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down the pike that deals with divorce. We require residency of one year before you are allowed to have a divorce. If no other states recognize what we've done and we are faced with issues of 'how do you resolve them,' I'm not sure that we ought to have a residency requirement. I think we ought to have a payment requirement that would pay for the system to take care of them. I can certainly see treating civil unions differently than I see treating marriages.

I know what all the statistics and numbers are for how men have abused women. I know that women have been killed. I know we have a significant problem in Vermont because of that. I don't know the extent of the problem in the gay and lesbian community. I don't know the impact it would have on the system that we currently have in place for our shelters. I might see a need to have something different. Therefore I would not want to keep the two identical which is how the law is written.

When I spoke with members of the gay and lesbian community even before the Supreme Court [Baker] decision came down I said that I felt that trying to have it identical to marriage was not something that I felt comfortable with. I felt that we needed to have a traditional marriage because the heterosexual community has its need to keep itself distinguished and different and that is important to them. Out of respect, I thought that having two systems was the correct

thing to do.

OITM: Don't you think the civil union bill does that?

Meub: I don't believe the civil union bill has two separate systems. When it starts off saying you have all the benefits and obligations of marriage, all it has is a civil union name but the way it is written it is identical to marriage. I don't see that there is any difference.

OITM: Except for the 1,049 federal benefits that the law does not include.

Meub: That is not something that the state can control. The state has no way to affect those particular issues. Within the limits of its power, it made it identical to marriage. I believe that the Legislature could say here are public policy reasons for why we are distinguishing between the two and act accordingly. The way it is linked together if you give a benefit to married couples it automatically flows to civil unions. I'm not sure that is appropriate.

OITM: Specifically, which benefits do you think that committed gay and lesbian couples should not be entitled to?

Meub: The only one that I was concerned about had to do with spousal abuse and the cost. I'd want to look at some numbers. I'd want to take a look at the list. There were two or three that I'd want to get more information. I'd want to know what the financial costs were and why the benefits were necessary.

OITM: What is your position on the medical use of marijuana by people living with

HIV/AIDS?

Meub: I know that there are some medical reasons why marijuana is used for some medical treatment and in those cases I think a prescription ought to be written for it and it should be used. I don't know its connection in the AIDS treatment program. If there were another drug that works more effectively then I would not be in favor of it. If there were a good medical reason for it, I am not opposed to use of marijuana as a medical treatment when physicians believe it is appropriate to use it.

OITM: Would you support Vermont's federal "presumed eligibility" application that would make Vermonters living with HIV automatically eligible for Medicaid?

Meub: I cannot give an answer to that. I'd need to have more information and more data. I'd need to know what the costs were. There's a lot more information that I would need to know before I could give an answer to that.

OITM: Do you have any final message to Vermont's gay community?

Meub: They ought to feel comfortable with who I am and they shouldn't be afraid of me. Typically, the gay and lesbian community is not seen as a Republican constituency. But to the extent that there are Republicans within the gay and lesbian community, then in my mind there shouldn't be any choice between who they should choose. ▼

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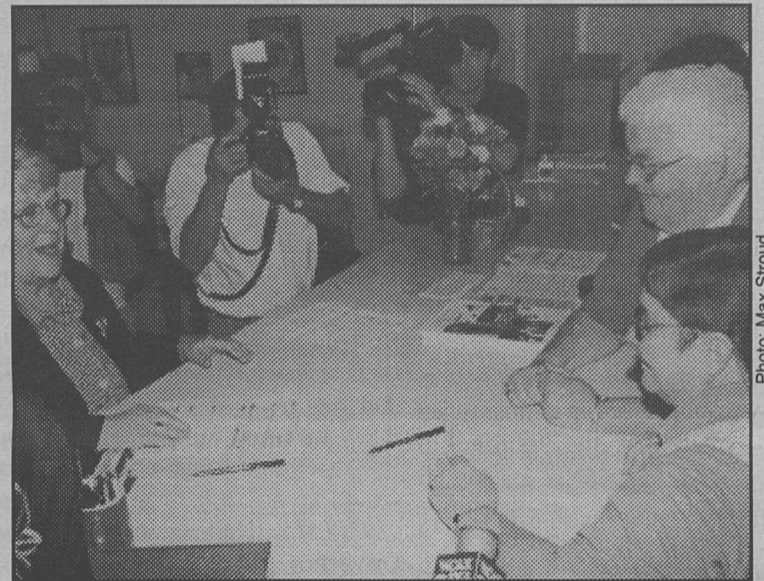
would maintain a relationship with any community through an official liaison. You usually talk directly to the people who are in the group because it is such a small state.

