

The following is a transcript of four television news clips pertaining to the 1993 theatrical production of Lips Together, Teeth Apart and the surrounding controversy. Following a complaint regarding homosexual subject matter in the production, Commissioner Gordon Wysong introduced an anti-gay resolution to the Cobb County Board of Commissioners. In August 1993, the Board of Commissioners passed resolutions condemning what was termed "the gay lifestyle" and eliminating all of Cobb County's public arts funding.

Clip 1: Channel 5 Eyewitness News

ANCHOR: Well, it's the eve of the great debate in Cobb County tomorrow the county commission there is going to vote on money for the arts in a controversy about family values and gays. Channel Five's Jim Kaiserski reports it's one of the hottest issues ever to go before the Cobb County Commission.

Unidentified: Okay, you're against the art funding.

JIM KAISERSKI: So many calls have come into the Cobb County Commission about tomorrow's vote, the county was forced to open a phone bank. Elva Dornbusch says most of the calls she's logged support Commissioner Gordon Wysong, and that's a lot of calls.

Unidentified: How many you think you got?

ELVA DORNBUSCH: Ah, oh gosh, about six thousand.

JIM KAISERSKI: County Commissioner Gordon Wysong has strong views about homosexuality.

GORDON WYSONG: Homosexuality is basically amoral in every society that we know of from recorded history forward. There hasn't been any society that's adopted and endorsed homosexuality as a normal practice. And I don't think this should be the first.

JIM KAISERSKI: Wysong does not believe the county should pay for anything contrary to what's defined as family values, and that includes the arts in a production at the Theatre on the Square in Marietta. The Theatre is putting on a play with a Christian theme right now, but earlier this year it put on "Lips Together, Teeth Apart." Wysong didn't see the play, but two people he sent to see it told him it had a gay theme. Michael Horne says it wasn't so. It was a respected Pulitzer Prize-winning play. It had no homosexual theme as Wysong charges.

MICHAEL HORNE: Almost ten thousand people saw the play. We received no letters of complaint about the play, and in fact, our subscribers, which are 4100 people, primarily of Cobb County, throughout Cobb County, voted Lips Together, Teeth Apart, their favorite play of the entire season.

JIM KAISERSKI: Commissioner Wysong says that the production in the Theatre on the Square in Marietta raised his level of concern. But what really got him started, he said, were events in

Atlanta and Washington. In Washington there was the Gay Rights March. Wysong says gays there announced a goal of establishing a curriculum in every public school which teaches acceptance of the gay lifestyle. He's against that. The other event was the domestic partners debate in Atlanta. It passed giving homosexual partners of city workers the same benefits as heterosexual marriage partners. And now the legislature will take up that issue next year. The Cobb arts vote, he says, will send a message to legislators.

GORDON WYSONG: That heterosexual marriage is sanctioned by the government and homosexual marriage is not.

JIM KAISERSKI: Commissioner Wysong says he believes a majority of the five county commissioners will vote not to fund, quote, those activities which seek to contravene existing community standards, end quote. That would mean a loss of about forty thousand dollars from the budget of the Theatre on the Square. John?

ANCHOR: We'll see how the vote comes out. Jim, thank you very much. Up next on Eyewitness News at Six [...]

Clip 2: Channel 46 News at Ten

Voiceover: This is Georgia's News at Ten.

KEVIN COKELY: The explosive controversy over arts funding in Cobb County comes to a boiling point tonight as county commissioners vote to kill all arts funding. Good evening. I'm Kevin Cokely.

KAREN GREER: And I'm Karen Greer. The vote comes after two weeks of emotional debate over the Commission's resolution condemning the gay lifestyle in favor of so-called family values, and a proposal to restrict arts funding.

KEVIN COKELY: Earlier today, hundreds of people attended the second public hearing, and then tonight's commission meeting, where are the vote cut funding altogether. News at Ten's Lu Ann Sodano joins us now from Marietta. Lu Ann?

LU ANN SODANO: Kevin and Karen, the Commission room was filled to capacity tonight. The overflow crowd spilled out onto the Marietta Square. They all came to hear the final vote on the plan to cut arts funding. The culmination of weeks of heated debate. Harsh words among opponents subsided for a few moments tonight as the crowd anxiously waited for the Cobb County Commissioners. The crowd was waiting for the Commission's vote on whether to kill funding for the arts in the county. Commission Chairman Bill Byrne began the meeting by saying that government spending must be based on need and not desire.

BILL BYRNE: I move that we remove all local grant funding for the arts and theater from the fiscal '94 budget and redirect those funds to the Department of Public Safety for the purpose of purchasing video cameras for all our police patrol cars and to procure trained dogs for our K-9 unit in an effort to better enforce the laws within our community.

