

the Front Page

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Washington for JESUS

Fundamentalists Converge On Washington, D.C.

Is this a sideshow or a serious threat?

A Special Report by Winslow Peck
with introductory remarks by Michael Baker

On April 28 and 29, the nation's capital will be the site for a fundamentalist event called "Washington for Jesus." Far from being a quiet religious ceremony, it seems clear that "Washington for Jesus," led by a group of conservative ministers, is a serious, well-financed effort to pressure Congress. With considerably more money and organization behind their effort, this march and rally could possibly have more impact than the October 14 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

Trying to predict the effects of this event, however, is difficult. Just reading the publicity material is enough to provoke both extreme anger and paranoia. It is just as easy for a gay person to go off the deep end on the subject of these self-righteous "Christians," as it is for a fundamentalist to do on the subject of homosexuals.

Unfortunately, this sort of response does not help clarify the central concern here: *Just how big a danger to the gay community are these people? How many of them are there? And how much influence do they have?*

In March, a group of fundamentalist ministers presented the White House with petitions containing over 70,000 signatures urging that the President and Congress take strong stands in favor of prayer in the schools and an increase in the national defense budget and against abortion, pornography, and homosexuality.

The petition drive, according to a report in the *Blade*, was organized in response to a pro-gay rights petition drive organized last year by the National Gay Task Force. That effort netted about 50,000 signatures.

In a press conference prior to the White House presentation, spokesman Bob Jones, III, of Bob Jones University in South Carolina, criticized President Carter for "not acting very born-again." He told reporters that "Ronald Reagan is the unanimous choice (for president) of Bible believing people."

Jones went on to say that the President had a soft attitude on homosexuality. "God's judgement," he promised, "is going to fall on America as on other

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FCC Copes With Gay Community

Several recent actions by the Federal Communications Commission seem to strengthen the position of WSOC-TV in Charlotte in giving the local gay community equal time to rebut the fiery declamations of TV evangelist Charles Sutar. In one action, the FCC recently ruled that a Dallas TV station was exercising legitimate editorial discretion when it cancelled a religious program because of anti-gay discussions. Further, the FCC also recently issued an order that broadcasters listen to all groups that are significant elements within their service areas, including lesbians and gay men.

WFAA-TV in Dallas cancelled "James Robinson Presents" last February, according to reports in *GCN* and the *Blade*. This decision followed the airing of a sermon in which Robinson condemned homosexuality as a "perversion of the highest order."

Commenting on the gay movement, Robinson said, "I don't know whatever gave homosexuals the right...to take a good, wholesome name like gay and apply it to anything as despicable as the homosexual movement." The fundamentalist evangelist also inferred that there was a correlation between the murders of San Francisco city officials George Muscone and Harvey Milk and God's contempt for homosexuality. In addition, Robison cited statements by certain law enforcement officials as evidence that gays actively recruit young children.

Citing numerous complaints from a variety of groups Robison had attacked, including other religious denominations, the station pulled Robison's program. Station manager Dave Lane said that the cancellation was due to "a continuing problem with Reverend Robison making statements about other religious organizations and community groups."

Further, the station claimed that under the FCC Fairness Doctrine it would be required to grant equal time at no charge to those wishing to respond to Robison's attacks. The FCC Fairness Doctrine requires broadcasters to present contrasting views on all controversial issues of public interest.

Equal time was subsequently given to the Dallas Gay Political Caucus to answer Robison's comments.

The James Robison Evangelistic Association subsequently lodged a formal 17-page complaint against the station with the FCC, saying "the personal attack rules and the Fairness Doctrine have an unconstitutionally chilling effect on the expression of views on religious and moral issues." The FCC ruled in favor of the station.

Robison's show was reinstated by WFAA-TV last July, however, after an agreement was reached which allows the station to view each show before it is aired. The station reserves the right to delete portions which might result in complaints. The program is currently broadcast by about 90 television stations throughout the country. Although a New York station reportedly deleted anti-gay comments from the audio portion of one of Robison's broadcasts last summer, WFAA-TV is the only station to cancel it so far.

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