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Hate Crimes Bill Back in the U.S. House

When a group of teenagers in San Francisco dragged David Johnson from his car in a supermarket parking lot, they did so solely because he was a homosexual. They called him a "diseased faggot," beat him with their skateboards, broke his jaw and three ribs, gashed his head and bruised his kidneys.

David Johnson is just one of the thousands of victims of the anti-gay violence that has been growing at an alarming rate during the past several years. On February 22 legislation was reintroduced in the US Congress to take the first steps toward ending the national epidemic of hatred and "crimes of bias."

The Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1988 (HR 947) was introduced in the House by cosponsors John Conyers (D-MI), Barbara Kennelly (D-CT) and Hamilton Fish (R-NY). The bill is expected to be introduced in the Senate in the near future by Paul Simon (D-IL) and Orrin Hatch (R-UT).

The Hate Crimes Statistics Act requires the Justice Department to collect comprehensive national data on crimes of prejudice committed because of race, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity.

Incidents of hate crimes against gays and lesbians have risen dramatically during

the 1980's. Recent attacks on homosexuals and other minorities by "skin-heads" and other gangs have received national attention. Groups that monitor acts of violence against gays estimate that up to 80% of "gay bashing" cases go unreported.

Last year, the Hate Crimes bill passed by an overwhelming vote of 383 to 29 in the House of Representatives, after members rejected attempts to remove gays and lesbians from the bill. This was the first piece of pro-gay legislation passed in the history of the US Congress.

However the bill was killed in the Senate after threats by Jesse Helms (R-NC) to gut the bill with anti-gay amendments. Activists are predicting a vote on this year's version within the next few months.

Gays and lesbians can send congress a message by calling the toll-free mailgram Action Hotline, 1-800-257-4900, operator 9188. Ask for the "Hate Crimes" messages.

Mailgrams cost \$4.50 each to send, billed to your phone. The Hotline is sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign Fund's Field Division. If callers don't know their congresspersons, the operator does.

Putney Friends Embrace Same-Sex Marriages

From the December issue of The Nor'Wester (Northwest Quarterly Meeting of Friends)

On a Saturday in early December, Quakers from all over New Hampshire and Vermont gathered in Rindge, New Hampshire to consider their attitudes toward homosexual marriages. In the ensuing discussion it became clear that they chose "not to shelter themselves from controversy" and recognized the need "as friends and lovers to pay attention to relationships of all kinds, including their sexuality."

The discussion was led by several Friends from the Putney Meeting who detailed their "worshipful consideration" and ultimate embracing of homosexual marriage during the fall and winter of 1987-88.

The Putney Friends summarized their sojourn in the following simple "minute": "We affirm our willingness to participate in celebrations of marriage for both opposite-sex and same-sex couples. We intend to follow the same customary and careful process of arriving at clearness for all couples who wish to unite under our care in accordance with our traditional procedures. At every stage we intend to treat all couples with respect, care and love."

Local monthly meetings were urged to continue consideration of the issue, using the minute as a "springboard", without the intention of passing their own version. Instead the group decided the goal is "to nurture clarity and quality of ways of communicating by asking and waiting."

The Putney Friends described their gathering's journey toward unity for the above declaration, recalling the study, and reading and discussion. They remember moving by "careful steps", sensitive to all points of view, trying to move toward "an action of the heart." Eventually, they found themselves wandering from the central issue of homosexual marriages to the meaning of marriage and and of "clearness process."

One Friend who had feared the issue would tear the rural meeting apart saw her faith strengthened as the work went on. The process by which they arrived at unity helped them "to grow greatly in openness and sensitivity to each other." Eventually they recognized a need to support gay marriages "farther afield."

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