OITM: What are your personal views of gay and lesbian people?

Dwyer: Treat them like everybody else. It is not my business what people do in their private lives. I could care less. Treat people the way they treat you and if people are decent to you then you are decent to them. I'm not comfortable with this public policy discussion so overtly talking about what people do in private because I think that is their own business.

OITM: Do you have any final message to Vermont's gay community?

Dwyer: The concern I've had is that pushing [civil unions] through so quickly is that there is a backlash. What has always struck me as a Vermonter is that gay and lesbian couples have been very accepted in the community and now I think that has changed a lot and it could get worse. What I think has been a short-term gain may be a long-term detriment for the gay and lesbian community. I've heard so many people say that this is the safest place that they have been and I believe that is absolutely true of this state and it may not continue to be if there is this much resentment now and it is getting worse or it escalates. ▼



Holly Puterbaugh (rt. front) and Lois Farnham, two of the plaintiffs in *Baker v Vermont*, got their civil union license on July 1, before a crowd of reporters and photographers at the South Burlington Town Clerk's office. Their ceremony took place a few hours later.

Unions make quiet entrance continued from page one

Burlington City Hall, just minutes after she and Puterbaugh got their license.

"That's long enough. It's nice after all this time to say Holly is my spouse," Farnham said.

No protesters or opponents have interrupted any of the ceremonies to date, but the opposition remains strong and organized. About a dozen people formed a prayer circle in Brattleboro across the street from the fountain where Peterson and Conrad held their ceremony.

And about 150 people turned out for a feisty protest on the Statehouse lawn on July 1 as the first civil unions ceremonies were being held across the state.

The theme of the opponents continues to be a call for the

majority of Vermonters to rise up and take back control of their state government from the legislators and governor who granted gay and lesbian couples full rights. "It is we who are on the offensive," said Neal Laybourne, pastor of Barre Free Evangelical Church. "Let's channel our energy toward taking back Vermont."

The goal of the protesters is to make a huge difference when Vermonters cast their ballots and they already are targeting House Republicans who voted for the bill. Many of those lawmakers face primary races from fellow Republicans.

"You can make a difference. You need to take a stand. You need to be active," Stephen Cable, an insurance salesman from Rutland who has established a group called Who

Would Have Thought Inc., told the protesters at the Statehouse.

Supporters of full equality for same-sex couples are quietly building their strength, too, though. The Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force is planning a full summer at the various fairs around the state, bearing witness to the public of the strong families that gay and lesbian couples have been forming for years.

A political action committee established by the task force also has been working to raise money so it can be active in this fall's political campaigns.

But most importantly, couples both from Vermont and from around the country have been taking advantage of the new legal rights and benefits that are being afforded to them by the civil unions law.

Of the 115 certified civil unions reported to the Vermont Department of Health's vital record's department as of press time, 78 were for non-Vermonters. Those couples will not automatically have any benefits when they return home.

Some of those couples said the symbolism of having a state government, even if it is not their own, recognize their relationships was immensely important to them.

"We believe that this should be a right anywhere in this country. It's my right to pursue joy," Karen Anders of Columbus, Ohio, said. Anders and partner Dorrie Mills stood in the lobby of South Burlington City Hall while Farnham and Puterbaugh got their license, waiting to fill out the paperwork for their own

civil union.

After Farnham and Puterbaugh got their licenses and dealt with the media, Anders and Mills presented them with a bouquet of flowers and thanks.

"They have worked hard," Anders said.

"We're tremendously grateful to them," Mills said.

Precise totals for civil union licenses obtained and certified in July, will not be available until mid-August. The licenses must be certified within 60 days after they are issued by a town clerk. Once certified, they must be filed with the town clerk within 10 days. The clerk then has until the tenth day of the following calendar month to record the union with the vital records department. ▼

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