LU ANN SODANO: Commissioner Bill Cooper had reportedly been set to cast the lone dissenting vote, but tonight set the record straight.

BILL COOPER: My position has been very consistent, that I would not decide on the issue the proposed ordinance change or total cancellation of the arts grants until both public hearings had been completed.

LU ANN SODANO: Moments later, the vote was taken.

BILL BYRNE: Motion carries, 5-0. Thank you, gentlemen.

[clapping]

LU ANN SODANO: Opponents of the measure say the Commission's action could have a devastating impact on private funding for the arts in Cobb County.

JON GREAVES: If the community does not give to the arts, then private contributors say that the community does not value those arts organizations and they will not give funds. The - There will be a domino effect that's going to hurt the arts community well beyond this money from the County Commission.

LU ANN SODANO: The sponsor of the original measure to restrict arts funding doesn't see it that way.

GORDON WYSONG: That this is going to become a cultural wasteland over a \$125 thousand is ludicrous. It's not our job to support that business any more than it is to support a mall. There are lots of businesses in Cobb County that would love to have a subsidy. Arts has no special rank in those businesses.

LU ANN SODANO: Meanwhile, outside the commission meeting room, the reaction to the vote turned raucous.

Unidentified protestors: Neo-Nazis, we say no! Homophobia's got to go! Neo-Nazis, we say no! Homophobia's -

LU ANN SODANO: Police stood by, ready if needed. One man in the crowd was from Athens, Georgia and came to support the commissioners.

ANDY CLARKE We don't- We've got no hate against these people. They are the ones that's saying we hate them. I don't hate homosexuals. I mean, I hate the deed. I don't- I don't agree with what they- they are, but I don't hate them. I mean, that's not- that's the Christian way.

JANE MANNER: I disagree with any sort of hate politics, and I was very proud of Cobb County when it began to fund the arts. The way it sounded tonight was that this issue didn't evolve from homophobia, but in fact, it did. It was in fear of lawsuits and the funding of the arts. And I'm very disappointed in Cobb County.

LU ANN SODANO: If in fact Cobb County commissioners were fearful that a plan to restrict arts fundings to certain groups would trigger lawsuits, they were right. The ACLU had planned

to file a suit if that original proposal went into effect. Things though it may not have changed even with this new plan to cut arts fundings altogether for all groups. The ACLU said it is reviewing its position and may well in fact file suit. Live in Cobb County, Lu Ann Sodano. Channel 46 News at Ten.

KAREN GREER: This is definitely not the end of this debate.

KEVIN COKELY: Yeah, far from it, right Lu Ann?

LU ANN SODANO: Not at all.

KAREN GREER: Thanks. An arrest [...]

Clip 3: WSB-TV Action News 2

Unidentified protestors: County, we say no! Homophobia's got to go!

DON FARMER: People angry about the outcome were in the streets tonight after the Cobb County Commission voted to stop using any taxpayers' money for the arts. That unanimous decision to eliminate government funding for the arts and the angry reaction to the vote make up our top story here on the Night Beats.

MONICA KAUFMAN: The controversy erupted when some people complained about a play. It touched on homosexual issues. The complaints escalated into a firestorm over family values. Tonight, the Cobb County Commission voted five to nothing to eliminate all government funding for the arts. Channel Two's Lynn Harasin begins our live team coverage. Lynn?

LYNN HARASIN: Monica, things are finally quiet here on the square in Marietta. That was hardly the case a few hours ago. The three hours of public debate this afternoon seemed to have no effect on the commissioners. For weeks it was expected that Cobb would get out of the arts business and that's just what happened.

Unidentified protestors: [inaudible] anti-gay! Cobb Commission KKK!

LYNN HARASIN: Gay protesters and arts activists expected the Cobb Commission's vote even before it was passed. Commission Chairman Bill Byrne, surprised no one with his recommendation, which he announced ten days ago.

BILL BYRNE: I move that we remove all local grant funding for the arts and theater from the fiscal '94 budget, redirect those funds to the Department of Public Safety for the purpose of purchasing video cameras for all our police patrol cars to procure trained dogs for our K-9 unit. Call a question. Motion carries, 5-0.

LYNN HARASIN: With that, Cobb County got out of the arts business, and eleven Cobb arts groups will lose their public funding. Still many people believe the vote was really anti-gay.

JON GREAVES: I'm angry and I'm very sad.

LYNN HARASIN: It was Commissioner Gordon Wysong who introduced both the anti-gay resolution and the original motion to limit arts funding.

GORDON WYSONG: There are no negative economic consequences from what we did. I've gotten letters from businesses all over the country who have praising us for what we're doing. One who said they're opening nine more branches in our county.

