

Q-Notes

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Letters

Hateful "thoughtcrimes"

While we revel in the victory of our new, more moderate legislatures, I would caution against rushing headlong into the passage of laws which may not be in the best interests of a truly free society. Perhaps it is a good time to take a second look at hate crimes legislation. I wonder if placing such a high priority on passing laws which rest on rather shaky philosophical and, perhaps, constitutional grounds is a good idea.

Almost all of our laws are designed to prevent certain kinds of behavior. What a person thinks or feels is usually not a factor when we determine whether his or her actions were legal. We use the defendant's state of mind only to determine whether his or her actions were justifiable (in the case of self defense) or explain the degree of severity of the crime (as in pre-meditated murder.) Should crimes such as murder, assault, battery or harassment be considered more heinous simply because the perpetrator hated the victim because of his sexual orientation or other group affiliation?

How difficult is it to prove that an assault occurred as a result of someone's hatred and bigotry? I think that much hate crime legislation would be effectively unenforceable.

While I fully agree we have the responsibility to educate the public about issues relating to the GLBT community, I believe we also have an obligation to allow people to be bigots. Should Archie Bunker have been strapped to the rack and forced to love his neighbor George Jefferson? Maybe part of living in a truly free society is allowing the seeds of truth and opportunity to spring up where they will, even though some of our seeds will fall on fallow ground.

How much of this effort could be channeled into working for what I believe are more important goals? Of the highest priority should be workplace discrimination and same-sex relationship recognition along with the accompanying rights and privileges that heterosexual couples enjoy.

I would argue that we already have these rights. Thomas Jefferson wrote that the "pursuit of happiness" was one of our "inalienable rights." What we really need is to have our legislatures recognize our rights! More importantly, our law-enforcement officials must protect these rights and our Judiciary must punish those who seek to deprive us of our rights.

The death of Matthew Shepard was

tragic...as are the countless other incidences of crimes perpetrated against the members of our community. But let us not commit further injustices rushing to judge a person's behavior on the basis of his or her thoughts and feelings. Hate is wrong and need not be nourished, but in a free society, it must be allowed to exist. "Thoughtcrimes" are for the negative-Utopia described by Mr. George Orwell...not for America.

— Eric Griggs
 Gastonia, NC

The time has come

Over 30 million people throughout the world will die of AIDS unless truly effective treatment against Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is developed and given to them.

You and I have watched co-workers, friends and loved ones sicken and die from AIDS. We've seen beautiful lives wither away, become only a memory and a patch on the Quilt.

We've heard certain religious leaders self-righteously condemn those suffering from HIV. "AIDS is God's punishment," they gloat, while preaching against sex education for young people, who are now being infected with various STDs, including HIV, at astounding rates.

We've remained silent as government and medical decisionmakers pushed the direction and dollars of AIDS research toward expensive, privately-licensed drugs and away from less costly, natural, immune-based approaches proven successful in preventive vaccines and therapeutic immune globulins for influenza, rabies and hepatitis B viruses.

We've paid the price for a giant pharmaceutical firm to receive exclusive US license to sell the "orphan drug" azidothymidine (AZT, Retrovir). AZT was created as a cancer treatment in 1963 at the Detroit Cancer Foundation. Its inventor, Dr. Jerome Horwitz, did not patent AZT because, in his words, "we found no use for it in cancer research." Thirty years later, the world's largest clinical trial of AZT, the British-French Concorde Study, indicated that AZT fails to prolong the lifespan of those infected with HIV. Yet one billion dollars a year of medicaid money, research grants, donors' dollars, insurance premiums and life savings still go for sales of AZT. Why?

After several years of trying and failing to interest the "best and brightest" AIDS researchers in immune-based therapy, and after attending the 1989 Third International AIDS Conference in Washington, DC as an observer, I formally submitted a proposal in April 1992 for use of a strain-specific therapeutic HIV vac-

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