

State Reps Mock Trans Bill

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by Amy Wooten

Last week, during a short debate on the House floor regarding a bill that would make it easier for transgender individuals to obtain a new birth certificate, three Illinois representatives decided to make a mockery of the issue.

Rep. Bill Black, R-Danville; Rep. Chapin Rose, R-Mohamet; and Rep. Art Turner, D-Chicago, joked and made comments, such as Black comparing non-surgical sex changes to voodoo and comparing transgender people to animals (the debate following an item about neutering deer for population control) . The Associated Press reported that Black's remarks were greeted by hoots from colleagues.

In an e-mail to Windy City Times, John Peller of AIDS Foundation of Chicago said, "The debate on this bill yesterday was one of the most offensive I have ever seen in the state Capitol."

The bill, HB 1732, failed by a vote of 78-32 on April 17. The bill's sponsor was Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, D-Chicago, who expressed to the media afterwards that she was ashamed of her colleagues.

The legislation would have amended the Vital Records Act so a new birth certificate could be obtained by an individual after receiving an affidavit by a physician that states he or she has undergone medical treatment (surgery or hormonal) . This would make it easier for those who have received treatment outside the U.S. Current Illinois law requires an affidavit by a U.S. doctor who performed the treatment.

Ed Yohnka, director of communications and public policy for the American Civil Liberties Unions (ACLU) of Illinois, described the legislators' response as disappointing, distressing and "shameful."

There really is no other vulnerable group in the state of Illinois whom these legislators would take up an issue on behalf of and mock," he continued.

Yohnka added that if this behavior had occurred in Chicago's city council, it would be a completely different story. "Frankly, I don't think that it can be ignored, as we sometimes do, simply because Chicago is three and a half hours from Springfield," he said.

"Illinois citizens look to our legislators to help resolve problems, not make a mockery of them. It's this kind of hurtful language that dehumanizes groups of people and perpetuates and legitimizes a culture of hate. We deserve better from our public officials," Illinois National Organization for Women president Bonnie Grabenhofer said in a statement released by the organization.

The issue of the mockery has even affected organizations outside of Illinois. In a statement released by the national organization, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman said, "Let Don Imus be a lesson for us all. There will be no more profit or pleasure to be gained by describing the lives of others in contemptuous

and derisive terms. We've had enough of trash talk from public figures and elected leaders."

The Task Force urged legislators to learn more about transgender people in their districts and state, and stressed that educational discussions with Illinois legislators need to take place.