LYNN HARASIN: But the Chairwoman of the Board of the Theatre in the Square says, she's been interviewed by people all across the nation. And everyone, she says, is appalled.

CHERRY STARK-SPENCER: I am saddened to think that we've gotten to this place, although I've said all along that was the agenda to begin with. The worst part is that we had to do it in a very cruel fashion. That brought all kinds of bad feelings in among all the Cobb County citizens. I lay that at Gordon Wysong's feet.

LYNN HARASIN: Commissioner Wysong told me he believes the whole issue will now go away, but apparently it will not. Gay activists will hold a news conference tomorrow on the square in Marietta to announce their next step. We're live in Marietta, Lynn Harasin, Channel Two Action News Night Beat.

DON FARMER: Lynn, thank you. Reaction to the commissioners' vote was immediate, especially outside the meeting room. Our team coverage continues now with Steve Filmer who reports on the anger and the protests that follows.

STEVE FILMER: On the Square, TV monitors blared the vote as it happens.

BILL BYRNE: Motion carries, 5-0. Thank you, gentlemen.

Unidentified protestors: Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame!

RICHARD NASON: We live in Cobb County for a reason and we support the decision that came down so far.

STEVE FILMER: Gays, lesbians and their supporters swarmed over to the county office building.

Unidentified protestors: Commission and the Klan work hand in hand! Commission and the Klan work hand in hand!

LISA KUNG: It's always a tragedy when a county in Georgia is seen by the rest of America as being backwards, Southern, stupid, backwater, and that's what's happening in Cobb County again, and I'm ashamed of it.

DARRYL MANN: I'm not surprised at all. The thing is that I'm here to let them know that as a resident Cobb County I do- I do not like what's happening here. I do not appreciate it.

STEVE FILMER: Across the street stood supporters of the anti-gay resolution.

JEROME COLEMAN: We don't have any morals in the world today and we need to reinstate the morals for the children and the generation that's growing up behind us.

Unidentified: This is not an issue about taxation.

Unidentified: That's right!

Unidentified: This is an issue of American culture.

STEVE FILMER: Police kept a lid on it all. Within about an hour, the shouting was over. In many ways, this small theater is where these big issues got started and now the theater is hanging out this black awning. Not because the theater is going to close. The people who run this theater say it is simply a statement about how they feel, about what's going on in Cobb County. In Marietta, Steve Filmer, Channel Two Action News on the Night Beat.

DON: FARMER: So here's the bottom line on the controversial vote on money for the arts in Cobb County. The county commission voted unanimously to eliminate county funding for all arts programs. There was an immediate and angry protest by gay activists and art supporters. The funding cut will take effect on October first. The money will be reallocated to public safety.

MONICA KAUFMAN: Tonight police say- [...]

Clip 4: ABC World News This Morning

VOICEOVER: It's Wednesday, August 25th, 1993. World News This Morning continues with Lisa McRee.

LISA MCREE: And for those of you who are just joining us here, the morning's top news stories. American planes have made an airdrop of food to starving Muslims in the Bosnian city of Mostar. The UN hopes a truck convoy will get food there later today. ABC News has learned that the Clinton administration may help finance health care reform, cutting \$200 billion from Medicare and Medicaid. And Michael Jackson responds to news of a police investigation by saying he will be cleared of any wrongdoing. In Cobb County, Georgia, the same county commissioners who voted two weeks ago to condemn homosexuality, have now voted to eliminate funding for the arts. Last night's five to nothing vote came after a heated public meeting. More on that story from Cobb County and ABC's Al Dale.

AL DALE: Gay activists, their opponents, and members of the arts community crowded into the hearing room to present their views to the County Commissioners. At issue, whether to delete taxpayer funding of arts programs that do not reflect family-oriented standards.

Unidentified: We have sexual deviants trying to influence our schools, churches, and government.

Unidentified: Commissioners, there are artists who have chosen to enrich the quality of life in your community. Celebrate this, don't condemn it.

AL DALE: The commissioner who proposed taking away the funds and who authored a previous resolution condemning the gay lifestyle, says he was motivated by a rising tide of homosexual rights activities nationwide.

Gordon Wysong: Holding that lifestyle up as morally equivalent to a heterosexual lifestyle. That is offensive because that's not true.

AL DALE: After three hours of public hearings, the commissioners voted unanimously to cut off all \$100 thousand earmarked for the arts, not just projects that might fail their family values tests.

BILL BYRNE: I call the question. Motion carries, 5-0. Thank you, gentlemen.

[clapping]

AL DALE: For some, bitter disappointment.

Unidentified: Very sad. I feel like Cobb County has turned back in time.

AL DALE: Others were convinced a victory had been scored [...]