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Just news

Senate passes hate crimes statistics act; includes sexual orientation

In an historic moment for the gay and lesbian community, the U.S. Senate on February 8 voted 92 to 4 to pass the Federal Hate Crime Statistics Act. Before voting for passage, Senate lawmakers rejected, by 77-19, a move by Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) to attach a four-part anti-gay amendment to the bill.

The landslide vote marks the first time in the history of the Senate that the pervasive problem of anti-gay and lesbian violence has been addressed.

"Today the U.S. Senate sent a strong signal to the bigots and bashers in our country that violence against lesbians and gay men is as intolerable as violence against racial, religious and ethnic minorities," said Urvashi Vaid, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) executive director. "It marks the culmination of seven years of work by the Task Force to gain a political response to the enormous problem of anti-gay violence."

The bill requires the U.S. Department of Justice to "acquire data about certain crimes which manifest evidence of prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity."

"This bill is the beginning of the slippery slope downward for homophobic skinhead bigots, violent racists, anti-semites and other perpetrators of hate crimes," said Vaid.

The bill passed with an amendment offered by Senators Paul Simon (D-IL) and Orrin Hatch (R-UT), two major sponsors of the legislation. The amendment reads, "Congress finds that: (1) The American family life is the foundation of American society; (2) Federal policy should encourage the well-being, financial security, and health of the American family; (3) Schools should not de-emphasize the critical value of American family life; and (4) Nothing in this act shall be construed, nor shall any funds appropriated to carry out the purpose of the act be used to promote or encourage homosexuality."

The Simon-Hatch amendment was considered a "pre-emptive strike" by bill supporters in an effort to head off a Helms amendment.

The Helms amendment, overwhelmingly defeated by the Senate, stated, (1) The homosexual movement threatens the strength and the survival of the American family as the basic unit of society; (2) State laws prohibiting sodomy should be enforced; (3) The federal government should not provide discrimination protections on the basis of "sexual orientation;" and (4) School curriculums should not condone homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle in American society.

"Senators Simon and Hatch deserve considerable credit for passage of this bill," said Peri Jude Radecic, NGLTF legislative director.

Radecic credits unprecedented, ongoing grassroots lobbying by thousands of gay and lesbians activists and allies, including a last-minute flurry of calls the morning of the bill's passage.

"For the past three years during NGLTF's National Lobby Days, we have led drives to increase co-sponsorships," said Radecic.

"Activists have moved their legislators on this issue. This bill shows constituent lobbying works," said Radecic.

Voting against the bill were Senators William Armstrong (R-CO), Gordon Humphrey (R-NH), Trent Lott (R-MS) and Jesse Helms.

International Women's Day celebration

Portland will hold its 15th annual International Women's Day Festival on March 10th, 10 - 5 pm, at PSU Smith Center, 1825 SW Broadway.

On March 8, 1857, thousands of working class women marched through the streets of New York City demanding an end to sweatshop conditions, better childcare facilities, equal pay for equal work and the right to vote. In 1910 at the International Conference of Women Socialists held in Copenhagen, Clara Zetkin proposed that March 8 be observed as International Working Women's Day in honor of the New York march. This observance continues as hundreds of cities join with Portland to acknowledge and honor women.

Poets from the Northwest will be sharing their poems, including Naomi Littlebear Morena, Rene Kaufman, Mattie Calliers-Spears, Janna Harris and Dian Million. Films to be shown include *Daughter Rite*, which examines the universal theme of mother/daughter relationships; *Trade Secrets*, which depicts the struggles and victories of women working in non-traditional jobs; and *It's Up to Us*, which focuses on the experiences of members of the National Black Women's Health Project who attended the UN sponsored End of the Decade conference in Kenya.

Craftswomen from throughout the state will be displaying and selling their work. Music will be performed in two settings and will encompass a wide variety of styles.

Some of the highlights include performances by the Portland Lesbian Choir, Flamenco guitar and dancing by Gaily Banzi, the classical guitar and flute duo, Musica Femina, yiddish songs by BJ Castleman, improvisational comedy by Acting Out, Vital Moves and a special appearance by Seattle vocalist Sharolyn Scott.

The Talking Heads room gives women an opportunity to speak about different issues which impact our lives. Some of the scheduled topics are Women in Prison; Jean Gump, a peace activist currently jailed because of her commitment to peace; Women in Palestine and more.

International food from Kenya, Central America, Malaysia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe will be featured. The Political Forum will be held at noon in the Smith center Ballroom. This year's topic is Pornography and Prostitution. The forum will feature speakers who either work in or are survivors of this movement. Sarah Winter, founder of W.H.I.S.P.E.R., Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt, will be one of the panelists.

Community organizations will have information tables, the Littman and White Galleries will feature art by Northwest women and a variety of workshops will round out the day's events.

The evening concert will feature two dynamic groups. Deuce is a fusion/jazz band led by saxophonist Jean Fineberg and trumpeter Ellen Seeling. Opening the show will be Latin America New Song Movement artist, Altazor, which is four women from around the world who weave together their different musical backgrounds and cultural traditions to create a unique musical tapestry.

Tickets for the evening concert are \$10 and can be purchased at A Woman's Place Bookstore, Artichoke Music and PSU Box Office. Smith Center is wheelchair accessible, child care will be provided for all of the International Women's Day events and free parking is available at the PSU parking structure.



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