

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

A Monthly Newsletter of the Asheville Area Gay/Lesbian Community

Asheville, NC

March, 1990

## US SENATE PASSES HATE CRIMES STATISTICS BILL Major Victory for Gays; Major Loss for Helms

On February 8 the United States Senate passed the Hate Crimes Statistics bill by a vote of 92-4. North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms and three other Senators were on the losing side. The bill now goes to a House-Senate Conference Committee, who will iron out differences between it and the House version, which passed overwhelmingly last summer. The bill would require collection of data on crimes motivated by bias based on race, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

They did it by getting 60 Senators to act as cosponsors, the number needed to break a Helms filibuster. Once they had the 60th cosponsor, Helms was powerless. Helms' proposal of a strongly anti-gay amendment was soundly defeated, too (19 for, 77 against).

In his last ditch efforts to persuade fellow Senators to vote against the hate crimes bill, Helms claimed that gay activists had "trumped up" the number of hate crimes against gays, and that the acts were only minor ones anyway. Then he presented a seemingly opposite argument that gays would not report incidents of hate crimes.

A spokesman for the Human Rights Campaign fund called the Helms amendment vote and the bill's passage "landmark victories" for gays. NGLTF's Kevin Berrill, who heads that group's Anti-Violence Project, said, "This is a historic moment for the gay and lesbian community," but added, "Our work is far

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### Editorials

## Self-Portrait Of The Senator

### Can Gays Help Being Gay? Can Helms Help Being Mean?

In his speech Saturday in Raleigh announcing that he would seek a fourth term, U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms described homosexuals and lesbians as "disgusting people," which said a lot more about Jesse Helms than it did about homosexuals and lesbians.

One doesn't have to go along with the idea of legally sanctioned marriages between homosexuals to acknowledge that many homosexuals are admirable people with many good qualities. But to Sen. Helms they are simply "disgusting."

One doesn't have to approve of homosexual activity on moral or religious grounds to have compassion for homosexuals. But to Sen. Helms they are simply "disgusting."

Although there is no universal agreement among psychiatrists and psychologists about the causes of homosexuality, there is virtually universal agreement that people aren't homosexual by choice. Common sense certainly supports that view. Anyone who chooses to be homosexual in this society would be choosing a life of torment, choosing to be ostracized, choosing to be a victim of cruel prejudice, an object of irrational fear and hatred. But to Sen. Helms, these victims of forces beyond their control, which neither they nor experts really understand, are simply

"disgusting."

When Sen. Helms describes homosexuals and lesbians as "disgusting people" — as distinguished from human beings who do things he finds disgusting — he reveals what a mean-spirited man he is, how totally lacking in compassion he is for anyone who is, by his standards, different.

That's hardly news, of course. But his choice of that description Saturday reminds us again that Sen. Helms is not only mean-spirited, but that he relishes being mean-spirited. He gleefully flaunts his mean-spiritedness. He glories in being mean-spirited.

Maybe Jesse Helms can no more help being mean-spirited than a homosexual can help being homosexual, so we won't describe him as a "disgusting person." We would suggest, however, that anyone who takes such joy in meanness comes very close to exemplifying what is meant by "evil."

And Gov. Jim Martin, who has made a radio commercial for the senator and introduced him to the crowd Saturday and sat beaming at the head table with him, belies his nice-guy image and betrays his Presbyterian heritage when he embraces a man who casually and cruelly dismisses homosexuals and lesbians simply as "disgusting people."