

Commentary

Just In Case They Thought We Didn't Notice...

Despite numerous invitations to do so, President Bush declined to address the Sixth International Conference on AIDS in San Francisco in June.

But what came as more of a surprise to many was that the day the Conference opened, Bush was in North Carolina, addressing a fundraising dinner for Senator Jesse Helms, the Senate's leading homophobe and author of the infamous "Helms Amendment" which restricts sexually explicit AIDS education. I guess Bush just didn't want to leave us with any doubts about where he really stands on our lives.

Had George gone to San Francisco, he probably wouldn't have been warmly received anyway. His refusal to change US immigration policy forbidding HIV positive visitors from entering the country was soundly condemned by the conference as being based in prejudice and disregard of scientific fact. At the opening session, delegates chanted slogans like "200,000 dead; where is George?" It made great television. It was probably the last time the AIDS conference will be held in this country, at least until our screwed-up immigration policy is changed. Plans for Boston in 1992 are being scrapped because of this neanderthal approach.

Indeed, had the President spoken to the conference, he probably would have suffered the same fate as his Secretary of Health and Human Services, Louis Sullivan, whose entire speech was drowned out by ACT UP activists with air sirens (you know, the kind that burst your ear drums at hockey games), whistles and catcalls while he was pelted with paper airplanes and pennies. Eyewitnesses said that not a word of his speech could be heard inside the auditorium. It was a fitting fate for an administration which has continued to hear not one word we've said either, and has instead pitched its own pennies at the epidemic.

It was just as well that George stayed in North Carolina with his good friend Jesse Helms. It is clearly where he's most comfortable.

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Speaking of politicians, Peter Smith has some explaining to do. When the House was debating the Americans with Disabilities Act (which prevents discrimination against people with disabilities and includes AIDS and HIV), an amendment was offered to allow food service establish-

ments to discriminate against people with AIDS. It was a close vote, and our Congressman joined William Dannemeyer and the other right wingers to allow discrimination against food servers with AIDS, despite the strong objections of public health officials and scientists. (The amendment passed, but was later taken out in a conference committee.)

Come on, Peter. You know better. Let's keep an eye out to see what kind of PAC contributions Smith picks up from the restaurant and food service industry special interests.

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With all the news of federal AIDS cuts to the state health department budget, isn't it about time that people started asking (loudly) where the state money for AIDS is? Why is Vermont one of just five states that doesn't allocate a single dime of state money for education and prevention or for services to people with AIDS/HIV? Even New Hampshire and Mississippi spend state money; isn't it time we got with the picture? Let's start asking Peter Welch and Dick Snelling and all the legislative candidates if they are willing to support a line item for AIDS programs.

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Why on Earth did the *Free Press* decide to run that article in July about the accused child molester who said he had AIDS? Even they admitted that his claim to have AIDS was possibly/probably a hoax - so much for the journalistic standards of checking your facts first.

That probably doesn't matter to the folks down at the *USA Today* Clone - after all, screaming headlines about a child molester with AIDS (on the top of page one, of course) are bound to sell papers. Especially if you combine that with some downright lurid descriptions of what he allegedly did with boys

(and some girls) in bikini briefs.

The whole sensationalist article played right into everyone's worst stereotypes - continuing to uphold those high standards we've come to expect from Donna Donovan and crew.

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