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Secessionists or racists?



Concerns over Vermont links to neo-Confederates

By Christian Avard | *Vermont Guardian*

If you've heard about the idea of Vermont secession then you probably heard it from the Second Vermont Republic (SVR).

The organization is led by a small group of individuals committed to returning Vermont to its original status as an independent republic, like it was from 1777 to 1791. In other words, they hope to secede from the United States.

While SVR is by no means a large political movement, it seems to be gaining momentum and garnering publicity. They've been spotlighted in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Montreal Gazette*, and many others. The *Vermont Commons*, a sister publication, was an *Utne Reader* finalist for "Best New Title, 2005." In 2006, the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont even conducted a poll that

found that 8 percent of all eligible voters in Vermont support the idea of secession.

However, while the idea is gaining mainstream attention, perhaps as a quaint oddity, some Vermonters, led by a group of bloggers, are calling into question the integrity of some members on SVR's advisory board and their connection to racist groups in the South.

Recently, John Odum of Montpelier, who launched the popular Vermont political blog, *Green Mountain Daily*, received an e-mail from an anonymous blogger called Thomas Rowley, the name of one of the original Green Mountain Boys who fought for Vermont's independence. Rowley's blog, *vermontsecession.blogspot.com*, has been tracking the workings of SVR and according to Odum, the real Rowley has a long history of monitoring hate groups. He/she asked Odum if anyone has ever investigated SVR and *Vermont Commons* based on

continued on page 11

Vermont utilities eye new power plant

By Shay Totten
Vermont Guardian

RUTLAND — In the coming weeks, the state's largest utilities will begin, in earnest, to determine what it would take to build a new major source of electricity, capable of providing a sizeable chunk of Vermont's base power needs.

Vermont Guardian first reported this story last summer, and since then talks between utilities and officials at the state Department of Public Service — which represents ratepayers in major utility rate cases — have been underway, quietly,

but intensely.

One of the larger questions facing Vermonters, and their future, is where they will get their power from if, and when, Vermont Yankee goes offline and a series of contracts with Hydro Quebec begin to expire. This all begins in 2012.

While federal regulators, and state lawmakers, weigh Entergy's application to extend the operating license of Vermont Yankee, there are talks underway with Hydro Quebec to extend those contracts.

State lawmakers are also grappling with the weighty issue of global warming and

continued on page 14

Salmon makes waves as auditor

By Shay Totten
Vermont Guardian

MONTPELIER — Less than a month on the job, the newly ensconced Auditor Tom Salmon, Jr., was reminded that politics is a full-contact body sport.

One of Salmon's first actions on the job was to fulfill a campaign promise to make the office a resource shop for municipal officials. He did so by appointing a five-member advisory commission comprised mostly of town officials, and one private citizen.

The goal of the commission

is to develop a variety of training and information-sharing programs to help cities and towns improve their accounting and financial reporting, said Salmon, who is a certified public accountant (CPA).

Salmon tapped Ernie Saunders of Westminster, president of the New England Municipal Resource Center as chairperson of the commission. Other members were: Ruth Woodard, Manchester's finance director; Lisa Barrett, Lyndonville's clerk/treasurer; John Leisenring, Brattle-

continued on page 10

INSIDE THIS WEEK

Goodman: Hillary and the antiwar voters — 2 — What's really driving school costs — 6 — Baruth: Let's talk Hillary — 7 — Ponds in winter — 8 — Vermont Legislature calls for Iraq pullout — 9 — U.S. unprepared for returning vets — 12 — Shining light on adoption in Guatemala — 13 — Love, lust, regret, delight — 15 —

what the individual claimed were ties to neo-confederate organizations such as the League of the South (LOS).

Rowley's probe began after SVR co-chairman Rob Williams of Waitsfield was a guest on Vermont Public Radio's *Switchboard* and presented a revisionist account of Pres. Abraham Lincoln.

Many secessionists believe Lincoln was not interested in freeing slaves in the South but was bent on imperialist powers.

Rowley told Odum the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) — an organization known for tracking hate groups — said this belief of Lincoln is "part and parcel" of the neo-Confederate movement, which the SPLC says "includes a number of organizations that generally share goals such as preserving Confederate monuments, honoring the Confederate battle flag, and/or lauding what is judged to be 'Southern' culture," according to its website.

And, SPLC staff say any connection to the League of the South should raise alarms.

"No matter what the league says, it has been opposed to inter-racial marriage. It's intellectuals — in official league writings — have defended segregation as a policy to protect the integrity of both black and white people and their leader has called for a hierarchical society in which different classes will have different legal rights. In other words, they are calling for a feudal society modeled very much on a theocracy," said Mark Potok, director of the SPLC's Intelligence Project. "This is a group that has harbored large numbers of racists of all kinds and in our view it's obviously a white supremacist group."

SVR co-founder Thomas Naylor of Charlotte claims his organization has no direct link to LOS, and more importantly SVR is in no way racist.

