

The Straight Stuff

How the mainstream press sees it

B Y W C M c R A E

Joice Booth, columnist in *This Week* magazine, aimed her March 4 rightist harumphing at HB 2325, Oregon's gay rights bill. Booth, who seems to be former Portland mayor Frank Ivancie in drag, lathered herself up about the legislature's inattention to her personal agenda. On jobs: "We've asked for help on the economy. We need jobs, we've said. Do something. So what do they do? They come up with gay-rights legislation. Fine. Swell. Lots of jobs in that." What the Imperial We misses is that, for 10-15 percent of the Portland homes that *This Week* intrudes upon weekly, the gay rights bill is a jobs bill.

To discontinue *This Week* distribution at your address, call 620-4121 and ask for circulation. But be patient, it may take months to free your home of this menace.

Last month's story about organized religion and gays is this month's story on priests and AIDS following an "Up Close and Personal" journalistic logic of personalizing religion into priests and foreshortening gays into, well, AIDS. Priests with AIDS stories have appeared in most major dailies and are being reprised now in the weeklies. The story plays well because the association of priests with AIDS discredits the priesthood at the same

time that the association legitimizes AIDS. From between the lines comes a plaintive plea for understanding and gay rights.

These stories about the Cloistered becoming the Political almost all ignore nuns. The press uses the AIDS association to draw conclusions about the sex lives of all the men and women of the cloth. Why such a discussion wasn't prompted by the Lesbian Nuns remains a mystery.

Writer David Leavitt called it "the love that dare not speak its name": friendships between gay men and straight women. Last month, *Gentlemen's Quarterly* stopped squirming long enough to print a story on the subject. The story — of course written by a woman — is the first I recall where *GQ* even acknowledges that gays exist, which is pretty astonishing considering what *GQ* is and who reads it.

GQ must have a larger gay readership than all the gay papers and magazines in the world combined, a situation not unrealized by its advertisers. While the article by Laura Furman is predictable enough — it's all, "Oh, what nice clothes; my, such manners; and who made the quiche?" stuff — her final paragraphs reveal her real "gay" concern: AIDS, "I can no longer afford the luxury of glamorizing [her gay friend's] life . . . Now I see the boundary between us as a minefield, across which I



keep an eye on my friend." Fag Hag, get thee behind me.

In fact, one of the editors of *GQ* is pictured in *Vanity Fair's* two-page photo memorandum of arts and entertainment types who have died of AIDS. Typically for *Vanity Fair*, even the road to AIDS is paved with name-dropping, and one could certainly view the photos and the long accompanying story as merely a voyeuristic "how the good die young" story. But the story transcends its classist context, and becomes a moving testimony. We're at least spared the mawkish deception of *Liberace*.

You may have naively thought that if a gay person were to run for elected office, then the gay press would do everything in its power to promote the candidate. Wrong.

The candidacy of Harry Britt, the openly gay supervisor from San Francisco, for California's fifth congressional seat is proving that San Francisco gay politics is easily as Byzantine as anything Chicago could serve up.

Coming Up!, a San Francisco gay

newspaper, has endorsed Britt's principle opponent, Nancy Pelosi, who is a major fundraiser for the California Democratic Party but has no elected parliamentary experience. *Coming Up!* editor Kim Corsaro, busily tossing garlands, invests Pelosi with almost superpolitical powers: "[Pelosi] is responsible for replacing Strom Thurmond as chair of Judiciary. Jesse Helms got his comeuppance from Pelosi when he lost the chair of Foreign Relations." Makes you kind of wonder how Pelosi could have done all that from an unelected position in San Francisco, doesn't it?

Corsaro scolds Britt for being "simply in over his head," and assembles lots of off the record grumbling about Britt from gays and lesbians, all of whom are portrayed as resignedly supporting the "incompetent" Britt. *Coming Up!* thus promotes itself as all the more principled for speaking out and having the integrity of breaking rank.

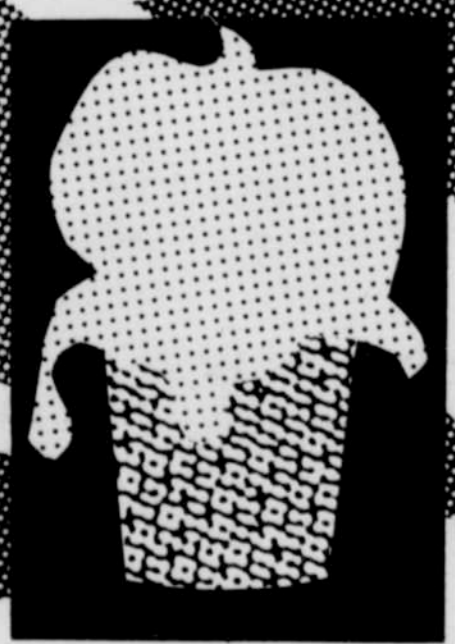
It must be difficult using a word processor when you're shaking your own hand.

The New York Native has also drawn a bead on Britt, but for being too progressive. Britt has truck with the Democratic Socialists of America, and views "his ties to the Democratic Party in the most nominal of terms."

Whatever Britt's merits, we're left with the unsightly vision of the gay press abasing itself deliriously each time a mainstream politician agrees not to quarantine us, while lashing out at a gay candidate who might presume to be good enough to join the mainstream. Of course, nothing looks so principled to its partisans as factionalism.

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