

Hate crime measure pending

By Mike Robinson
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House approved Wednesday and sent to the president a bill requiring the government to collect data on "hate crimes" motivated by race, religion, sexual orientation or ethnic roots.

"Now is the time for Congress to begin the fight against hate crimes," Rep. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., told the House when the measure was brought to the floor. The lawmakers voted 402-18 on Wednesday to send the Senate-passed measure to the president's desk for his signature.

President George Bush is expected to sign the measure, which would require the Justice Department to keep data on crimes related to victims' race, religion, sexual orientation or ethnic group. It is supported by a variety of civil rights, ethnic and police groups.

Actually, the House already had passed the measure and this time merely consented to minor changes made when the Senate approved the bill on Feb. 8.

Crimes that would be counted are murder, non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, aggravated assault, simple assault, intimidation, arson and destruction, damage or vandalism of property.

First proposed in 1984 by Rep. Barbara Kennelly, D-Conn., the legislation grew from a series of arson incidents at synagogues in Kennelly's central Connecticut district.

Authorities were never able to determine that racial or religious prejudices led to the crimes.

Hard Rock Cafe gets drenched

WEST HOLLYWOOD, Calif. (AP) — The Hard Rock Cafe, a watering hole for the hip and famous, was flooded with 200,000 gallons of water early Wednesday when a film crew truck hit a hydrant.

The water warped the Hard Rock's hardwood floor, but firefighters were able to save such rock 'n' roll momentos as Elton John's sequined baseball uniform, Steven Tyler's leopard jumpsuit and an entire wall of Elvis memorabilia.

Firefighters and employees used water vacuum trucks, mops and squeegees to clean up the Hard Rock in time for dinner, said Valerie Van Galder, a spokeswoman for the rock 'n' roll-themed club.

The truck struck a fire hydrant at 3:47 a.m. and water shot up to the Hard Rock's roof. The water leaked into the restaurant, covering the floor with up to eight inches of water, said city Fire Department spokesman Pat Marek.

No injuries were reported. The truck that hit the hydrant was part of a camera crew taping an all-night TV special commemorating Earth Day called "Hard Rock Cafe Presents Save the Planet." The show will air April 20 on CBS.

Some supporters say the measure is needed because of a rising tide of "hate crimes" on the part of neo-Nazi skinheads and other such groups, although there is no certainty that such offenses are on the increase.

A May 1988 Justice Department report said: "These types of offenses are far more serious than comparable crimes that do not involve prejudice because they are intended to intimidate an entire group."

Estimates of the cost to collect the information have ranged from \$1 million a year to \$10 million a year. The Justice Department has said it would have no trouble making hate crimes part of its annually published uniform crime reports.

The bill was brought to the floor Tuesday night and debated but the vote was delayed until Wednesday.

Bush asks for South American aid

By Christopher Connell
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President George Bush lobbied for Senate passage of an emergency aid package for Panama and Nicaragua this week, but Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell left the White House Wednesday indicating that the timetable won't be met.

Bush invited more than a dozen senators to the White House to congratulate them on Wednesday's passage of tougher clean air standards.

Afterward, he summoned Mitchell, Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole and Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., who chairs the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that dispenses foreign aid, into the Oval Office to lobby for the Panama-Nicaragua package.

Mitchell, who on Monday accused the administration of taking a "jigsaw puzzle" approach to foreign aid, told reporters: "There's no point in worrying about something that we can't get to until we deal with the authorization bill."

The authorization bill — separate legislation that must first be passed before Congress can appropriate, or actually disburse funds — isn't moving because Republican senators have so far been unwilling to permit us to proceed without amendment and in a short time limit," said Mitchell.

"We first want to see action on the authorization bill. All else is speculation," said Mitchell. "When we get action on the authorization bill, then we'll consider the next step."

White House spokesman Martin Fitzwater declined comment on the meeting, calling it private.

Bush has been prodding the Senate to appropriate up to \$800 million for Panama and Nicaragua before it leaves Thursday on an Easter recess until April 18.

The House voted for \$720 million in aid to the countries Tuesday. Panama is rebuilding following the U.S. invasion that ended the Noriega dictatorship in December, and Nicaragua will end Sandinista rule and install democratically elected Violeta Chamorro as president April 25.



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