

Pressing the flesh

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Ken Reeves: the gay that got away

While East Boston state Rep. Anthony Petruccelli won an early endorsement from MassEquality in his special election bid to fill departed Senate Prez Robert Travaglini's First Suffolk and Middlesex seat, it appears that support from LGBT politicians in and around the Boston-Cambridge-Revere-Winthrop district isn't a given. Then again, the same could be said for Petruccelli's opponent, Revere City Councilor Dan Rizzo.

As we've reported previously, openly gay state Sen. Jarrett Barrios is supporting Rizzo in the March 29 Democratic primary, which, absent any other candidates, will effectively decide the race (See "Pressing the Flesh," April 26). Barrios has been friends with Rizzo for eight years and credits the four-term councilor with helping him get elected to his Middlesex, Suffolk and Essex seat, which includes Revere. Rizzo's wife, Jean, has served as Barrios's campaign treasurer. Additionally, says Barrios, Rizzo has "consistently stood up for progressive values, in a place where it's not always easy to stand up for progressive values." Among those values, notes the senator, is strong support for marriage equality. In an effort to introduce Rizzo to folks from the Cambridge portion of the First Suffolk and Middlesex district, Barrios, who also represents part of the city, is hosting a meet and greet for the candidate at his Cambridge abode on May 6.

And to cosponsor the event, Barrios recruited several members of the LGBT community, among them Cambridge Mayor Ken Reeves and **Sue Hyde, a longtime activist and a resident of the First Suffolk and Middlesex District. Hyde's day job is director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's annual Creating Change conference. Most notably, however, she is a member of MassEquality's board of directors. But Hyde says that though she agreed to help spread the word about the Rizzo meet and greet, she remains undecided in the race. She further stated, "I have some uncertainties" when it comes to Petruccelli. Hyde declined to elaborate on her concerns in detail as she said she had yet to address them with the candidate face-to-face. But she indicated that they relate to his initial support for the Travaglini-Lees, anti-gay marriage amendment back in 2004. "I am trying to sort out the meaning of the vote for Travaglini-Lees and I'm uncertain right now as to what that was really about," said Hyde. "I do understand he's now enthusiastically in our corner."**

Petruccelli has said he supported the amendment in 2004 as a favor to Travaglini and in an effort to thwart the passage of more draconian amendments, but has since realized that he cannot in good conscience vote to rescind existing rights for same-sex couples (See "East Boston Rep. Comes Out Against Marriage Amendment," Aug. 9, 2005). He has since become an important behind-the-scenes player in efforts to defeat the current anti-gay marriage amendment.

Despite her concerns, Hyde, who said she had a "good conversation," with Rizzo on the amendment, has no problem with MassEquality's endorsement of Petruccelli. "MassEquality is doing its job. They are consistently and without equivocation supporting incumbents who are pledged to vote against the amendment," said Hyde (Barrios expressed a similar sentiment). But as a voter in the district, Hyde said she comes to the race "with a different set of interests, including my interests as a person who has lived in this district and was completely ignored by [Travaglini]. So I really am undecided." She hopes that a May 8 candidate forum will help make up her mind. (The forum will take place from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at the LBJ Apartments, 150 Erie St.,

Cambridge.)

As for Reeves, his mind is already made up. Though he's willingly cosponsoring the May 6 event for Rizzo, he's staying neutral. "I ran into Mr. Petrucci on Sunday and told him he could invite me to cosponsor an event, too," says Reeves. "I got enough enemies." (Could he mean The Cambridge Chronicle?). Reeves points out that he doesn't reside in the district so he's not going to choose sides in a race he says "has nothing to do with me." When we point out that the district includes a portion of the city over which he presides as mayor, Reeves concedes, "Well, that's true." Nonetheless, the candidates are on their own as far as he's concerned. Says Reeves, "I do wish them all well."

Love, honor and Obey?