They "charge that because the SVR's website has a link to the LOS that therefore we must in bed with them, failing to take into consideration that through our sister organization the Middlebury Institute we have links to all 35 of the secessionists groups and we're in bed with none of them, in particular the LOS. We have no relation with the LOS and all of the secessionist groups ideologically are all over the place," said Naylor in a recent radio interview with Steve West, on WKVT-AM in Brattleboro.

And, according to a recent statement released by the Middlebury Institute, a think-tank dedicated to the study of secession-

ism, the League of the South's directors have renounced its racist past — on June 21, 2005.

"The problem is Abraham Lincoln did such a number on the American people 150 years ago that most Vermonters when they think of secession, they think of slavery and racism and if you're a Southern secessionist by definition you have to be racist," said Naylor. "Writing off the LOS because it's a Southern secessionist group is based on a position of total ignorance. The only common ground between us and the LOS is unconditional antagonism and hostility toward the American empire."

SVR advisors: Are they racist?

Vermont bloggers who have been probing these links, however, interpret the connections between Vermont's secessionists and the League of the South differently.

What Rowley uncovered, and Odum posted on Green Mountain Daily, was that several SVR advisory board members — Marco Bassani, Thomas DiLorenzo, Donald Livingston, and Jason Sorens — some of whom have ties to allegedly racist organizations.

Bassani and Sorens are considered by Rowley and Odum to be the minor individuals in the group — Bassani with the allegedly xenophobic Northern League of Italy and Sorens, the founder of the libertarian Free State Movement of New Hampshire. DiLorenzo, Livingston, and Naylor are considered the major individuals in SVR.

DiLorenzo is an economics professor at Loyola College in Baltimore, MD, and is a staunch advocate of Lincoln revisionism.

According to the SPLC, DiLorenzo is responsible for much of the neo-Confederate movement's ideology on Lincoln's quest for "destroying states' rights" and "building a massive federal government."

DiLorenzo is also a senior faculty member of the Ludwig von Mises Institute, a libertarian foundation in Alabama, and teaches at the League of the South Institute for the Study of Southern Culture and History, a South Carolina school established by the LOS.

"DiLorenzo has essentially laid bare the fact that Abraham Lincoln, contrary to the predominant-belief by many, was not only not the best president, he was arguably the worst and where Pres. George W. Bush learned a lot of his dirty tricks," said Naylor. "Most Americans think the Civil

War was fought about freeing the slaves but rather it was fought to preserve the union and build a [domestic] empire."

The SPLC has a different view of DiLorenzo.

"DiLorenzo is a darling of the neo-Confederates in the [LOS] and his work on bashing Lincoln is considered gospel by them," said Heidi Beirich, deputy director of the SPLC's Intelligence Project. "DiLorenzo talks all the time at LOS events and tons of other Confederate events in that world."

DiLorenzo's works have been featured on SVR's companion publication, *Vermont Commons*, and his book *The Real Lincoln: A New Look at Abraham Lincoln, His Agenda, and an Unnecessary War* received favorable reviews.

"DiLorenzo is being portrayed up there as a mainstream Lincoln scholar and that is false, his work is not taken seriously by serious American historians," said Potok. There's no question that Lincoln was something of a racist before the war like every other person in America, so it's a straw-man argument. What the argument from the neo-Confederate world about Lincoln is that, "Well, he's not as politically correct as you're supposed to be these days, therefore he was a dirty racist, therefore the whole world was a scam to do in the South. It's a ridiculous argument."

Livingston is a philosophy professor at Emory University, Atlanta, GA, and is also under scrutiny by Vermont bloggers and the SPLC.

"Livingston did sever himself from the league a few years ago after we wrote about him about three years ago. I interviewed him for a piece we wrote for the Intel report and at that moment he had said he was going to quit the league and create [an organization called] the Abbeville Institute," said Beirich.

The Abbeville Institute is an Atlanta-based organization of scholars dedicated to discovering "what is true and valuable in the Southern tradition," according to the institute's website.

"Livingston for many years from 1994 to about 2003 was the head of the League of the South's institute which is sort of their indoctrination outfit. Even after he told me he was quitting the league, he may have quit as a member, but he stayed on as a lecturer at the league's institute while he was still running his own Abbeville Institute," said Beirich. "In addition, we know he has been at league meetings since then, so I feel like he's playing a bit of a game here. Being out of



Thomas Naylor

the league is just not true."

Naylor and Williams know Livingston on a more personal level and believe he is in no way a racist.

"I think it's safe to say he is philosophical guru of the Second Vermont Republic. He has been a guest in my home three times and I can say he's not a racist," said Naylor.

Williams agrees. "I know [and studied from] Don Livingston but he hasn't been a part of LOS for six years and if you want to condemn him for something he did or was involved with six years ago, you can do that but I [also] think that's misrepresenting him. He's given me no cause to suggest he's a racist and it's none of my business to investigate his personal life to find out if he is, beyond the fact that we have this personal/professional relationship."

As for the SPLC claims that Livingston is no longer an LOS member but it still associated with the organization, both Williams and Naylor say, "Consider the source."

"The anonymous blogger's sole source appears to be the nefarious money-making machine known as the SPLC. The SPLC is a well-known McCarthy-style group of mercenaries who routinely engage in ideological smear campaigns on behalf of their wealthy techno-fascist clowns. It's all about money, power, and greed," said Naylor on WKVT.

