

Just news

The other side of Washington: Lobbying

In Portland on the Sunday of the March, Congressman Wyden denied knowing anything about it.

B Y W . C . M c R A E

There was one element of the Lesbian and Gay March on Washington whose success we may never easily measure: impact on legislators.

Excepting Rep. Bob Smith, each of Oregon's legislators was lobbied. Some of the encounters were more noteworthy than others. Sen. Bob Packwood gave lobbyists a friendly welcome, discussed their concerns, but declined to again co-sponsor the national gay rights bill. "To be honest, I can't go that far out on the limb again," he stated, although he vowed to support the bill if it ever came to a vote.

Rep. Les AuCoin is currently a co-sponsor of the bill in the lower house, and was seen on the day of the march attending the Art/AIDS benefit in Portland.

Reaction from some representatives was less candid. On that same Sunday, Rep. Ron Wyden, in response to a question at a public meeting in Portland, disavowed any knowledge of the gay and lesbian march or its goals. When asked by a *Just Out* reporter, "What do you think of the lesbian and gay march on Washington," Wyden replied, "I read about it in Saturday's paper," and then went on to a general statement supporting peoples' exercise of "First Amendment rights."

Such statements appear disingenuous in light of Wyden's record, according both to long-time activists and to lobbyists who met with Wyden in Washington before the march. Not only did

Wyden know about the march before reading that Saturday's paper — during the previous week he had met with constituents who were in Washington for the march — but the people he did meet reported they received a rude reception.

Wayne Harris, a Wyden constituent, met with his congressman while in Washington, and later met with one of his assistants. Harris reports that his first meeting with Wyden was "brusque" and that the office staff was "rude." After Harris informed Wyden of the goals of the march, and gave him written material, Wyden reportedly snapped, "Don't you know my record?"

Long-time activists *do* know Wyden's record. When Wyden first ran for Congress in District 3 in 1980, he garnered widespread gay and lesbian support by stating his intention of co-sponsoring the national gay rights bill. After his election, however, Wyden told gay leaders that he would not, after all, be able to support the bill.

After months of trying to arrange a meeting with Wyden last year, Metropolitan Community Church Pastor Gary Wilson threatened to chain himself to the church if Wyden would not agree to meet with gay leaders. Those who attended the resulting meeting, which took a further six months to arrange, considered it the first organized meeting with gay constituents since Wyden's election six years earlier.

At the time, the meeting was considered to be an effort at constituency building should Wyden in the future attempt a run at a Senate seat. •

U.S. Senate 94-2 vote bars safe sex education funding

The U.S. Senate on October 14, 1987 passed an amendment banning the use of federal funds for materials and projects in AIDS education that might "promote or encourage, directly or indirectly, homosexual sexual activity." The amendment was introduced by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC) to the \$126 billion Labor, Health and Human Services and Education bill, which allocates close to \$1 billion dollars for AIDS research and education efforts in fiscal 1988.

The Helms amendment was passed overwhelmingly by a 94-2 vote, with negative votes cast only by Sen. Lowell Weicker (R-CT) and Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY). All other Senate supporters of the federal gay/lesbian civil rights bill voted in favor of the Helms amendment, including Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-HI), Sen. John Kerry (D-MA), Sen. Alan Cranston (D-CA), and Sen. Brock Adams (D-WA).

"This amendment's passage, and especially its support by some of our friends in the Senate, is intolerable," said Jeffrey Levi, NGLTF Executive Director. "Three days after a March for lesbian and gay rights which drew over 500,000 lesbian and gay Americans, the Senate has passed a bill that is rooted in homophobia."

The bill passed after virulent floor debate led by Senator Helms. Helms said he introduced the bill because he was disgusted by a comic book depicting safer sex practices published by Gay Men's Health Crisis. While he conceded that no federal funds had been used in producing the comic book, Helms noted that GMHC conducts educational efforts under a statement of

purpose which explicitly affirms gay identity and gay sexuality.

Said Helms, "I will not consume the Senate's time reading the details of this revolting project. But, Mr. President, you know those little bags they have on airlines when it gets bumpy, if I were to read the sickening details to you . . . you would need one . . . We have got to call a spade a spade and a perverted human being a perverted human being, not in anger, but in realism." Helms blamed the spread of AIDS to homosexual intercourse, saying that "[E]very AIDS case can be traced back to a homosexual act."

NGLTF plans to register its condemnation with our friends by meeting with several senators and staffers. In addition, the Task Force is actively contacting state and local groups in the state of all Senate supporters of the federal gay rights bill to encourage that constituent meetings and direct action be initiated.

Some Senators are justifying their votes by saying that the actual impact of this amendment will be negligible. "This is wrong and unacceptable on two counts," said Levi. "First, its intent and effect are homophobic, as Helms made patently clear throughout the debate. Our friends who abandoned us on this vote would never have voted for a measure that was racist in intent, no matter how benign its impact. Second, this amendment could well rule out any federal funds for the safer sex programs our community has so successfully developed."

"We hope to defeat this amendment when the House and Senate have a conference on this bill, but its chilling effect on the Public Health Service bureaucracy may result in the reduction or elimination in funding for gay-related AIDS education programs," Levi observed. •

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