

Politics

Sanders Speaks (from page one)

can't continue to pull out as much profit as you want because people cannot afford it."

When asked what he could do about such issues, Sanders was frank with his audience. "Let's not kid ourselves. I'm going to be one congressperson out of 435," he admitted. "What I think I can do is raise the issues which 99% of these people don't have the guts to even talk about. YOU have to make change; don't look at me. You've got to change the system. It's called a political revolution."

Sanders then talked about how the election system is being designed to keep voters feeling powerless and unable to have their own wishes and desires heard on the congressional level. Sanders believes that everyone needs to be a part of the political process in order to "create a much more democratic and representative form of government."

Sanders was asked why he chose to run for Congress and not for Governor of the state, to which he replied that he didn't want to be the "Daniel Ortega of Vermont." After giving much thought to not running at all, he decided to try once again for Congress "because my mind is on the national and international issues. The real fight is to change the national priority structure." Sanders then added, "I made the decision to run for Congress and I'm very happy with it. No regrets."

Sanders was asked about his response to the crisis in the Middle East, which he acknowledged to be extremely complex and delicate. Rather than address the political issues in the area, he looked to the situation in this country: "As we see the end of the Cold War, the real challenge is to develop new energy systems which are sustainable and environmentally sound. So long as the energy industry is owned by people whose major concern is profits for themselves, there will be no change."

At another point in the evening, the question of substance abuse and the war on drugs was addressed. Sanders said he was opposed both to the current war on drugs and to the notion of legalizing drugs, arguing, "I don't have a magic solution. Given the economic and political climate in this country, (legalizing drugs could be) society's easy way out, to keep millions of kids - mostly low-income kids - doped up and on the periphery of society. The use of drugs is to some degree the manifestation

of human hopelessness. In the long run, we're going to have to give people hope."

Sanders confessed that he was not as knowledgeable as he would like to be on issues affecting the gay and lesbian communities, and he opened the floor to hear the specific concerns of those present. Issues such as domestic partnerships and AIDS testing were mentioned, along with civil rights measures and increased protection against hate crimes.

Sanders agreed that while many of the issues affecting the gay and lesbian communities are determined by local legislation, the national government could do more to serve as a model for the individual states. "I'm not familiar with every piece of legislation," Sanders admitted, "but I think you will find me on the civil rights side of most issues."

After a question about proposed cutbacks in AIDS funding, Sanders spoke once again about the priorities currently being set by the national government: "The point that I try to make is that no issue is separate. You say that you are appalled by the cutbacks for AIDS research, so what? They're cutting back all over the place...Don't be appalled by cutbacks to AIDS research and education, because they're cutting back on everything else that is important to human society as well.

"The point is this: all of these issues are the same issues. Do we take money out of homelessness to give to AIDS research? We have to understand that what we're dealing with are insane, absurd national priorities, and we're not going to play off a horrible epidemic over here against people who are sleeping in the streets. This is why we need a political movement that brings all people together, that fights to cut what we can agree on...You (get them to) cut back on defense spending and tax breaks, (then) we can start talking about doing all the things we want and have to do."

A member of the au-

dience worried that while all of the other problems were important and demanded attention, he didn't "want our single issue to get lost," to which Sanders replied, "That's a fair enough concern."

When asked if he would sponsor and/or endorse Gay Rights legislation in the Congress, Sanders replied, "I have not read the bill, but my general inclination is to say yes. If it is a reasonable bill that says that human beings are human beings despite their sexual preferences...you will find me supporting it.

"I look at the issue of gay rights as a civil rights issue," Sanders continued. "You have the right to live your life; I have the right to live my life. I don't want to impose my values on you; I don't want you to impose your values on me."

When he was informed about the political incorrectness of using the word "preference" instead of "orientation," Sanders listened attentively before apologizing. "I have to tell you that I don't come before you being as knowledgeable as I should be about some of the issues that you have raised," he said, "and I'll try to do better. I think you will find that I have a very strong record on the issues of civil rights and common decency."

Sanders pointed to his record as Mayor of Burlington and cited the civil rights achievements he had made during his office in that city. While not making any specific promises regarding his upcoming term of office in Washington (on gay/lesbian issues as well as other national issues), he did maintain his allegiance to issues of civil rights, stating time and again that "ultimately, the most important thing that we can do is give hope to people.



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