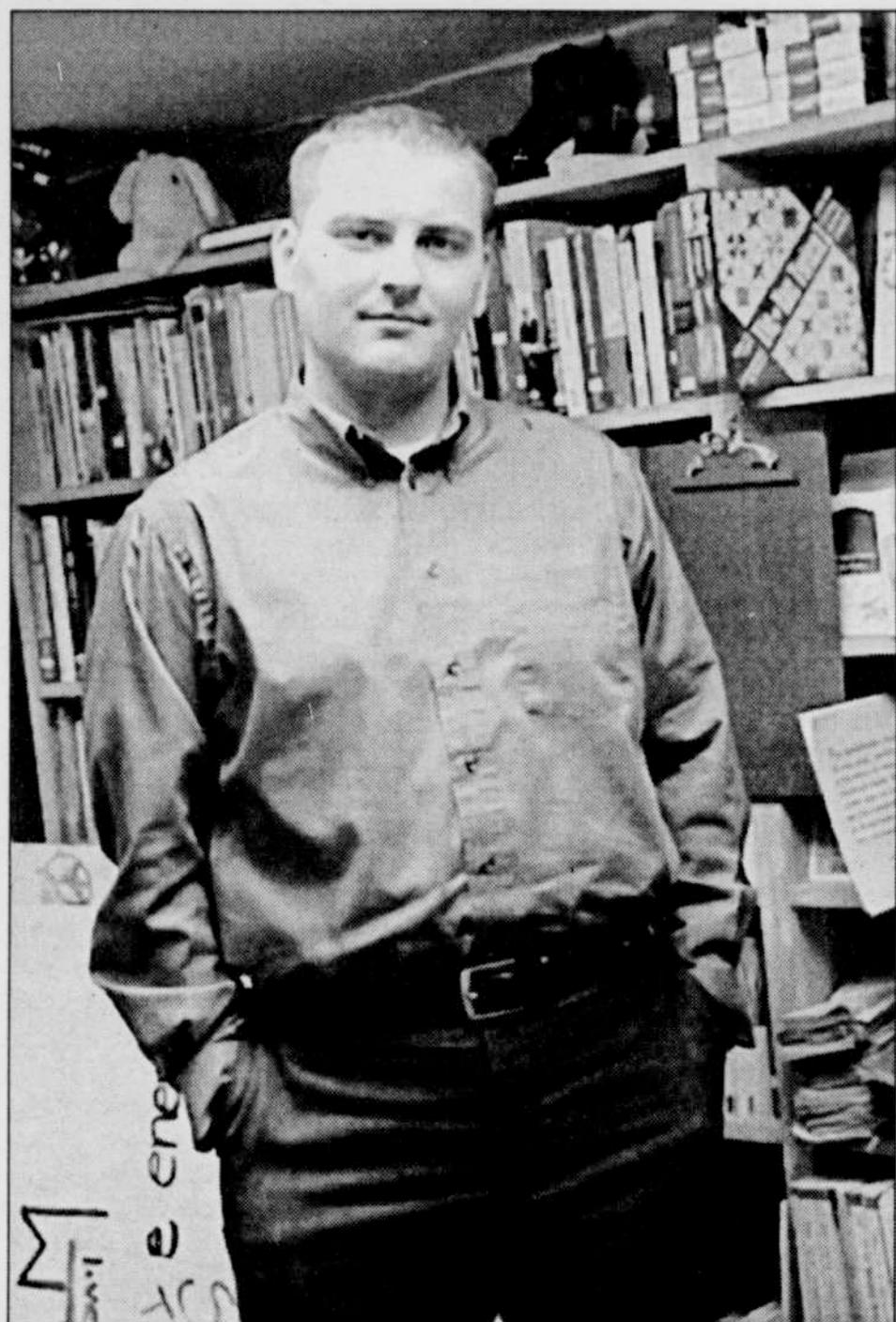




Activist Rick Galena helped foil an anti-gay ballot measure effort in Maine

ing insurance and other benefits.

Secretary of State Dan Gwadosky announced Jan. 29 that anti-gay groups failed to collect the 42,101 signatures needed to place a question on the ballot. The measure would have repealed a recently enacted law requiring all health insurers to sell policies with domestic partner benefits to any business that asks for them. It also contained a dangerous provision aimed at prohibiting the state from ever legally recognizing gay marriages or civil unions.

"We...firmly believe that this is a direct result of Maine voters seeing this issue for what it truly is," said Rick Galena, Maine Lesbian Gay Political Alliance executive director. "It is not about 'gay rights' but about every person's ability to have access to health insurance, regardless of their marital status or sexual orientation."

MONTANA

A lesbian couple's home in Missoula was gutted by fire Feb. 8 because they are part of a lawsuit seeking health benefits for same-sex partners of University of Montana employees.

Shortly after 3 a.m., Adrienne Neff and Carla Grayson took their infant son and headed for the front door, only to find a wall of fire. Back in the bedroom, Neff passed the baby out the window to Grayson, then struggled to escape herself. The house was surrounded by fire, which officials said was almost certainly the result of arson.

"Whoever set this fire did not intend to simply frighten or intimidate this family. They meant to kill them," said Matt Coles, American Civil Liberties Union Lesbian and Gay Rights Project director. "Two days after the case was filed, all of the plaintiffs received anonymous death threats

in the mail that said, 'Die dyke.'"

Grayson told a roomful of reporters and supporters Feb. 4 that she was a plaintiff in the lawsuit against the university, where she is a professor, because Neff needs to have health benefits in order to stay at home and care for their baby. "I'm doing this to protect my family," she said.

Workers at the Montana University System's seven campuses can get health insurance, disability coverage and other benefits for their spouses. Even unmarried opposite-sex couples can provide their partners with benefits by simply signing an affidavit of common law marriage.

"This is a matter of basic fairness—of whether gay employees should be compensated less than straight employees for doing the same work," said Scott Crichton, ACLU of Montana executive director. Along with actual salary, he noted, health and other benefits make up a

substantial portion of how employees are compensated.

The lawsuit is based on protections in the state constitution that the ACLU said are in most other state constitutions, including fundamental rights to privacy and equal protection. Attorneys said the taxpayer-funded university system is violating these basic rights by denying lesbian and gay employees equal access to health insurance and other benefits.

"We are working with local and university officials and law enforcement to ensure that this heinous crime is fully investigated and prosecuted—and that the families involved in this lawsuit are not vulnerable to further attack," Coles said. "The case is being handled as a triple attempted homicide, and federal officials have become involved in the investigation."

COLORADO

A state Senate committee voted 4-3 to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity Jan. 23. The bill was headed to the full Senate.

A similar measure passed the Senate last year but died in a House committee. It was at least the fifth time such a measure failed in the Colorado Legislature, according to The Associated Press.

"It's beyond me why sexual orientation would be any different from sex, religion, race and the other characteristics we already prevent discrimination on," bill sponsor Sen. Doug Linkhart, D-Denver, told the AP.

The measure would exempt religious organizations that do not receive taxpayer funding. **J**

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