

CALEDONIAN-RECORD

Established 1837

ST. JOHNSBURY, VERMONT — TUESDAY, JUNE 26, 1984

Amestoy Defends State's Action In NEK Church Raid

By RICH BECK

Inconsistent sentences are "one reason the public doesn't have a lot of faith in Vermont's criminal justice system," Jeffrey Amestoy, Republican candidate for state attorney general, told St. Johnsbury Rotarians yesterday.

The current system produces sentences which are "too varied and inconsistent," Amestoy said, advocating state legislators set "ranges of sentences for violent crimes."

"We should remove the mystery from the sentencing process," the former Dept. of Labor and Industry commissioner said.

"There are circumstances where judges should be able to deviate from the range, but they should also be required to state, on the record, their reason for doing so," he said.

Amestoy also called for easing restrictions on the content of presentence investigation reports, used by judges as they consider how long a sentence a convicted person should serve.

Under present restrictions, "a judge is looking through a very narrow window," Amestoy said, citing the suspended sentence given to a Vermont man after his second conviction in less than a year for separate sexual assaults on six-year-old children.

"Our judges should have all the information they need to make a proper decision," Amestoy said.

Answering audience questions, Amestoy defended state officials involved in the decision to take children of Northeast Kingdom Community Church members into temporary custody.

More than 100 children were taken into custody during an early morning state police raid Friday.

Vermont District Court Judge Frak Mahady released them later the same day.

"I know every person who was involved in the decision-making process and none of them are witch hunters," Amestoy said.

"It was an agonizing decision," he said. "I can only assume the evidence was sufficient and other avenues had been exhausted."

Interviewed after his meeting with the Rotarians, Amestoy said he supports a review of state regulations and laws to determine their effectiveness.

"There has been a tendency to put out regulations without regard to their enforceability," he said. "That undermines their effectiveness."

"There are too many regulations on the books

and they're not being enforced."

On other topics, Amestoy said he

— supports efforts to litigate the acid rain issue.

"The federal government hasn't acted quickly enough," he said.

"Vermont is the lowest sulphate producer of any state, but the ratings here are sometimes equal to the ones in industrial states."

Amestoy also said the attorney general's office should help coordinate state agencies' policies on hazardous wastes.

"Cleanups should be compelled by suits," he said;

— supported the role of side judges, saying they provide "a balance as representatives of the community;

— said he opposes raising Vermont's legal drinking age.

"We shouldn't raise it until we're prepared to raise the age of majority, too," he said.



Jeffrey Amestoy

Amestoy also said he strongly opposes the federal government's attempt to link highway funds to state drinking ages.

"It's simply a bad precedent," he said, saying the proposal would undermine the rights of states to make their own decisions.