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

OUT IN THE MOUNTAINS

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inside OITM

FEATURES:

14 Interview with Alison Bechdel
15 A Queer History of
White River Junction

SECTIONS:

16 arts & entertainment
20 health & wellbeing

MONTHLY COLUMNS:

4 voices from the mountains
6 faith matters
7 cybershark
8 legal briefs
8 news briefs
9 the source
10 news briefs
12 crow's caws
12 on the other hand...
13 progeny
20 dyke psyche
21 resurrecting the body politic
24 stargayzer
25 around vermont

THE FUNNIES:

Ethan Green - 5, 13
DTWOF - 27
Curbside - 11, 15

Freedom To Marry: The Right Strikes Back

• 'Take It To The People' takes it to the press

A lawsuit seeking the right to same-sex marriage has drawn a long-awaited response from the political right.

A group calling itself Take It To the People held a news conference at the Statehouse on February 11 to announce the results of a survey it commissioned. The group said the poll showed Vermonters opposed same-sex marriage by a margin of three to one.

Members of the group said they wanted to show that most Vermonters do not support giving gays and lesbians the right to marry. They said they wanted to take the issue "back to the people where it belongs."

Take It To The People wants to publicize the results of its survey so the public un-



'Take It To The People' meet the press: Ruth Charlesworth of Burlington, Dick Trudell from Grand Isle, Mary Schayer of Waterbury, and Craig Benson of Cambridge

derstands that there is not support for the idea of gay marriage. Its members said that publicity would help stir further opposition.

"We agree with the Attorney General that it belongs in the legislature," said Mary Schoyer.

The group was made up of about a dozen people, who appeared in front of television cameras in the Statehouse lobby. They held their news conference on the same day that many supporters of the community also were at the Statehouse lobbying for

greater AIDS assistance from the state.

Members of Take It To The People, who identified themselves as part of a "diverse group" were: Dr. David Stertzbach from Vermont Citi-

BATTLE, p26

Immigration Laws Discriminate Against Same Sex Couples

BY ABIGAIL J. DUKE

It often feels like discrimination against gay men and lesbians has sunk to record lows. Discrimination doesn't change the way many of us live our lives. But for gay and lesbian binational couples - when one partner is a citizen of a country other than the U.S. - discrimination can be a daily experience. As a friend says "most people just don't get it". Consider...

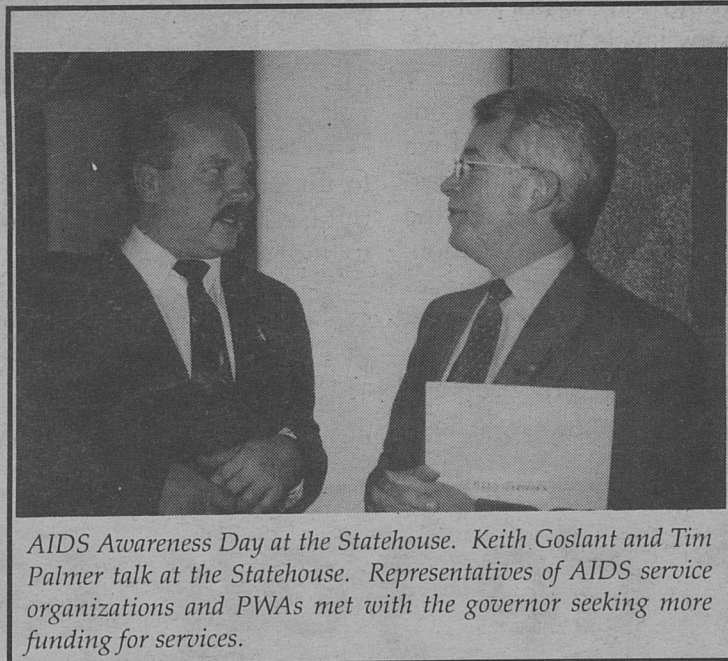
• Melissa lived and worked illegally in Vermont for several years in order to stay with her partner before it became too hard and she returned to England.

• Rachael went to school for two years to get a second masters when she wanted to work.

• John moved to Australia to join his partner when he couldn't obtain a work permit.

• Ellen and Sonja struggle to remain in the U.S. They are legally married in the Netherlands but that marriage isn't recognized by the United States.

Seven countries - Swe-



AIDS Awareness Day at the Statehouse. Keith Goslant and Tim Palmer talk at the Statehouse. Representatives of AIDS service organizations and PWAs met with the governor seeking more funding for services.

den, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Australia, Britain and Canada - allow the gay and lesbian partners of their citizens to immigrate, but not the United States.

U.S. immigration law is designed to support family reunification. However, U.S. law does not recognize gay and lesbian partners as "family". In fact, until 1991 homosexuality was reason enough to bar someone from immigrating to the United States.

For married heterosexual couples, immigration is almost guaranteed. For gay or lesbian binational couples like immigration options are limited -

and are an almost daily reason for stress.

"It is an outrage that people are forced to jump through legal hoops to sustain their relationships when our immigration law is supposed to help families stay together," said Lavi Soloway of the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Rights Task Force.

Thousands of binational couples around the country have struggled - sometimes going to school when they want to work; marrying someone that they don't want to marry; spending thousands of dollars

Maine Voters Repeal Gay Rights Law

Maine voters narrowly repealed a gay rights law enacted last year by the Legislature, leaving Maine as the only New England state without such protections.

Only 31 percent of the state's registered voters turned out for the special election, which was better than officials had predicted. Roughly 51 percent voted in favor of repeal and 49 percent said they wanted to keep the law.

Advocates of the law said they believed the vote in Maine, the first time a state has used a voter referendum to repeal a gay civil rights statute, would increase the pressure for a federal law.

"Certainly, the right will feel emboldened by this, but again, I think it will definitely be a wake-up call across the country for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community," said Rebecca Isaacs, political director for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Ten other states, and Washington, D.C., now have laws similar to the one repealed in Maine. It would have barred discrimination against gays and lesbians in employment, housing, public accommodations and credit. The other states are California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin.

Conservative groups were emboldened by the vote. "I think you're going to continue to see these issues pop up across the country because it seems a defining issue for liberalism going into the 21st century is granting special rights based on one's sexual preferences behind closed doors," said Randy Tate, executive director of the Christian Coalition. His group helped fund the repeal effort.

Maine Gov. Angus King said the vote was a setback but he would still fight for gay rights. "I think it's unfortunate," he said. "But we'll move forward, I think this is an evolutionary process."

The matter, however, should not be brought back before the Legislature "anytime in the immediate future," he said.