

NATIONAL news

Michael Adams, Lambda Legal education and public affairs director. "We applaud Asbury Park for its leadership and courage. Any time the constitutional right of same-sex couples to marry is acted on, it's a step forward."

Lambda Legal filed a lawsuit in June 2002 in New Jersey state court on behalf of seven same-sex couples, arguing that denying full marriage to gay men and lesbians violates the state constitution. In November 2003, a trial court decision in favor of the state propelled the case forward into the appeals process, where it will ultimately be decided.

WISCONSIN

The Wisconsin Senate passed a constitutional amendment March 12 that would deny marriage, civil unions or domestic partnerships to same-sex couples in the state.

The measure—which was already passed in the House—must be passed again in the next session of the Legislature by a simple majority of both Houses. The question then would be placed on the ballot, which could not happen before April 2005.

"We have faith in the fairness and compassion of the people of this state," said Chris Ott, Action Wisconsin executive director. "Wisconsinites will soundly reject this amendment should it pass the Legislature again next January, especially once they understand that it is designed to ban civil unions, comprehensive domestic partnership benefits and marriage."

MAINE

The Maine Senate refused March 5 to consider a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage by a vote of 17-16. A similar proposal was defeated Feb. 18 in the House by a vote of 76-63.

Betsy Smith, Maine Lesbian Gay Political Alliance executive director, said the victory was especially important. A bill still before the Legislature that would give inheritance rights to domestic partners could have been negatively affected had the amendment resolution succeeded.

Smith expects to see the same amendment resurface during the next legislative session and is already preparing a broad coalition of advocacy groups, from the faith community to business leaders, to prepare for the fight ahead of them.

INDIANA

Indiana House Republicans admitted defeat March 6, bringing to an end their boycott of proceedings that had lasted a week and a half, in a last-ditch effort to ban equal marriage rights for same-sex couples with a constitutional amendment.



Indiana House Speaker B. Patrick Bauer thwarted a Republican effort to amend the state's constitution

House Speaker B. Patrick Bauer—backed by the Democratic majority in the House—would not allow any debate on same-sex marriage, calling it a nonissue and insisting that the Legislature needed to deal with more pressing priorities.

GEORGIA

A bill to send to voters an amendment to the Georgia Constitution to ban same-sex marriage failed Feb. 26 by a three-vote margin to get the required 120 of 180 votes in the House.

Immediately after the defeat, House Republicans and conservative Democrats moved to have the measure reconsidered, and right-wing

political and religious groups have mounted a venomous campaign to push for a revote.

WYOMING

An amendment to deny the legal recognition of same-sex marriages performed outside the state of Wyoming was proposed and defeated Feb. 18. Wyoming is one of 12 states that does not have a Defense of Marriage Act or constitutional provision on the books.

"Why we would not want to support the commitment of two people...I do not know," said Linda Burt, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Wyoming chapter. "I don't know what the purpose of the state would be in doing that."

NATIONAL

Log Cabin Republicans launched an unprecedented \$1 million national advertising campaign March 10 opposing the Federal Marriage Amendment. The proposal would not only deny civil marriage rights for same-sex couples but also jeopardize civil unions and domestic partner benefits.



Dick Cheney's words are coming back to haunt him

A 30-second television commercial began airing March 11 around Washington, D.C., and in seven crucial swing states:

Ohio, Missouri, Florida, Minnesota, New Mexico, New Hampshire and Wisconsin. The ad uses excerpts from a 2000 debate in which then vice presidential candidate Dick Cheney said marriage should be regulated by the states, not the federal government.

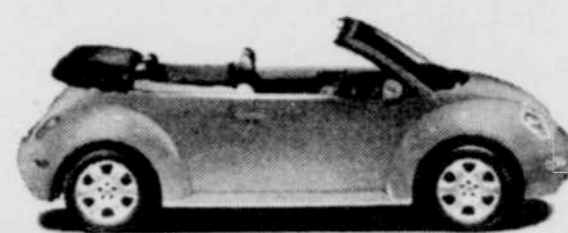
"As Republicans, it is our obligation to stand up and speak out when our party is headed in the wrong direction," said Patrick Guerriero, Log Cabin executive director. "The Republican Party has a choice: Be the party of Lincoln, Reagan, Schwarzenegger and Guiliani or be the party of Bauer, Falwell, Robertson and Buchanan.... Choosing the wrong path will put the Republican Party on the wrong side of history. Fairness and freedom will prevail over intolerance and exclusion."

The Office of the Special Counsel is actively trying to roll back a 23-year-old interpretation of a statute that prevents federal workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation. The office, which is responsible for investigating and prosecuting federal workplace discrimination, in recent weeks has removed all information about filing claims of discrimination based on sexual orientation from its Web site and handbooks.

The office has stated publicly that it is re-evaluating its statutory authority to investigate claims of discrimination based on sexual orientation. In a release Feb. 27, special counsel Scott Bloch said the protection against sexual orientation-based discrimination originated in an executive order from five years ago.

However, a new letter from former special counsel Elaine Kaplan called that claim "demonstrably inaccurate...indeed, I cannot imagine where you derived this understanding of the basis for OSC's pre-existing policy regarding sexual orientation discrimination complaints." She went on to note that the very documents that have been removed from the office's Web site would have demonstrated her point clearly. [E]

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