

Washington state gears up for hot political summer

This September, King County (Seattle) voters will consider a referendum which seeks to overturn the recently passed Fair Employment Ordinance (FEO). The ordinance, which was passed December 9, 1985, bans discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, ancestry, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, and sensory, mental, or physical handicap. Concerned Citizens for King County (CCKC), a right-wing group composed largely of fundamentalist Christians, has spearheaded the drive against the ordinance by collecting 41,000 signatures calling for a referendum. Even though sexual orientation is only one of the ten protected classes covered by the law, CCKC activists refer to the FEO as "the homosexual rights ordinance."

Lesbian and gay men together with people representing other protected classes, have organized the "Yes on 7" Committee to organize in support of the ordinance.

The CCKC is also working with Washington State Representative Glenn Dobbs from Centralia, who has announced his intention to place an initiative on the November ballot to prohibit "sexual deviants" from working with "at risk groups" of people. The proposed initiative also forbids any state or local law, or executive order, that would disallow discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

The initiative is seen as a direct attack on Governor Booth Gardner's Christmas Eve executive order which banned discrimination against state employees based on sexual orientation.

According to the proposed initiative, "sexual deviants" would be prohibited from working, directly or indirectly, with children, the handicapped, the elderly, anyone in "state custody," or anyone in a "risk group population." The initiative explicitly states that gay men and lesbians may not be employed by volunteers in any "political entity" (that is, governmental agency) and in institutions including, but not limited to, hospitals, health care facilities, mental health hospitals and clinics, jails, prisons, half-way houses, juvenile centers, group homes, resident crisis centers, foster care, day care, battered women's shelters, alternate resident placement facilities, "and other such facilities."

The proposed initiative defines a "sexual deviant" as someone who sexually exploits or abuses a minor child, a handicapped person, or an elderly person, or any other person "at risk"; someone who commits rape; someone who engages in sado-masochism, bestiality, homosexuality, water sports, or scat; or anyone who uses an "object" (a dildo, for example) for sexual pleasure.

Dobbs has until the first week of July to gather 152,000 signatures in favor of the initiative. If he succeeds, as is generally considered likely, the initiative will appear on the November ballot.

New York City Council approves gay-rights bill

by Jay Brown

The New York City Council approved a gay-rights bill on March 20 by a two-thirds majority. The bill, known as Intro. 2, was the last in a series of bills introduced over a period of 15 years. The last time the full council considered a similar bill was in 1974. During the final tally (21-14), which came after an extended, emotional, and sometimes acrimonious hearing, as it became clear that the bill would finally pass, supporters jumped to their feet and cheered.

Primary opposition to the bill has come from the Roman Catholic Church and Hasidic Jewish men. The only opposition at the final hearing came from Brooklyn Councilman Noach Dear. As Dear denounced the bill over 40 men and women silently stood and turned their backs on him, thus emulating a group of Hasidim who had turned their backs on Mayor Ed Koch when he spoke in support of the bill a week earlier.

The bill, which amends the administrative code of New York City, is intended to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in housing, employment and public accommodations. Also, provisions in the bill prohibit its repeal by referendum. Supporters say it is basic civil-rights legislation; opponents contend that it "condones homosexuality" (Ronald Reagan echoed this sentiment at a news conference on March 22.)

Mayor Koch, at an impromptu hallway news conference following the vote, said that passage of the bill would make "... no major change in the life of this city. The sky is not going to fall."

The most dramatic moment at the final hearing came when uncommitted Councilman Wendell Foster of the Bronx, a minister with the United Church of Christ, looked up at the people in the gallery and said: "In the spirit of Christ I must love my homosexual brothers and sisters, even though I don't understand them. They frighten me. They intimidate me. Yet, I have to live with myself." Foster, a Black, also cited personal knowledge of discrimination in his decision to vote in favor of the bill.

