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Georgia's Christian right comes out against bills aimed at child prostitution

2:59 pm February 1, 2010, by jgalloway

The season's most disputed issue may have just surfaced at the state Capitol.

The weight of the state's Christian right movement just came down in opposition to a pair of bills that would steer young girls under the age of 16 into diversionary programs instead of arresting them on charges of prostitution.

The press conference came just hours after several hundred people turned out to support the measures. (My AJC colleague Ernie Suggs has more details here.)

Representatives from the Georgia Christian Alliance, the Georgia Christian Coalition, Ralph Reed's Faith and Freedom Coalition, and the Georgia Baptist Convention all put in appearances. Republican candidate for governor John Oxendine appeared around the edges of the afternoon press conference, but did not speak.

At issue are two separate bills, one in the House and one in the Senate. Both are sponsored by Republicans.

"Who will benefit from the passage of H.B. 582 or S.B. 304? I'll tell you who – the very profitable and growing pedophile industry," said former state senator Nancy Schaefer of north Georgia. "It is imperative that these bills be defeated."

Some opponents said the bills amounted to decriminalization, which amounted to legalization. And would lead to more prostitution, not less, they said.

"Decriminalizing that means the police would have absolutely no interest in it at all," said Sue Ella Deadwyler, who writes a Christian conservative newsletter. "They wouldn't arrest the girls, they wouldn't pick the girls up, they wouldn't protect them from influence on the street from the pimps and the johns. It would be an absolute cultural upheaval in our state. Never in the United States, as far as I know, has juvenile prostitution been legalized."

Renee Unterman of Buford, author of the Senate bill, confirmed that she had been in contact with opponents of her legislation. She said a compromise was in the works.

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