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Bush reference to gays angers AIDS conference

aids
homo

□ Research indicates a highly activated immune system could be a major factor in getting AIDS. Page A4.

By Ellen Robinson-Haynes *Sacramento Bee*
Bee Medical Writer
6/2/87

WASHINGTON — Vice President George Bush outraged scientists, AIDS care providers and gay activists Monday with an offhand remark he made after a formal address to nearly 7,000 AIDS researchers.

Bush's speech, which elaborated President Reagan's proposed order Sunday for mandatory AIDS testing and increased routine testing, was interrupted several times

by boos and hisses. And as the vice president left the podium, he said, "Who was that? Some gay group? Not there?"

The scientists, who came from all over the world to attend the annual international AIDS research meeting, already were angered by the administration's proposal to require testing of all aliens and federal prisoners, as well as its request that states offer routine testing of applicants for marriage licenses and of patients visiting venereal disease clinics.

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Bush

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Reagan's proposed testing order, followed by Bush's remark, confirmed the administration's lack of sensitivity and understanding about AIDS, they said. The critics believe mandatory testing will offer little public health benefit. Reagan's position, they said, jeopardizes the cooperation of the thousands of infected individuals who have volunteered to be research subjects.

"It is evidence that the administration is not listening to the scientists," said California AIDS clinician Donald Abrams, who runs the San Francisco General Hospital AIDS clinic. "We would be better off if this administration would listen to their surgeon general and not their attorney general."

Abrams' remark was echoed by other scientists, as well as by members of gay activist groups, who demonstrated Monday afternoon at the White House and at the convention site against the administration's controversial stand on testing.

"It basically just points out the attitude of this administration, which believes that AIDS is a gay disease," said Steven Webb, coordinator of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power.

Lori Behrman, representing the Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York City said, Bush "made light of the situation and didn't take what these people were saying very seriously."

Bush, who was raising money in the Carolinas for his presidential campaign Monday afternoon, con-

firmed he had been curious about "who was hissing and booing his speech," said Stephen Hart, Bush's deputy press secretary.

But, Hart said, the remark indicates no more than simple curiosity.

"He just thought maybe they'd been the ones to organize the hissing and booing," Hart said about the reference to gay groups.

Responding to the scientists' disapproval of mandatory testing, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, who has been adamant in his opposition to such testing, said the proposal to require testing of aliens entering the United States falls clearly within public health regulations regarding the control of infectious disease.

"Aliens we have no choice about," he said. But, he said, a decision has not been made about whether the federal government can mandate that all federal prisoners be tested.

"I'm not going to test anybody," said Koop. "I'm going to wait to see what the Department of Justice says about it."

In regard to state and local testing of prisoners, Koop said some prisons are so overcrowded that testing might be impossible.

The scientists responded favorably to the vice president's support for confidentiality of all test results, a qualification noticeably absent from Reagan's speech Sunday night. But they criticized his vow that politicians, not scientists or public health officials, will resolve such conflicting interests as right-to-privacy vs. protection of public health.

"I think that would traditionally fall within the realm of the public health authorities," said San Francisco researcher Constance Wofsy. "But

at the cutting edge, I think these will become judicial issues."

Paul Holland, who heads the Sacramento Blood Center and is the former director of the National Institutes of Health blood bank, said:

"Making a political decision in a vacuum of science is inappropriate and foolhardy."

Labor pact revives San Diego Symphony

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The San Diego Symphony, silenced for 8½ months by labor and money problems, will resume concerts in November now that musicians have agreed to a new two-year contract, officials announced Monday.

Members of the musicians union ratified the contract Sunday night, accepting a reduced concert schedule that symphony officials said was needed to regain financial stability.

The orchestra was disbanded in February after symphony officials failed to win concessions from musicians, who blamed the association's financial problems on mismanagement.

SETTING IT STRAIGHT

The telephone number for the Chautauqua Playhouse listed in The Bee's Monday Scene section was incorrect. The correct number is 480-7529.