

Don't exclude gays, lesbians

# Hate Crime laws must protect all citizens

On Monday, March 29, Chuck French was attacked at his sister's Salem home by William Antone Himi, Jr.

Himi yelled at French, called him a faggot and other names, and told him to leave; when French walked out the front door Himi charged him. French wound up with a mild concussion and 25 stitches in his right ear. His sister told authorities that he had not provoked the attack.

The Salem Police, however, set the matter on the back burner. "This particular case, while it's a bias crime, is still a relatively minor assault in the large scheme of things," Information Officer Lt. Bill Kohlmeyer told the *Statesman Journal*. "This case is not going to be the No. 1 priority for this detective."

With that one statement, Kohlmeyer made Salem a more frightening place for thousands of

gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and transgendered citizens.

Every time a citizen is frightened out of participating in our democracy, or working in our economy, or

entire community, which gets the message: "Your kind isn't safe here."

Research indicates that victims of hate crimes suffer two to three times more symptoms of trauma than victims of comparable crimes that do not involve prejudice. It is appropriate to recognize that hate crimes involve more than a physical act, and to prosecute and punish more than that physical act.

This does not deny protection to speech, no matter how hateful. To say, "I don't like you because you're in a wheelchair," is not criminal. To say, "I'm hitting you with this baseball bat because you're black," is. What's more, it contains the implication, "and I'm willing to hit other people like you."

Federal law currently recognizes hate crimes based on the race, ethnicity or religion of the victim. Extending the coverage to crimes based on gender or disability is a no-brainer, an obvious extension of policies we've established in our anti-discrimination statutes. The

controversy arises over sexual orientation.

It is currently legal, in the United States, to discriminate against people because of what you think their sexual orientation may be. This includes denying employment, housing or public accommodations. It includes discrimination against gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexual or transgendered people, and even against heterosexuals. Attempts to ban discrimination in employment have recently failed in Congress and the Oregon Legislature.

If we condone discrimination based on sexual orientation, why shouldn't we condone violence based on sexual orientation?

Because we can't afford to brutalize ourselves. Because, unchecked, hate crimes breed chains of retaliation that lead down the paths followed for centuries by, for instance, Ireland and Kosovo—paths that the Irish and Kosovars would certainly not recommend.

On Tuesday, April 6, when President Clinton asked Congress to pass the Act, he remarked that the United States is as vulnerable as Kosovo to "old, even primitive hatreds.... We should remember that each of us wakes up every day with the scales

of light and darkness in our own hearts, and we've got to keep them in proper balance. And we have to be, in the United States, absolutely resolute about this."

Robert H. Knight of the Family Research Council echoed the theme of balance when he said, "We cannot allow the law to designate less protection for some people than others." He is right. However, he believes that the Act would designate less protection for straight people than for gays. In this, he is wrong.

Despite the fact that straight people vastly outnumber gay people (by at least nine to one), the victims of sexual orientation-based hate crimes are almost always gay.

And those crimes are increasing. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs reports that gay-bashing incidents that left victims hospitalized more than doubled from 1997 to 1998. Assaults and attempted assaults with firearms against gays and lesbians rose 71%.

So, although it is likely that the law would most often be invoked in cases with a gay victim, this is not evidence that the law is unbalanced. Society is. Pass the law, to protect those now at the bottom, and it will stand as protection for those who are vulnerable tomorrow.

## People and Policy

SUSAN ABE  
Staff Writer

volunteering in our charities, or illuminating our culture, we all lose. The Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1999 is an important step against that fear, one we need to take.

Congress should pass the Act, sponsored by Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., to extend federal hate crime law to cover offenses based on sexual orientation, gender or disability.

A hate crime is an act of terrorism. The victims are not only those who are assaulted or intimidated but their



## Television: bad effects

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as a baby-sitter, it's no wonder that kids are shooting up their classmates in elementary school.

The thing that I did not see was intelligent content. I even tuned to the academic channels, and all I found was more death and killing.

If the average American spends four hours per day watching television, why doesn't the average American go to the library (you don't even have to pay a cable bill!), pick up a book, and spend four hours per day reading? Or better yet, spend four hours per day reading to a child?

Unless we protest death programming, our whole culture will turn into death. It's already well on its way. I whine about our country and our culture, but it's better than the rest of the world, and I'd like to see it stay that way.

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