

Out in the Mountains

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

MAR 8 1988

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VERMONT'S NEWSPAPER FOR LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

Volume III, Number 2

March 1988

Gays Take Lashing at Hearing--Again

The Senate Judiciary Committee held a public hearing for S278, the bill to prevent discrimination based on sexual or affectional orientation, on Thursday, February 18 at the State House in Montpelier. Coalition organizers began arriving at 5pm, although the hearing was not scheduled to begin until 7pm. By 6pm the well of the House was over half full of supporters wearing blue tags saying, "Yes on S278". Nervous conversation could be heard all around the room.

About 6:45, the buses filled with Fundamentalists opposed to the bill arrived. The tension in the room was thick as this new group searched for available seats among the supporters.

Shortly before 7pm, sign-up sheets were set out for those who wished to testify. The room took on a new level of tension as scores of people stood in line to sign their names on the list. At 7:20, Mary Just Skinner had to ask that the hearing begin and anyone wishing to testify should proceed to the back of the room and sign the list there. The ground rules for the hearing were outlined by Ms. Skinner, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. The rules were the same as last year: two minutes per speaker,

a speaker in favor of the bill followed by a speaker opposed, no applause, groans, or laughter. The stage was set and the procession of speakers began.



Chair Mary Just Skinner and vicechair John Bloomer preside over S278 public hearing.

Flossie Robillard, a committee member, was unable to attend because she was ill. Will Hunter was charged with keeping time for the speakers. He and the other committee members settled in for a long evening. There were 215 people signed up to testify, 85 for and 120 against.

The testimony against the bill was predictable. Most of the people testifying against the bill carried their bibles to the stand with them. This year, however, less of the opposition actually quoted repetitive bible passages. The opposition came from a few areas—Cabot, St. Albans, Middlebury/Cornwall, and Marshfield. Many testified that they hadn't heard of this public hearing until the night before on a Christian radio program.

Many called gays depraved, predators, likened us to rapists, and murderers. They testified that they didn't want to be forced to rent, or hire a lesbian or gay man. "We do not judge you, but that which you do," one woman exclaimed. Many told the committee that they knew for a fact that homosexuals choose their lifestyle and therefore they should not be granted any special privileges for making that choice.

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AIDS Action for Life Series Draws Crowds

by Eileen

For four Thursdays in January the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington and Vermont CARES presented a series of programs on AIDS. The presentations ranged from the social to the medical to the political. The last program "The Religious Response to AIDS" was postponed and will be announced.

The first program on January 7 was entitled "AIDS 101—Everything You Always Wanted to Know About AIDS and Were Afraid to Ask." The presentation featured Barry Whitworth of the Vermont Department of Health and Dr. Barbara Grant of the University of Vermont Medical Center.

Mr. Whitworth's facts and fiction of

AIDS transmission were chilling, but the essence of Whitworth's message was heartening: No one who does not have the virus now need ever contract it, if they only engage in safe sexual practices (or of course no sexual activity) and take precautions when handling blood. Barbara Grant demonstrated how the HIV virus gets into the body's cells.

The second program featured Terje Anderson, of Vt.C.A.R.E.S., and Marilyn Richards of the Vermont Department of Health. Anderson emphasized that AIDS does not focus on risk groups, but on risky practices. He then went on to discuss those practices in specific detail. Using the pamphlet entitled "Safe Sex," Anderson discussed the different sexual practices

considered safe, risky, and dangerous. He did not entirely agree with the pamphlet. For example, Anderson disputes that wet kissing is at all risky. Although the HIV virus is found in the saliva of some of those with AIDS, its concentration is .0001 of the concentration in infected blood or semen. Further, he argues, if the virus could be transmitted through saliva, we would see many more cases of AIDS, spread through sneezing, coughing, etc. He added that no one engaging ONLY in oral sex has gotten the AIDS virus.

Anderson then demonstrated the proper use of condoms. Although condoms are not 100% safe in preventing AIDS (or other diseases or pregnancy, for that mat-

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