

Driscoll's Special Status of Concern to Some Aldermen

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"There has been far too much cronyism in City Hall ... and people outside of a small inner circle have not been involved ... I intend to change that."

Those were the words Burlington independent Mayor Bernard Sanders used at his April 1981 inauguration when he took over from five-term Democratic Mayor Gordon Paquette.

Sanders vowed to appoint city officials on the basis of competence in what he described as a change from Paquette's pattern of putting former Democratic Party activists on the city payroll.

Two years later, Sanders has drawn criticism from some aldermen for recommending a salary of almost \$21,000 for Jane Driscoll, head of the city's youth office and his close friend and companion.

Driscoll has run the office, which coordinates programs for children, on a largely volunteer basis since Sanders took office. Now she and Sanders believe she deserves a salary, which the mayor has proposed to fund with federal community development money.

Driscoll has run programs involving hundreds of youths in activities as diverse as Little League baseball, drama, gardening, drug-abuse prevention, concerts and radio programs.

Her efforts have won praise from aldermen, even from some who do not like the thrust of Sanders' administration.

Before Sanders was mayor, no such office existed. One of the themes of Sanders' campaign



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—Mayor Sanders

was to involve children in programs in an attempt to head off juvenile delinquency.

Driscoll, who resents being called Sanders' "girlfriend" because she believes the term is sexist, did not work on Sanders' 1981 campaign. She met the mayor shortly after his election and became involved in designing the youth programs.

Unlike most city positions, the youth office job was not advertised to allow people to compete for it. Driscoll was picked by Sanders. And unlike many other city administrative jobs, she has no commissioners to evaluate her job.

"Jane has done a wonderful job," said Alderman Gary DeCarolis, independent-Ward 3. "She's got the energy of four people."

But, DeCarolis said, "I would like to see the hiring process opened up ... so it doesn't look like

cronyism."

DeCarolis is confident that if the job were advertised, Driscoll would get it anyway because she would be considered more qualified than other applicants.

The \$20,800 salary proposed for the coming fiscal year contains no benefits, such as health insurance, vacation or sick leave. Driscoll estimates that makes the position worth the equivalent a \$16,500 salary.

The youth office budget also is being increased in Sanders' budget recommendations, from \$9,800 last year to \$30,000 in the fiscal year that starts July 1.

"I'm tired of hearing innuendo, especially regarding Jane," Sanders said. "If she is not competent to do the job, I want to hear someone say it."

"In my view, this administration has put together the highest quality of people working in government in the state of Vermont," he said.

Sanders believes there is no favoritism in appointing Driscoll and giving her a salary. "Cronyism is hiring people for specific jobs because they are friends and not because they are qualified," he said in an interview.

"If someone can explain to me that Jane is not qualified for the job, I'll listen to them."

Under Driscoll's direction, the office has raised about \$20,000 in private funds over the past two years to help finance the youth activities. She has been the recipient of grants from the state to direct the drug-abuse education project.

Her post is called a "contracted service," according to Peter Clavelle, city personnel manager. Other jobs in the city are given to contractors without advertising the jobs or a competitive hiring process, according to Clavelle.

"We have consultants for various projects," and lawyers, such as labor negotiator James Dunn, are hired on contracts.

Of the coming year's budget, Driscoll hopes to raise about \$18,000 from private sources, such as businesses and organizations, to supplement the \$30,000 in federal money.

"I think the office stands on its record," Driscoll said. She built the program from scratch, hustled for funds for two years and believes she now is entitled to a salary.

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