

QNotes

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viewpoint

Is Al Gore guilty of a hate crime?

Apparently so — if the charges are true that the vice president's campaign supporters mocked Nebraska Senator Bob Kerrey as a "cripple" and splashed the handicapped Vietnam veteran with mud.

If Al Gore really believes what he says about hate crimes, then he should immediately turn himself in to the police and accept punishment for what his campaign staff and supporters did to Senator Bob Kerrey.

If federal hate crimes are a good idea — and the vice president passionately insists they are — then why should Al Gore be treated differently than any neo-Nazi, Ku Klux Klan member, or bigot who assaults a handicapped person?

In early February, Kerrey was surrounded by a screaming mob of Gore supporters when he arrived in Somersworth, New Hampshire to campaign for Gore's Democratic primary rival, Bill Bradley.

The mob — led by Gore's New Hampshire campaign chairman Bill Shaheen and at least one unnamed Gore campaign aide — taunted Kerrey as a "cripple" and splashed him with mud.

Kerrey, who received the Medal of Honor after losing part of his leg during an attack on a Viet Cong stronghold, confirmed the insults, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, and said, "They were calling me a cripple."

In response, Gore denied the assault took place. "It didn't happen," the vice president said on MSNBC's *Equal Time*. Words might have been exchanged between Kerrey and Gore supporters, he admitted, but it was "in good fun."

However, Gore didn't seem to think that hate crimes were "good fun" on July 6, 1999, when he issued a statement calling on Congress to expand federal hate crime legislation to include the very kind of physical disability his supporters taunted Kerrey about.

At that time, Gore said: "This legislation [the Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1999] sends a clear, strong message to all those who would attack others simply because they are different: Don't do it. It is wrong, it is illegal, and if you do commit these terrible crimes, we will find you and punish you to the full force of our laws."

The bill would have redefined a "hate crime" to include an assault on a person "because of [an] actual or perceived religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability." Violators could be imprisoned for up to 10 years.

So if Gore thinks that assaulting a disabled person is a "terrible crime," the vice president should turn himself — and his hate-filled supporters — in to the police immediately.

Al Gore, take a stand against hate crimes. Send a clear, strong message to all those who would attack others simply because they are different. Turn yourself in. Admit your guilt as the kingpin of a gang of disability-hating bigots. And demand the full force of the law as punishment: 10 years in federal prison.

Of course, the Libertarian Party doesn't actually support federal hate crime legislation because "the government shouldn't discriminate when it comes to justice."

However, Libertarians might be willing to make an exception when it comes to hypocritical politicians.

If we must have federal hate crime laws, we might as well start by applying them to the politicians who support them.

After all, what's good enough for the Ku Klux Klan should certainly be good enough for Al Gore. ▼

— Steve Dasbach
 Libertarian Party National Director

letter

Shut down Dr. Laura

Hate, it seems, is big business these days. And you would be hard-pressed to find a more aggressive marketer of hate than Dr. Laura Schlessinger, known to millions simply as "Dr. Laura."

Dr. Laura's edicts are grounded in the strictest, right-wing, Judeo-Christian values imaginable. She has a wildly popular nationally broadcast radio show. Shortly, she could have a nationally broadcast television show if Paramount (the company producing it) doesn't wise up, and her new magazine, *Dr. Laura Perspectives*, debuts this month.

As for the lady in question, it's important to clarify that the "Dr." in front of her name appears to be deliberately misleading. Ms. Schlessinger is not a doctor of medicine, or psychology, or psychiatry. She possesses a Ph.D. in (of all things) physiology, and a B.S. in biological sciences.

Then, of course, there are her opinions. Dr. Laura recently called on her listeners to deluge the Vermont Legislative Council, and the state's governor, with faxes and phone calls and emails condemning the Vermont Supreme Court's decision in *Baker vs. Vermont*. The court ruled that Vermont's legislature must afford gays and

lesbians the same joint matrimonial rights as heterosexuals, either by allowing gay marriage or by enacting some equal form of domestic partnership.

Dr. Laura didn't like that decision. She has already openly stated that the American Psychiatric Association's decision to remove homosexuality from its list of official mental illnesses was politically-motivated, not just good medicine. Being gay is just flat-out wrong, in Dr. Laura's opinion. Sick. Twisted. Perverted. So when Vermont ruled we're entitled to the same rights as other Americans (gee, there's a subversive idea!), Dr. Laura rallied her faithful drones.

It's time we as a community take action to shut Dr. Laura's empire of prejudice down. Before there's another Matt Shepard. Before another teenaged boy contracts HIV. Before her hate can infect one more person.

Dr. Laura herself, however, may have inadvertently provided the most fitting comment on her vicious prejudices and messages of hate. Splashed all over every page of her web site is a logo consisting of a circular scribble, with little lines radiating out from it. It is probably intended to be a childlike depiction of the Sun. However, to me, it looks a whole lot like an asshole viewed close up — just like watching Dr. Laura.

— L. Michael Janssens
 Fort Lauderdale, FL

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