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VERMONT'S VOICE FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER ISSUES

# OUT IN THE MOUNTAINS

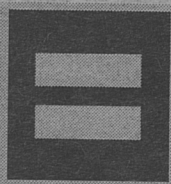
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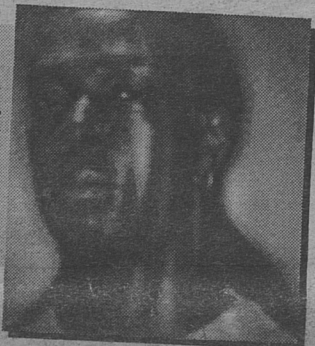


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## New Anti-Gay Proposals Introduced

Gains that Vermont's gay and lesbian community made in the past decade or so are under assault by opponents of the civil unions law. More than a half-dozen different initiatives have been introduced to the Legislature this year that seek to roll back some of the rights and benefits that have been recognized.

The proposals run the gamut.

One seeks to repeal the civil unions law and to nullify and void all civil unions that already have been formed. Another proposes to limit civil unions to Vermont residents only.

Rep. Nancy Sheltra, a Republican from Derby whose name appears on several of the bills, caused a stir when she proposed that teachers and "agents" of schools be prohibited from discussing homosexuality in schools.

A petition, signed by some of the people who were involved in the Take Back Vermont movement, has been

filed with the House that seeks to repeal the hate crimes statute.

Some of the bills appear to be innocuous on their face but would have much broader potential consequences. For example, one bill would give justices of the peace the ability to opt out of performing civil unions if they have moral qualms. A separate bill would extend the same option to judges who currently have to perform both marriages and civil unions.

If the option for justices of the peace were to pass, it would undermine Vermont's nondiscrimination law. That statute currently outlaws discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. That's why a justice of the peace who officiates at marriages cannot refuse to do the same for same-sex civil union partners.

All of the proposals have in common an underlying unease, in some cases outright hostility, toward homosexuality. House Judiciary Committee

Chairwoman Peg Flory, a Republican from Pittsford, said that is her principal objection with civil unions.

She understands that something akin to civil unions must remain the law because the Vermont Supreme Court said in the Baker case that gay and lesbian Vermonters were being unconstitutionally denied the rights and benefits of marriage. She does not believe civil unions need to be extended merely to same-sex couples though.

"I would not be for repeal without coming up with a replacement that I think would meet the Baker test," Flory said. "My main objection with the bill this year is the same as it was last year: that it appears to grant benefits and parallel marriage based primarily on sexual orientation."

Flory's committee has been spending one day a week taking testimony on civil unions and what changes it might make to the law. With a

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## Ashcroft Confirmed

BY BARBARA DOZETOS  
Above the Fold News Service

The United States Senate's 58 to 42 confirmation of the right wing pillar John Ashcroft as Attorney General last month has the gay community looking ahead and preparing for the consequences.

Vermont's senate delegation was split on the Ashcroft vote. In spite of protests staged outside his local offices, Republican Sen. James Jeffords voted to confirm Ashcroft, with whom he has a close personal relationship. Ashcroft and Jeffords were known as two of the "Singing Senators" along with Senate President Pro Tempore Trent Lott and Larry Craig.

Democrat Patrick Leahy, however, was outspoken in his criticism of Ashcroft's record on many issues. Throughout the confirmation hearings, which Leahy chaired, the senior senator raised the specter of the nominee's open disapproval for the GLBT community.

Leahy questioned the former senator from Missouri pointedly about his reasons for thwarting the appointment of

openly gay James Hormel as ambassador to Luxembourg.

In the end, Leahy was amongst the minority who voted against sending Ashcroft's nomination to the full Senate. From the Senate floor, Leahy gave a speech urging his fellow Senators to vote against Ashcroft, during which he reiterated the nominee's anti-gay stance, among other things.

"We're just sick about John Ashcroft," said Vera Martin, a spokesperson for Old Lesbians Organizing for Change. "I've struggled my entire life for civil rights, and I'm sure he will set us back by years."

Charles Mehler, former president of the Chicago Log Cabin Republicans, called Ashcroft a "24-karat bigot." He said he hopes that Ashcroft's nomination was a "loss leader to placate the far right wing of the party" in anticipation of Bush's offering a centrist candidate for the Supreme Court. "If this is not the case," said Mehler, "then Ashcroft signals the beginning of the end of George W. Bush's presidency."

"This was one of the most

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## VT Historical Society Preserves OITM



Joseph Watson, right, accompanied by Mountain Pride Media president Bennett Law, center, presenting a bound copy of *Out in the Mountains* to Vermont Historical Society president, Peter Mallory.

"Much of what has happened in the gay and lesbian community has been accomplished within the past 17 years. Much of this would not have happened or would have occurred in a much longer time frame without *Out in the Mountains*. It is so fitting that it have a home where its history will be protected and made available to present and future Vermonters." — David Ryan

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