

national news

For gay N.H. lawmaker, Obama was clear choice

Voters finally get their say after long slog in the snow

By LISA KEEN

HART'S LOCATION, N.H. — When Ed Butler recently invited several neighbors to “the Met,” he was not playing into a gay male stereotype. He was campaigning for Barack Obama.

Butler, a New Hampshire state representative, is gay. And he's one of those newcomers to politics who surfed into office on the Democratic tidal wave of November 2006. He's also a 58-year-old innkeeper in the north country of New Hampshire with his life partner. And together they are two of the 29 registered voters in the state's smallest town.

The Met is a coffeehouse in the center of nearby North Conway Village, where Michelle Obama, the wife of the candidate, was to appear in just a couple of days.

On Saturday, just hours after having to take his 9-year-old Bernese Mountain Dog, Abby, to the vet to have her euthanized, Butler hit the campaign trail for Obama. It was two days past the

Iowa caucuses and three days before the nation's first presidential primary of 2008. Obama had won Iowa, taking 38 percent of the delegates at the caucuses. The polls were showing a close race between Obama and Hillary Clinton.

Going door to door, Butler found only one neighbor who said she was undecided. Everybody else had taken sides — for Clinton, Obama and John Edwards. A list of registered voters showed the undecided woman had registered with no party affiliation. Butler talked up all the Democrats, but emphasized Obama, then asked the woman how she thought she might vote Tuesday.

“I kinda like Rudy,” she said. “And Mitt Romney.”

This is heavily Republican territory, Butler acknowledged as he continued down a long road.

“Can I talk to you about Obama?” he asks a man shoveling snow from a driveway where it has piled more than five feet high.

“No,” says the man, “but he's a great candidate.”

As Butler walks on, a woman at the house runs out, calling “You can talk to me!” Butler does, and she directs him across the

street to another potential supporter. But at that next door, the man says he's for Clinton.

But for Butler, Obama is the right candidate. He's seen Edwards on the campaign trail and thought he was insincere and playing only to the cameras. He doesn't like Clinton, Butler said, because he doesn't like monarchies. He met Obama last May and was struck by his sense that Obama was seemed trustworthy and sincere. And, as a former nurse who worked with people with AIDS in New York City in the 1980s, he thinks Obama has a good health plan.

But gay issues were also critical. And Obama, he noted, was willing to repeal the entire Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), not just one section of it, like Clinton. Plus, said Butler, Obama has an “intimate understanding” of discrimination.

Butler acknowledged that the Obama campaign's inclusion of anti-gay gospel singer Donnie McClurkin in a concert tour in South Carolina was a “mistake,” but he felt Obama did a good job in responding and trying to help both the gay and the black community work through it.

Not every gay person in New



‘Obama is somebody I can respect and trust,’ said Ed Butler, a gay New Hampshire state representative. Sen. Barack Obama lost to Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton in a close primary race this week. (Photo by Lisa Keen)

Hampshire agrees, of course. The state's Freedom to Marry group endorsed Edwards. State Rep. Jim Splaine, who led last year's successful legislative push for civil unions, is backing Clinton. In making phone calls Saturday, Butler found gay voters for each of

the top three polling Democrats, plus long-shot Dennis Kucinich.

In the local sports bar-deli market, an undecided voter said she wasn't comfortable yet with Obama's spouse Michelle. Clinton's spouse, former President Bill Clinton, and Edwards' spouse, Elizabeth Edwards, seemed like clear assets, she said.

“But ‘I'm not sure about his wife, with two little girls,’ said the woman.

Butler urged the voter to attend an event with Michelle Obama Monday at the Met, adding, “Obama is somebody I can respect and trust.”

And that's why, on an icy cold gray Saturday in New Hampshire, Butler was going door to door to encourage voters to support Obama. At three minutes past midnight on Tuesday, when voters of Hart's Location joined voters in another small town, Dixville, as the first to finish casting their votes in the state's primary, Hart's location gave nine votes to Obama, six to John McCain, five to Mike Huckabee, four to Ron Paul, three to Clinton and one each to Mitt Romney and John Edwards.

“It was an exciting vote,” said Butler, “and a great outcome.”

Army sergeant comes out on CBS' '60 Minutes'

No reaction from military nearly one month later

By CHRIS JOHNSON

The U.S. Army has taken no action against Sgt. Darren Manzella despite a Dec. 16 appearance on CBS' “60 Minutes” in which he said he was gay.

Manzella figured the appearance would lead to his being discharged under “Don't Ask, Don't Tell,” the military's policy that prevents gays from serving openly. He'd been out publicly before, though. Last July, he was profiled in the Advocate.

While on a short leave from his duties, Manzella appeared Tuesday at the National Press Club in Washington to describe his experience in the military since the “60 Minutes” piece aired.

On the show, he stated that he told his commanding officer he was gay late in 2006. The Army then launched an investigation into his sexual orientation, but later told him, despite Manzella's previous statement, he was not gay



Sgt. Darren Manzella expected his Army days were numbered when he came out on national TV in December. (Blade photo by Henry Linser)

and took no action against him. During the investigation, Manzella said he stated he was gay on a questionnaire and submitted a

video of himself in which he was shown kissing his boyfriend.

Manzella also said he has been open about his sexual orientation with his fellow soldiers. About 12,000 service members have been expelled from the military since 1993 as a result of the policy.

Manzella said he notified his superior officers through e-mail that he would be appearing on “60 Minutes.” Manzella said when he told the officer in charge of his section, the officer said, “Wow, you can't go back now.”

“He stood up and he shook my hand and he said ‘I wish you the best of luck and it's unfortunate that policies like this are in place,’” Manzella said.

Manzella said the reaction from his comrades was particularly sympathetic.

Army spokesperson Lt. Col. George Wright said the service would not discuss personnel matters for individual soldiers. However, he said Manzella had only recently returned from his duties overseas and so “it's premature to speculate on any future actions until the young man's sit-

uation can be considered by his chain of command.”

Aubrey Sarvis, executive director of Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, an organization working to repeal the ban, said he doesn't know why Manzella has not heard from the Army since the piece aired. However, he argued that Manzella should be able to continue his duties and that his story demonstrates that some commanders are looking the other way and allowing good soldiers to serve.

SLDN is supporting legislation in Congress that would repeal the “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” policy. A bill is pending before the House that has 140 co-sponsors. Sarvis said he expects hearings in the House Armed Services subcommittees this year. In the Senate, a bill is slated to be introduced by the end of the first or the second quarter of this session, he said.

Sarvis said while SLDN supports these measures, he does not expect the committees to report out the legislation for a floor vote.

“It's unlikely that legislation will move out of the committee or to either floor for consideration

in this Congress,” he said. “Unfortunately, I think that is in large part due to resistance from the administration.”

Sarvis said SLDN is focused on a new administration and new Congress, building a legislative record and making a case against “Don't Ask” to the American public.

Manzella joined the Army in 2002 and was assigned to Ft. Hood in Texas where he worked as lead instructor for the Combat Lifesaver program, which trains non-medical soldiers in first-aid procedures to assist medical personnel. In 2004, he deployed to Iraq and earned the Combat Medical Badge for providing medical support for soldiers.

Following his leave, Manzella is slated to resume his duties in early January at Ft. Hood.

“I'm actually anxious to get back there and see everyone that I've been working with and find out my duties,” he said.

Manzella received orders to report to Ft. Drum in New York in May. He plans to continue to serve in the military until his enlistment ends in March 2011.