

Students join in march

■ About 70 Hoosiers make journey to Washington for gay-rights demonstration

By Chad Hesting

Indiana Daily Student

About 70 IU students made a 12-hour trek to join the mass of demonstrators gathered in Washington, D.C. last weekend for the gay and lesbian rights march.

Brian Withem, male vice president of IU's gay-lesbian-bisexual rights organization OUT, said 30 students rode to Washington in vans chartered by the organization, while the rest traveled by their own means.

IU students who attended the event called the Sunday march a victory for gay rights.

"I was blown away," sophomore Kevin Clonts said. "The march was still going on six hours after it began. I expected to see a huge crowd, but it's something entirely different to be in the middle of a crowd like that."

Though serious social and political issues brought the marchers to Washington, Withem said the atmosphere among those gathered was very relaxed.

"It was wonderful," Withem said. "It was something I'd never experienced before, being in majority instead of the minority."

Freshman Amy Becklenberg said the rally inspired a positive attitude in gay rights supporters.

"I talked to a 50-year-old man that was so happy because he was able to hold hands with his lover out in public for the first time ever," Becklenberg said. "The weekend was just so positive for everyone."

The numbers at Sunday's march exceeded those of a similar 1987 gay rights march of 200,000 people.

The United States Park Police's estimated the crowd at 300,000 marchers, but freshman Roshy Kheshti said this assessment was too small.

"I know that there was a million people there," Kheshti said. "I've never seen so many people in my life."

Clonts said a change in political climate generated a larger crowd this year.

"The religious right has made (homosexuality) more of an issue recently," he said. "Also, with the new administration, it's making some people see that change is possible."

But Clonts said he was very disappointed that President Clinton did not attend the rally. "I thought it was pretty much bullshit," Clonts said. "He could have at least sent a video. A million people is a lot more important than a bunch of newspaper people."

But Withem said a speech from President Clinton was unnecessary.

"It really didn't matter to us," Withem said. "We were out there to empower ourselves. Perhaps it would have been nice, but it wasn't needed."

Kheshti said Clinton has been delivering more campaign rhetoric than action on gay and lesbian issues.

"Nothing's really been done as far as I'm concerned," she said. "Nothing serious has been dealt with. If I thought my needs were being dealt with, I wouldn't have lugged myself twelve hours to get there."