborah Glick. The struggle for marriage legislation is at the heart of this campaign.

Glick, along with many others in the gay leadership, is optimistic that, with Governor Eliot Spitzer's support, the issue is moving steadily forward in Albany.

State Senator Tom Duane, who has been "fighting for marriage legislation for most of this decade," says he has a positive outlook, but "we're not there yet."

But he notes that Joseph Bruno, the Republican State Senate leader, "has come a long way," and now accepts civil union. There is also encouragement from the suburbs, where gay households have been much more accepted. But, Duane adds, "we still have a lot of work to do, including the fact that we have Democrats in the Senate and Assembly who are not yet onboard."

Other issues on the gay agenda include campaigns against hate crimes and employment discrimination, for student dignity, the continuing health challenge presented by H.I.V./AIDS and the painful military policy of "don't ask, don't tell."

On the marriage issue, State Committee-member Rachel Lavine gives personal testimony on the subject.

"I gave birth last year to a child, and when my partner, Roberta Kaplan, went to see our baby, she unfortunately ran into a homophobic nurse who gave her a hard time," Lavine recalls. "I guess that's Manhattan for you. It's really important for both mothers in a lesbian relationship to provide health

City equal benefits to city benefits and services.” She expects to give strong support to Spitzer as he tries to fulfill his commitment on the marriage issue.

And Brad Hoylman — Greenwich Village Democratic district leader and former president of Gay and Lesbian Independent Democrats — adds hopefully that, “We have 53 co-sponsors of the marriage bill in the Assembly, with Assemblyman Danny O’Donnell, supported by Glick, leading the effort.

“It’s a real challenge in the Senate,” Hoylman admits, “but we are picking up support from some mayors and we are putting pressure on Republicans in close districts.”

On a personal note, as of June 21, Hoylman will be the new chairperson of Community Board 2 — covering Greenwich Village, Soho, Noho, Little Italy and Hudson Square.

Several gay community leaders spoke forcefully about state legislation referred to as “dignity in the educational area.”

The aim, says Duane, is to ensure that all students are treated with dignity. Schools, he says, “would have to develop plans to prevent bullying, ridicule and other forms of discrimination through anti-bias programs.”

Glick adds that such legislation would be “across the board” on all behavior that creates hostility, whether racial, religious or sexual: “It means you couldn’t call a classmate a faggot.”

Health issues are also high on the gay agenda, according to Richard Burns, executive director of the L.G.B.T. Center in the Village, where there is an extensive educational and service program combating H.I.V./AIDS.

“We’re asking all the presidential candidates,” Burns says, “to make a deep commitment for research and services in fighting this dread disease.”

Glick focuses on educational efforts to prevent infection and the institution of a “strict regimen” to deal with those who are extremely sick.

“We need to educate people against unprotected sex,” adds Hoylman.

Duane points out that, “Right now, there is no cure, so we have to support research until a cure is found.”

Virtually all the leaders keep an eye on hate-crime legislation. At the state level, an amendment to existing legislation would also cover transgenders. At the federal level, efforts are still underway to include “sexual orientation” under hate-crime coverage.

The frustration over the “don’t ask, don’t tell” U.S. military policy continues but with greater expectation, as all eight Democratic presidential candidates have declared their opposition.

“It’s a foolish policy that compromises our national security,” Glick states. “When we’re desperate for Arab-speaking translators, we remove these specialists from the service because they happen to be gay.”

Hoylman notes that gays are integrated in the British Army and no one has suggested that it’s hurt their national security.

Duane is particularly angry at Rudy Giuliani.

“When he was mayor, we felt he was with us on this issue,” Duane says. “Now that he’s running for president, he’s joined all the other Republicans in opposing an integrated bias-free military.”

Adding a new chapter to the anti-hate agenda, Councilmember Rosie Mendez is pushing a bill in the City Council, urging state legislation that will enable judges to disregard courtroom appeals based on so-called “panic strategies.”

Her bill would prevent hate-crime defendants from invoking perceived characteristics of the victim,

such as race, religion or sexual orientation, as a defense.

“Lawyers should never be allowed to distort the facts of the case to a jury’s bias or prejudice,” Mendez argues.

As for the St. Patrick’s Day Parade in Manhattan, Lavine states philosophically that nothing is likely to change here in the near term as long as New York Catholics run the event.

“Chris Quinn had the right idea,” she said. “If you want to march with other Catholics where you will be welcomed, you can go to Dublin.”

As for where the future will take Quinn, the City Council’s first openly gay speaker, there’s no shortage of speculation. She enjoys an excellent working relationship with Mayor Mike Bloomberg, and many expect she may run for mayor herself in 2009. Another possible option foreseen for Quinn is getting a job running an agency in a new Democratic administration in D.C.



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