

**Vermont Gubernatorial Candidates Forum
at Burlington's Turning Point Recovery Community Center**

On June 23, 2010, the campaign trail led up the steps of the Turning Point Center of Chittenden County (Burlington, VT) where five Democratic candidates and two Independent candidates participated in a moderated dialogue on addiction and recovery issues. The candidates expressed their views on questions ranging from the importance of funding for recovery supports, to the need for a more integrated substance abuse system and ongoing funding for prevention. There were questions specifically about marijuana, maintaining the minimum legal drinking age (MLDA), buprenorphine, and beer taxes. More than 80 people came in during the course of the event, which was transmitted as a live broadcast on radio station WDEV. During this event, Friends of Recovery-Vermont organized the Recovery Voices Count awareness campaign meeting with candidates and encouraged recovery community members to learn more about the issues and get out to vote in the election this year.

Patty McCarthy, Executive Director, Friends of Recovery-VT
<http://www.friendsofrecoveryvt.org/>

MEDIA COVERAGE

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Vermont governor candidates discuss drug issues

By Terri Hallenbeck, Free Press Staff Writer

The five Democratic gubernatorial candidates agreed Wednesday at a forum that the state should spend its money on prevention and treatment of substance abuse rather than locking people up for crimes those problems create, but there were some differences when it came to specifics, such as lowering the drinking age or raising the beer tax.

"I'm not opposed to taxing things that lead to health problems," said former Sen. Matt Dunne of Hartland, adding that the beer tax should be considered in a broader context along with other taxes.

Sen. Susan Bartlett of Hyde Park, Secretary of State Deb Markowitz of Montpelier and Sen. Doug Racine of Richmond agreed they would await the findings of a commission looking at the state's taxes. Racine added, though, that he was interested in looking at taxing junk food to pay for health care.

“I don’t believe we’re going to solve our problems with new taxes,” countered Sen. Peter Shumlin of Putney.

On the drinking age, Racine, Bartlett and Shumlin said they were opposed to lowering it. Dunne said he was open to the idea, and Markowitz said she was torn.

Shumlin stood alone in the group in declaring he would support decriminalization of marijuana. “We have to do things differently,” he said. Racine said he would like to look at whether the penalties should be changed.

The forum, sponsored by the Turning Point Center, which offers substance abuse recovery services in downtown Burlington, focused on how the candidates would handle funding for treatment and policies surrounding drugs and alcohol. Two independent candidates, Dennis Steele and Emily Peyton, joined the five Democrats. Republican Brian Dubie did not respond to an invitation to participate, said Mickey Wiles, executive director of Turning Point.

Wiles, whose 5-year-old program has a \$200,000-a-year budget to offer 12-step meetings and other support to 4,500 visitors a month, said he wanted to expose the candidates for governor to the issues his clients face and hear what they had to say. The program received \$50,000 a year from the state, he said.

The candidates all said they wanted to shift state spending more toward prevention and treatment of addiction rather than on incarcerating addicts. Shumlin and Bartlett argued that they have started that process as legislators, including spending \$90,000 in next year’s budget on two new recovery centers, Bartlett said.

Moderator Peter Mallary asked the candidates what they would do about a growing problem with abuse of buprenorphine, a prescription drug used to treat heroin addiction, including in the state’s prisons. Only Bartlett appeared versed in the issue, responding that use of the drug should be better managed.

Racine said he didn’t know about the issue, but as governor he would turn to experts to find out. Dunne argued that if there is a growing problem with buprenorphine in the prisons, the governor should make that known so that the issue could be resolved in public.

Asked if they personally had been touched by the issue through family or friends, all the candidates said they had. Dunne got the most personal with this answer, saying he had to intervene to help his mother. He said he learned how hard it is to find treatment. “You would have thought it would be easy to find places,” he said. “I’ve got to tell you, it was incredibly difficult.”

Rutland Sunday Herald, June 27, 2010

Pols, polls and Dubie flying high

Peter Mallary

... I had a front row seat at the primary last week, moderating a forum that featured the five Democratic candidates, along with two independents. The venue was the Turning Point Center in Burlington, the city's headquarters for people recovering from alcohol and drug abuse. And the topic was prevention and treatment of and recovery from addiction. The particular focus of the Turning Point forum pushed the candidates of their comfort zones; away from their stump speeches. For a note on the independent candidates. We have every right; even a responsibility; to question politicians who try to know all and be all to all. But we also have a responsibility to notice when candidates clearly fail to grasp the breadth of issues necessary to govern in an informed fashion. Dennis Steele and Emily Peyton, earnest though they may be, fit the profile. And they stayed in their comfort zones. Steele's riff is the separation of Vermont from the United States; or "The Empire," as he calls it. Peyton's is an ethereal New Age brew, charming at times but just a bit out there. She livened things up by asking a guitarist to accompany her answers, an idea that did not survive the attention of this moderator. And what of the real pols? Deb Markowitz was a bit off balance and tended to fall back; pretty skillfully; on some stock stuff. Peter Shumlin challenged the crowd with forceful and candid answers and by calling out Brian Dubie with his amusing "Free Brian" campaign routine; referring to the Republican candidate's Rose Garden strategy and his hotshot advisers from Washington. Doug Racine, empowered by key endorsements over the past fortnight, is working hard; with some success; to appear more engaged and energized as a candidate than in the past. He was disarming in admitting that he did not know the answer to one pretty tough question. Matt Dunne was politically polished and involved family to give the audience on personal experiences related to addiction and recovery. And Susan Bartlett just aced the quiz, clearly knowing more about the issues in question than any of the other participants...