How badly does the Mass. Republican Party want to win the 11th Norfolk District special election? Well, since we signed on to the state GOP mailing list via our personal e-mail account well over a year ago — in an election year, mind you — not one e-mail asking support for a Republican candidate has landed in our in-box, which tells you a little something about why GOP candidates fared so badly last November. So imagine our surprise when on April 25 a little love note with "IMPORTANT" as its the subject heading came our way courtesy of Kirk Dobson, who introduced himself in the e-mail as the state GOP's political operations director. Dobson was seeking help for "a massive project" being organized at the party's Boston HQ — a mass mailing and phone banking effort for Doug Obey's 11th Norfolk District campaign. "It is very, very important that we work together to help make Massachusetts a two party state," Dobson concluded at the close of the note. Obey, who chairs the Westwood Republican Town Committee and staunchly opposes marriage equality, is running in a May 15 general election against Democrat Steve Bilafer and independent Paul McMurtry, Dedham residents who are both pro-equality. The Dedham-Walpole-Westwood seat was formerly held by Democrat Bob Coughlin, a pro-equality lawmaker, who earlier this year took a post in Gov. Deval Patrick's administration.

Even more surprising than the e-mail from Dobson was a personal appeal from Obey himself, four days later, which means that the state GOP, which is allegedly trying to rebuild from the ground up, is wisely sharing its e-mail list. Obey also made an appeal for grassroots support for phone banking and canvassing, noting McMurtry's recent statement that he would enroll in the Democratic Party if elected. "So, I'm running against two Dedham Democrats!" Obey wrote, an allusion to the potential for Bilafer (MassEquality's endorsed candidate) and McMurtry to split the Dedham Democratic vote and give him a winning margin. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking? I need your help now. ... I have plan [sic] to win this election in two weeks to give Beacon Hill a Republican that it doesn't want."

While Dobson's point about the importance of two-party governance in the Bay State is well-taken, it's a shame that the best hope for jumpstarting a GOP comeback is a vocal opponent of marriage equality. Time will tell if Beacon Hill isn't the only place that doesn't want this Republican.

Dodging the marriage issue at Dem debate

Politically active LGBT folks may have come to a grudging acceptance that a serious presidential contender coming out in support of marriage equality any time soon is about as likely as Anderson Cooper announcing "Yep, I'm gay" during an appearance on The Ellen DeGeneres Show. In other words, it's gonna be a long time. So until the candidates jockeying for LGBT money and votes — which is to say the Democratic ones, primarily — realize that as long as they seek to have it both ways on LGBT issues they'll mostly sound like idiots when talking about them, we'll be treated to eye-rolling performances like U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd's at the April 26 Democratic presidential debate in South Carolina. Asked by NBC News anchor Brian Williams if there was a difference between gay marriage and civil unions, the latter being legal in his home state of Connecticut, Dodd began his answer by noting his thinking on the issue is influenced by

his two young daughters, “who one day may have a different sexual orientation than their parents.” He expressed hope that most Americans would want their gay children “to have those loving relationships sanctioned.” Dodd said he was proud that Connecticut sanctioned same-sex relationships and that the state of New Hampshire was poised to do the same thing. Not bad so far, although not really to the point of the question. But then Dodd really went over the cliff: “I believe that civil unions are appropriate and proper,” he added. “I don’t support, uh, uh, same-sex marriage and the distinction there I think is one of more of what’s available, what the traditions are, and, over the years, but basically that’s the distinction I make. Strongly support those civil unions.” Umm ... what? We can’t offer any further analysis because we have no idea what the hell Dodd was talking about. But we’re pretty sure he didn’t answer the question, which didn’t really matter because we forgot what it was by the time he was finished. Maybe that was the point?

But as is the norm these days, Dodd’s position, however muddy, is still preferable to his Republican counterparts, none of whom even support civil unions, now that Rudy Giuliani, who has been leading in GOP primary polls, has flip-flopped on the issue. The former New York City mayor had gone on record as a civil union supporter back in 2004 but in a statement to the New York Sun last week, Giuliani came out against New Hampshire’s new civil unions law. “In this specific case the law states same-sex civil unions are the equivalent of marriage and recognizes same-sex unions from outside states,” the Giuliani campaign said in a statement to the Sun. “This goes too far and Mayor Giuliani does not support it.” For a rebuttal that perfectly encapsulates the absurdity of the notoriously socially liberal Giuliani’s change on the issue, check out activist Mike Rogers’s April 26 post on the topic over at BlogActive.com. Topping a 1997 photo of a beaming Giuliani in full Marilyn Monroe drag onstage at a New York political roast is the headline “This man is against civil unions.” Priceless.