

The Burlington Free Press

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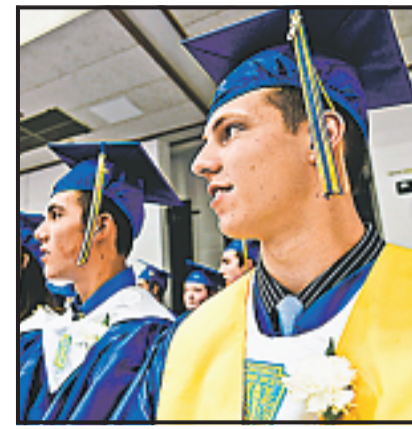
GLENN RUSSELL, Free Press
Meredith Manning recites the Pledge of Allegiance during graduation ceremonies for Colchester High School students.



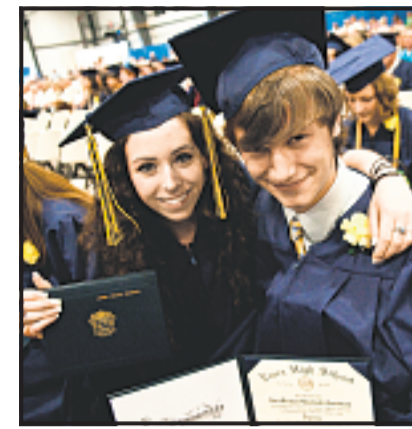
BEN SARLE, for the Free Press
Malual Garang Deng (right) and Musaab G. Ali congratulate each other after the Winooski High School graduation.



LYNN MONTY, Free Press
Ashley Sprano and Meghan Goodrich smile after the Mount Mansfield Union High School graduation at the University of Vermont.



BEN SARLE, for the Free Press
Blake Read (right) and Sam Macy wait to receive their diplomas at the Milton High School commencement.



IAN THOMAS JANSEN-LONNQUIST
Lauren Granato and Ian Gonnou celebrate after the Essex High School commencement at the Champlain Valley Exposition.

POTENT ALLIANCE

How cries to save a moose created a bill rushed in secret in the final days of the Legislature to exempt a hunting reserve from game rules



Photos by **CANDACE PAGE, Free Press**

Richard Nelson watches bull elk approach a feeding trough at Big Rack Ridge in Irasburg on Monday. Nelson and his father, Doug, keep a herd of 50 or more bull elk at the hunt park where clients pay hefty sums for a guaranteed kill. In May, they won an exemption from Fish and Wildlife rules that would have required removal of the native deer and moose from the park — probably by slaughter — to stop any risk of spreading disease. The Nelsons say their herd has proven to be disease-free, and they hope to add whitetail deer hunts to their offerings.

By Candace Page
Free Press Staff Writer

IRASBURG — At Big Rack Ridge, elk native to the American West share feeding troughs and a fern-floored forest with Asian sika deer, European fallow deer and with moose and whitetail deer native to these hills.

It's an unlikely mix of species, but perhaps not as unlikely as the political alliance forged last winter between animal lovers defending one resident of Big Rack Ridge — an orphan called Pete the Moose — and Doug Nelson, the man who owns the ridge and sells his clients the right to shoot captive elk for as much as \$7,500 an animal.

The alliance proved a potent one. In legislation written behind closed doors, kept secret from the Fish and Wildlife Department and introduced on the session's final day, Vermont lawmakers gave the allies what they wanted: Big Rack Ridge was exempted from Fish and Wildlife hunting-preserve regulations.

Pete the Moose will live on; Nelson can keep the native whitetail deer and moose on his property and plans to market whitetail-deer trophy-hunts.

But far from ending the debate about Big Rack Ridge, the Legislature's action has raised new issues and touched off fresh protests.

Outraged members of the state policy-setting Fish and Wildlife Board, wildlife biologists and some



Doug Nelson of Derby, the state's largest dairy farmer, drives through his elk hunting park in Irasburg.

"I'm required to protect the health and welfare of wildlife in the state of Vermont. This is a big deal."

Wayne Laroche, state Fish and Wildlife commissioner

hunters say the Legislature has rewarded illegal behavior, put the health of the Vermont deer herd at risk and violated the ancient legal principle that native deer and other wildlife belong to the public as a whole and can't be given or sold to anyone for private gain.

"A whole host of things happened here that are so wrong," said Brian Ames, a Putney builder who chairs the Fish and Wildlife Board. "We can't take wildlife and put it in a pen and feed it white bread and Snickers bars and make a Facebook hero out of it — except if you are well-enough connected, apparently you can."

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■ For transcripts of the Fish and Wildlife board meeting about the exemption and a photo gallery of Big Rack Ridge, go to www.burlingtonfreepress.com

Legislators and Nelson defend their actions. They could not accept what they saw as the Fish and Wildlife Department's unnecessary plan to kill Pete, other moose and as many as 200 native deer at Big Rack Ridge in the name of protecting the health of Vermont's wild deer population.

"That was just not acceptable," said Sen. Susan Bartlett, D-Lamoille, who played a key role in adding the "Nelson amendment" to the must-pass budget bill, and who is a candidate for governor. "People in that part of the world were really, really upset."

There have been rumblings in the wildlife community that someone might challenge the constitutionality of the Legislature's action, or seek a reversal of the Nelson amendment next year.

Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Wayne Laroche said last week he doesn't know whether that will happen. But, he said, the

See **NELSON, 4A**

BP chief's yacht outing infuriates Gulf Coast

By Raphael Satter and Holbrook Mohr
The Associated Press

EMPIRE, La. — BP chief executive Tony Hayward took a day off Saturday to see his 52-foot yacht "Bob" compete in a glitzy race off England's shore, a leisure trip that further infuriated residents of the oil-stained Gulf Coast.

While Hayward's pricey ship whipped around the Isle of Wight on a good day for sailing — breezy and about 68 degrees — anger simmered on the steamy Gulf Coast, where crude has been washing in from the still-gushing spill.



Hayward

"Man, that ain't right. None of us can even go out fishing, and he's at the yacht races," said Bobby Pitre, 33, who runs a tattoo shop in the crossroads town of Larose, La. "I wish we could get a day off from the oil, too."

BP spokespeople rushed to defend Hayward, who has drawn withering criticism as the public face of BP PLC's halting efforts to stop the worst offshore oil spill in U.S. history.

Company spokesman Robert Wine said the break is the first for Hayward since the Deepwater Horizon rig BP was leasing exploded April 20, killing 11 workers and setting off the undersea gusher.

"He's spending a few hours with his family at a weekend. I'm sure that everyone would understand that," Wine said.

He said Hayward is well known as a fan of the J.P. Morgan Asset Management Round the Island Race, one of the world's largest, which attracts

See **BP, 4A**



The Associated Press

Smoke rises from an oil burn Saturday at the site of the Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

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Chance of showers. **Page 8A(c)** ©2010 The Burlington Free Press

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