

Patriot Act changes promised

Tim McCahill

The Associated Press

Sanders vows to protect library patrons' records

Undaunted by last week's narrow defeat of an amendment to the USA Patriot Act, Rep. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said Monday that he would continue his fight against the law that gives the government stronger powers to conduct investigations and detain people.

Sanders was among the lawmakers who led an effort in Congress to block a part of the law that lets authorities obtain special court orders requiring book dealers, libraries and others to give up records such as purchases and Internet sites visited on a library computer.

The amendment, tagged on to a \$39.8 billion measure financing the Justice, Com-

merce and State departments, came close to being approved by the House on Thursday until Republican leaders held the vote open to persuade fellow GOP lawmakers who initially supported the provision to change their vote.

The measure ultimately failed by a vote of 210-210, with a majority needed to prevail.

"Let me tell you, I have not the slightest doubt that we are going to win this fight," Sanders, joined by a group of librarians and booksellers, told a small crowd at the Fletcher Free Library in Burlington. "And when we do it, we're going to strike a tremendous

blow for the U.S. Constitution, for democracy, and the rights of the American people to feel free."

Sanders said mobilizing grass-roots opposition to the Patriot Act and garnering bipartisan support in Washington for changing the law would be key to his effort.

"What you're seeing is an honest and good coalition that's coming together, and it's a coalition that's going to win," he said.

Supporters of the Patriot Act, which was enacted in the weeks after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, say it has helped in anti-terror efforts. The law's critics counter that it threat-

ens civil liberties.

Sanders was among the 66 House lawmakers who voted against the measure in 2001. His skepticism of the Patriot Act was shared by the others who spoke at Monday's news conference.

Trina Magi, a University of Vermont librarian, said the law compromised a reader's right to privacy. She also called on the Bush administration to heed peoples' concerns about the law "rather than subvert the democratic process."

"As people all over Vermont have told me, secret government surveillance of their reading habits makes

them feel less secure, not more," said Magi, who in May received an award from the Vermont Library Association for her opposition to the Patriot Act.

Ben Scotch, a former executive director of the Vermont chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, highlighted the importance of books in a democracy and praised Sanders' attempts to scale back the Patriot Act.

"Books are always there when other sources of information falter. ... Libraries and bookstores will remain as much the seats of democracy as are the House and Senate," he said. "Bernie had the wisdom to begin challenging some of the excesses of ... (the Patriot Act) by protecting books."