Another uncommitted councilman, Joseph F. Lisa of Queens, chairman of a council sub-committee on AIDS, also voted in favor of the bill but two hours later attempted to have his vote reversed. Lisa said he was under no outside pressure when he changed his vote. The majority leader, Peter F. Vallone, said that Lisa's reversal was not valid.

An omnibus gay-rights bill, similar to the New York legislation, is certain to be introduced in the 1987 session of the Oregon Legislature. The Oregon effort is being spearheaded by the Oregon chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union's Commission on Lesbian/Gay Rights. Burton White, commis-

sion chair, applauded the action of the New York City Council, "We welcome the action by the New York City Council in passing the gay-rights legislation which guarantees to a group of Americans, who have been discriminated against, the same rights that belong to all who live in this country."

"Legislation must be enacted to protect human beings against discrimination," White emphasized. "Passage of similar legislation in Oregon has been a long-standing legislative goal of the ACLU. One of the things that is always persuasive to a legislative body is passage of similar legislation elsewhere. It is very welcome to have courageous action by New York City and it is encouraging to have legislative victory in spite of homophobia."

Rick Haselton, also an ACLU Gay/Lesbian Commission member, praised the "yes" vote by Councilman Foster, the Black minister. "He drew upon his own experience with discrimination and human rights and knew he needed to vote for the measure," Haselton said.

Haselton stressed that it takes a lot of ground work and cooperation among different groups to win the struggle for human rights. (Ed. note: For more on the ACLU Lesbian/Gay Commission see W.C. McRae's story on the subject in this issue.)

Networking, political consciousness essentials in AIDS fight

The values of networking and an enhanced political awareness in the gay community as it struggles with the effects of the AIDS epidemic made deep impressions on CHES representatives Michael Pavlin and Dan O'Neill as they attended the 7th Annual Lesbian/Gay Health Conference and 4th Annual AIDS Forum in Washington, D.C., in mid-March.

Founded in 1978 as a caucus for lesbian and gay health professionals to share their struggles for recognition of the gay community's specialized health concerns, The National Lesbian/Gay Health Foundation has evolved into a strong force at the forefront of the gay/lesbian movement. The latest conference lasted four days and was attended by hundreds of representatives

from lesbian and gay organizations all over the country.

Because the AIDS crisis in the early 1980s brought with it concern that other gay and lesbian health issues might become obscured, the National AIDS Forum was established to provide a specific clearinghouse of information and resources for AIDS-related service organizations such as CHES and Cascade AIDS Project. The goals of the conference were to increase information sharing, networking and coalition building during these critical times. According to O'Neill and Pavlin, the most useful aspect was the chance to meet and identify the people and organizations involved with the AIDS crisis nationwide.

"The opportunity for networking was invaluable, and we established contacts that later can be tapped as potential resources" said O'Neill. "There's a tendency to narrow the focus down to our own community and the problems we have to face in Oregon, but this forum gave us a chance to hear how other communities both large and small, are dealing with the AIDS crisis, and also a chance to share mistakes and successes," added Pavlin.

The conference general sessions provided the most current information available on national gay/lesbian lobbying efforts, medical research, civil rights and legal issues by featuring speakers such as Dr. Mathilde Krim of the AIDS Medical Foundation, Jeff Levi of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and Gary MacDonald of the AIDS Action Council. There was a strong push throughout the conference for a raising of the political consciousness of the American gay community. Specific pieces of repressive legislation proposed in several states and other civil rights issues were cited as reasons for the need to start considering AIDS as a political crisis, and not just a medical or social crisis. The general conclusion of the conference was that AIDS will be the major domestic issue facing the United States for the remainder of this century, and that the crisis will impact on our society in a devastating manner unless the Gay/Lesbian and AIDS-related service organizations are united in purposes and resources.

(Ed. note: Michael Helquist is preparing an exclusive report on the health conference and AIDS forum. It will appear in the May issue of Just Out.)

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