

Sanders calls for research on cancer

Bill would pay for statewide registries

By Toya Hill

Free Press Staff Writer

There are more statistics kept on professional sports players than on the thousands of women who get breast cancer, Virginia Soffa, founder and president of Vermont Breast Cancer Action Group, said Monday.

But a bill being sponsored by Rep. Bernard Sanders, I-Vt., would change that, she and another cancer research activist said during a news conference announcing the bill. The bill would create a national program of statewide cancer registries. Vermont is one of 19 states without a statewide registry.

"As we speak at 11:14 a.m., my friend Rene is being buried in Burlington, prematurely dead because of cancer," Joanne Rathgeb of Essex Junction said. "The important data about Rene's cancer will be in the registry of the Medical Center Hospital of Vermont, but not statewide.

"Congressman Sanders' legislation would change that; and Rene would like that because that data could help others, perhaps you or even me."

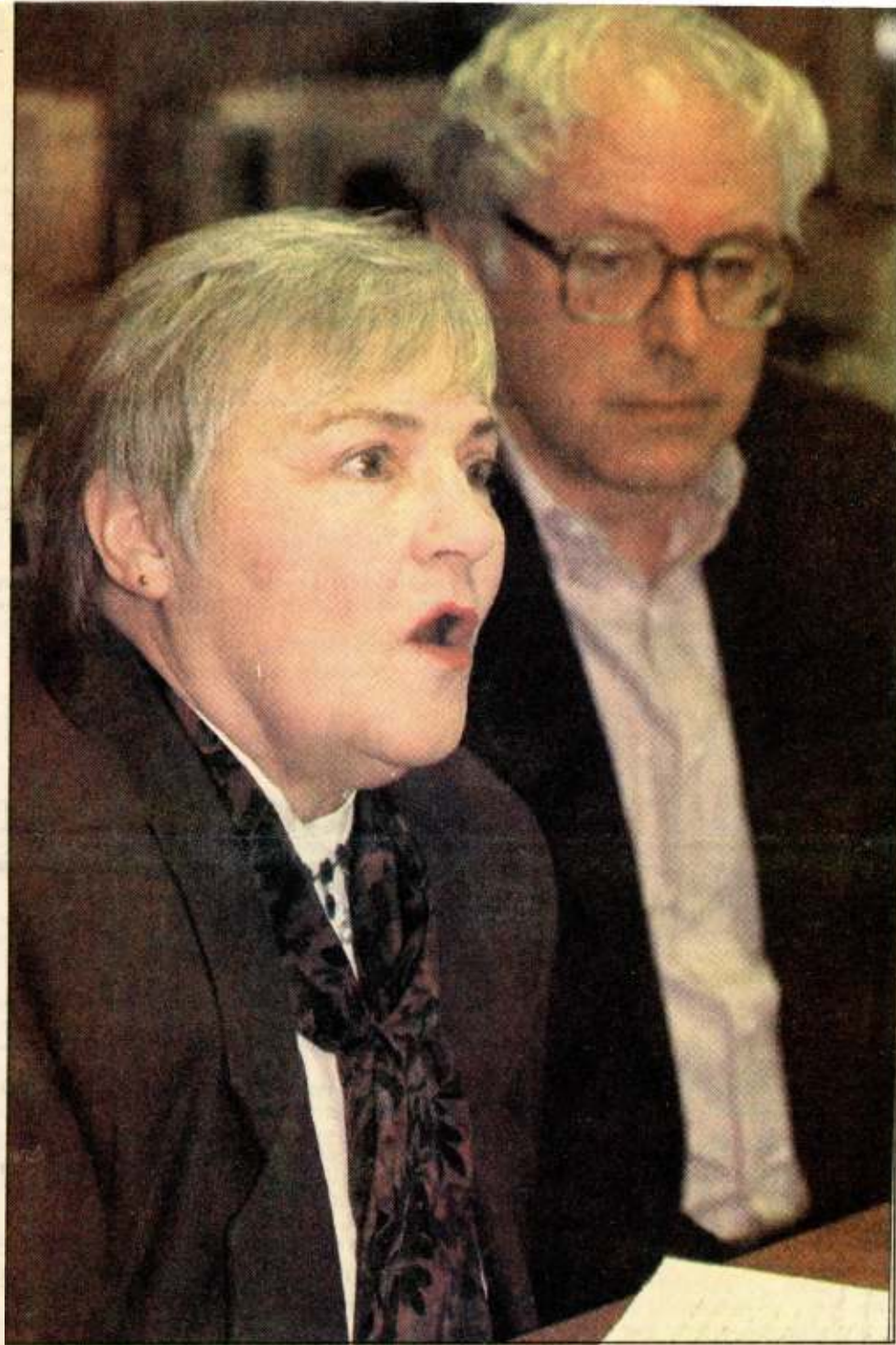
Rathgeb, 61, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1985.

Sanders' bill, which he said he will introduce when Congress reconvenes, will allow states to apply for federal grants to establish and support cancer registries. These registries will collect information on cancer victims' location, age, sex, occupation — as well as data on the type of cancer, its stage and the type of treatment the patients have received. The information will be coordinated nationally.

"Breast cancer in America today is a tragedy of epidemic proportions," Sanders said. "For the state of Vermont, and New England in general, the crisis is even more acute."

Vermont has the eighth highest mortality rate for breast cancer in the United States, Sanders said.

Sanders' bill would cost about \$30 million a year for five years, with the federal government putting in \$3 for every Vermont dollar.



JYM WILSON, *Free Press*

Rep. Bernard Sanders, I-Vt., (right) listens to Joanne Rathgeb of Essex Junction as she speaks in support of a bill Sanders is sponsoring that would create a national program of statewide cancer registries. Rathgeb was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1985.

Sanders said he had heard of opposition to the registry in Oregon by chemical companies who fear that statistics would show a connection between environmental conditions and cancer rates. But he said members of Congress had shown tremendous support and a number of them asked to co-sponsor the bill.

"This bill is a significant step toward determining the causes of breast cancer

and will provide critical data needed to understand the disease and its prevention," said Soffa, who was diagnosed with breast cancer three years ago.

Soffa, 41, of South Burlington, and Rathgeb led a letter-writing campaign in Vermont in October and delivered nearly 14,000 letters to Washington that asked members of Congress and President Bush for more breast cancer research.