Naylor, Williams, and other SVR members have made it clear that in no way are they racist nor do they support the ideologies of other organizations linked to the SVR website. What unites all of them, regardless of their political platforms, is secession.

"It is not SVR's policy to en-

dorse or denounce whatever these secessionist groups espouse," said Williams. "The SVR is interested in talking with any secessionist group that supports a peaceful secession (like the LOS) and it's not our policy to judge their political positions although we may disagree on them."

Odum claims he is no way calling anyone racist, especially Williams and Naylor. Rather, he wants to shed light on these advisory board members.

"The intention was just to draw to the front this connection that existed, and its more than a link on a website. DiLorenzo, Livingston are people who are actively, currently, connected institutionally with the LOS," said Odum. "It is an institutional connection based on these people who are on the very board that advises this organization on what type of society they want to build. And the attitudes they represent both towards race and class in the case of DiLorenzo are poisonous attitudes. Clearly people within the SVR did not know that these attitudes were pervasive at this level at the organizational structure, and I think the appropriate response that if they mean what they say, then these people can have no part in building that society with you."

When pressed by WKVT radio host Steve West if Naylor knew that one or more of the advisory board members was shown to have obvious racist connections what would be the SVR response, Naylor responded, "He wouldn't be on the board."

As of now, Naylor and others believe that DiLorenzo, Livingston, Bassini, and Sorens are not. ☺

continued from page 1

what, if anything, can be done in Vermont to ease the human-induced contribution to greenhouse gases, and our sources of energy are one focus.

The state's largest power companies — Central Vermont Public Service (CVPS) and Green Mountain Power — hope to issue a request for proposals within a month, or two, to determine if the state should, or could, build a new baseload power plant. Part of the study would also determine what fuel source would power the plant — nuclear, natural gas, biomass, or some combined fuel source (natural gas/wood chips).

Several officials close to these discussions do not believe that siting a new, nuclear power plant in Vermont is a realistic option, nor do they think a coal-fired plant has any chance of being sited. That leaves a plant fueled by biomass, natural gas, or a com-

bined fuel source.

“Coal and nuclear would seem somewhat unlikely, but natural gas, or a combination of fuels, such as biomass are likely candidates,” said Steve Wark, a spokesman for the Department of Public Service (DPS).

One utility spokesman said the work behind the scenes has more to do with figuring out what a third-party study would entail, and what questions need to be answered.

“There's been a lot of stuff going on behind the scenes, really looking at the scope of what the study should look at and what it would take to build a power plant and particularly in Vermont where there are a lot of issues to factor in,” said Steve Costello, a spokesman for CVPS, the state's largest utility.

Beyond the obvious two — economics and the environment

— there are technical and engineering issues that will need to be vetted, as well as narrowing down where a potential power plant could be sited, Costello said.

“You can't just build one anywhere, you have to be able to get the power onto the grid safely,” said Costello.

Each of these issues must be weighed for their pros and cons in a feasibility study.

Location will be a key factor, and Costello believes a new power plant would likely have to be sited in Central or Northern Vermont — closest to the high-growth areas of Chittenden, northern Addison, and southern Franklin counties.

“People will keep an open mind about it, but clearly the load growth is really heavily in those areas,” said Costello.

Who would build such a plant, however, is an open question at this point.

“I think that is unclear,” said Costello. “It could be a utility or two, or all the utilities, or it could be a private company that builds it and lines up contracts to buy power. All that is stuff we have to look at.”

Costello believes DPS' upcoming public outreach process, and CVPS' own transmission discussions with many stakeholders in Southern Vermont, could dovetail nicely with the discussions about building a baseload power plant

“As we're looking at our future power supply and the public outreach process is tasked with coming up with conclusions, too, hopefully we'll all be singing from the same hymnal.”

— Steve Costello
Central Vermont Public Service

in Vermont.

“As we're studying the possibility of building generation there will be this public outreach process and that could well inform and dovetail into the public discussion and we could hear from Vermonters if they think this is feasible or not feasible,” said Costello.

Wark agrees.

“They're still early in the process but we're in the middle of implementing a separate process to hear what Vermonters want their power to come from,” said Wark.

The Legislature, last year, called on DPS to engage Vermonters in a lengthy process to determine what power sources they'd like to see in the mix.

The state is contracting with the University of Texas, Stanford University's Center for Deliberative Research and Opinion, Facilitate.com, and Raab Associates to conduct the public outreach and

then prepare a report for the Legislature.

Also, in Southern Vermont, CVPS is looking at beginning a process that could potentially create several smaller, distributed sources of power to help stabilize the flow of power on its transmission grid from Bennington to Stratton.

Rather than build more power lines, the utility is looking at ways to bring more, but smaller, power sources online to help ensure reliability.

Taken together, Costello said, these efforts are geared toward finding a balance.

“At this stage in the game, everyone wants to keep all options on the table,” said Costello. “As we're looking at our future power supply and the public outreach process is tasked with coming up with conclusions, too, hopefully we'll all be singing from the same hymnal.”

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