

OITM Turns 13 and Looks Back

BY PAUL COOK

This issue marks *OITM's* 13th anniversary, so I thought I'd take this opportunity to revisit some headlines from February of '86 to see how things have changed.

Just for fun, a few statistics: The price of a gallon of gas was about \$1.30, a new luxury car averaged \$14,000, a four bedroom raised-ranch, \$85,000, a two bedroom condo, \$40,000, and the economy was thought to be on a roll.

Talk about an eerie familiarity!

Dominating news on the national scene, the space shuttle Challenger had recently exploded and NASA was knee-deep in the blame game. President Reagan (I never thought I'd be using those two words consecutively again) told NASA to send the Challenger up as scheduled, in spite of strong opposition from experts who were concerned that the boosters were not designed to function in the abnormally cold weather Florida was experiencing that week. Well, at least Reagan wasn't getting blown in the Oval Office, right?

Another frightening national headline read, "President Robertson?" It was February of '86 when Pat Robertson became a candidate in the Republican primary. The evangelist (con-artist) explained that he was on a mission from God. "I've worked for the Lord for 30 years now and obviously he's going to give me instructions as to how to carry out his work." According to Robertson, Jesus had decided to use the multi-million dollar media approach to preach the importance of intolerance and bigotry.

After the gay-bashing Republican crusade of this past summer, I can truthfully say that some things never change.

Speaking of things that never change, there was also a raging

war in the Persian Gulf in 1986. A country involved in that war vowed to do whatever it takes to get rid of Saddam Hussein. Only it wasn't the US; it was Iran. And guess who was backing Saddam. Even though he was gassing his own people, he paid cash for the weaponry he purchased from the

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ment of his candidacy; Former President Gerald Ford was at his side. At his next fundraiser, Snelling was accompanied by Vice President George Bush, and Senate majority leader Bob Dole. I bet they would have saved themselves a lot of time and money if Fred Tuttle had not been farming at the time.

And how could we forget all the damage done to the gay community due to the stereotyping of AIDS victims. Whenever the subject of creating AIDS research funding from the federal government came up, the right wing went into moral outrage. A playwright named Brent Earle who had lost seven friends to AIDS went on a crusade. "I hope to provide a point of focus by delivering the message that together we can stop the spread of AIDS now," Earle said moments before he embarked on a nine-month, 10,000 mile run to raise money and consciousness in the battle against the disease.

In reaction to Earle's effort, the always eloquent Jesse Helms said, "A disease that can only be contracted by engaging in disgusting revolting acts doesn't deserve a dime of federal funding."

So, fast forward to 1999. The "God-fearing Christians" are on an insane crusade to take down the first president to even remotely support gays. It is sad to see that the Monica story got more press coverage than the first moon walk, and it's far from over.

So, take a moment to be grateful that we have alternative papers, the internet, public access TV, hate crime and equal rights laws, and elected officials who dare to be openly gay. The advent of progress can be slow and frustrating work. Sometimes it helps to take a look back, just so we can see how far we've come and get a better perspective on where we have to go. ▼

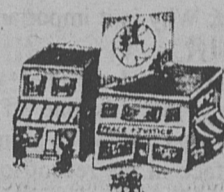
US. That was good for the economy, right?

The political climate in VT was pretty lively then, as well. I remember the hallway outside Senator Pat Leahy's office being occupied by a group of peace activists protesting the support of the Nicaraguan Contras. Leahy said, "Let them stay. I hope that they will come to me with their ideas. There is no question that there are atrocities being committed in Nicaragua."

Meanwhile, since Leahy was taking such a wimpy liberal stance, Republican Dick Snelling decided to challenge Leahy in the upcoming election. He pulled no punches during the announce-

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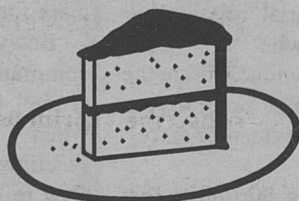
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