

SB 2278 Press Round Up
As Put Together by the Fair Housing of the Dakotas

BISMARCK TRIBUNE

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/01/04/news/topnews/173297.txt>

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It's all about money

By BRIAN DUGGAN

Bismarck Tribune

As the Legislature prepares for its 61st session, which starts on Tuesday, House and Senate leaders say one of the biggest issues lawmakers will grapple with over the next four months will be: What to do with the extra cash?

"We go into this session with a lot of opportunity," said House Majority Leader Al Carlson, R-Fargo, of the state's estimated \$1.2 billion in reserves. "With the money comes opportunity, and with it comes responsibility to spend it wisely."

The North Dakota Legislature will convene in the state Capitol on Tuesday under some unusual circumstances, lawmakers say. The state has collected record revenue amid an oil boom while the threat of a recessionary economy looms on the horizon, and in some cases, is beginning to hit home.

"One of the big issues is going to be money; everybody is going to be in there to get their share," said Senate Majority Leader Bob Stenehjem, R-Bismarck. "Even though it seems like we have a huge budget surplus, I think we have to be cautious."

The session will start with Gov. John Hoeven's State of the State address in the House chamber at 1 p.m. Tuesday. From there, lawmakers will begin to address the hundreds of issues that have been brewing for months, which include a potential change to the state's pharmacy ownership law, various reforms to Workforce Safety and Insurance, and millions of dollars in infrastructure projects.

Other potential bills that could surface next session include a ban on driving while talking on a cell phone and a push to include sexual orientation among the protected classes in the state's fair housing laws.

Property taxes

But the issue that is likely to stir the most debate, lawmakers say, is the governor's \$300 million property tax relief proposal.

"Property taxes are levied at the local level," said Rep. Dave Weiler, R-Bismarck. "The state of North Dakota has never levied property taxes, and I don't know if it's a wise idea if the state gets involved in that."

Hoeven's plan calls for giving school districts funds as long as mill levies are reduced on a dollar-for-dollar rate, reducing property tax levels in theory. But Carlson said doing so may not be as easy as it sounds.

"It's one of those taxes that the state doesn't assess it and the state doesn't collect," he said. "I personally don't think it will pass unless there are some strings attached."

Democrats also voice similar concerns over the proposal.

"It does become quite a jurisdictional question; property tax is local," said House Minority Leader Merle Boucher, D-Rolette. "A lot of people are very reluctant. Some people even question how much authority we have to meddle in property tax relief."

Sen. David O'Connell, D-Lansford, said he's not sure if he can support the governor's plan of reducing

property tax rates based on reducing mill levies for school districts, which he said is biased toward larger cities that have higher mill levies than smaller rural areas.

"Basically, you're rewarding the ones who have been spending at a high rate and punishing those who have been more conservative," he said.

Oil trust

House and Senate leaders say they also expect five or six proposals for a new oil trust fund to surface this session.

Weiler, who introduced the failed Measure 1 in 2007, said he is working on a similar proposal for the upcoming legislative session.

"We need to do something, and I plan on putting something forth, but the details of it I'm still working on," Weiler said.

O'Connell said the expectations are high coming into this session, with constituents pushing for property tax relief and infrastructure investments into roads and bridges.

He has said he wants to fund more road projects around the state, especially in the areas with oil production, where semi-truck traffic has steadily increased over the past few years. But with slumping oil prices, hovering around \$30 in North Dakota, some of the projects now seem less feasible.

"We were looking at lot of infrastructure being built up," O'Connell said. Instead, they are likely to be "something that will be maintained instead of being improved on."

As part of his \$2.7 billion general fund budget, Hoeven proposed \$120 million in road and bridge improvements.

"We really hope the Legislature goes along the governor's recommendation," said Aaron Birst, legal counsel for the North Dakota Association of Counties.

Birst said the money for road and highway improvement should be directed to many of the counties where the oil production - and the road damage - is the highest.

"The counties that are generating a lot of the surplus, those roads are getting beat up," Birst said, adding that roads in the state's eastern half also have endured damage because of wet weather.

Among other potential infrastructure improvements include \$67 million going to the state penitentiary and \$18 million for the state's Heritage Center.

WSI reforms

Boucher said reforms to WSI will be a key issue throughout the session. The Industry, Business and Labor interim committee has recommended bills that aim to curb political influence inside the workers compensation department.

"I still feel WSI is still a very important issue," Boucher said, adding there's been some talk of privatizing WSI, which he said would be an unlikely measure to pass through the Legislature. Either way, former WSI director Sandy Blunt's conviction "has led to people calling on changes to WSI."

Among other issues, Boucher said he's heard of some talk about introducing a bill that would ban talking on a cell phone while driving.

"It's a frustration of mine, too, those of us who travel a lot," Boucher said. "Even though I'm guilty of

picking up my cell phone and answering every now and then, it's a safety issue."

He offered no specifics over the potential legislation or who would sponsor it.

Another fight is brewing over whether to repeal North Dakota's pharmacy ownership law, which requires pharmacists to own more than half of their pharmacy.

Many lawmakers say they're still undecided over the issue, adding that a bill is likely to emerge this session to repeal the law, which first passed in 1963.

The group North Dakotans for Affordable Healthcare has waged a public relations campaign since last fall, urging lawmakers to repeal the law that they say keeps prices of prescription drugs higher than other states because it prohibits box stores such as Wal-Mart, with its \$4 prescriptions, from establishing its pharmacies in the state.

"When it passed initially, the argument at the time was a conflict of interest for doctors owning pharmacies," said Dan Traynor, legal counsel for North Dakotans for Affordable Healthcare. "That was the initial intent of the law, the way it has worked since then is it has prevented large chain stores from expanding."

But pharmacists are fighting back with a public relations campaign of their own, which started two weeks ago when a group of them launched www.knowtherxtruthnd.com, which contends that North Dakota pharmacy prices are lower than the national average.

Fargo pharmacist David Olig, who helped start the pro-ownership law campaign, said he doesn't want to see the law changed because repealing the law could decrease the access rural residents have to pharmacists because larger chain stores wouldn't construct stores in small communities.

"He who controls the purse strings controls the practice," Olig said.

The North Dakota Human Rights Coalition will also seek to amend the North Dakota Human Rights Act and the state's fair housing act to include sexual orientation among its protected classes.

The group's executive director, Mitch Marr, said about 25 other states include sexual orientation in their housing rights law, adding that the bill will have bipartisan sponsors, but he did not give any names because the legislation is not finished.

(Reach reporter Brian Duggan at 223-8482 or brian.duggan@bismarcktribune.com. Read his blog at www.bismarcktribune.com/blog/?w=nodakcentral.)

BISMARCK TRIBUNE

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/01/15/news/state/174083.txt>

GAY-LESBIAN ANTI-DISCRIMINATION MEASURE PLANNED

The director of North Dakota's Human Rights Coalition says his group is working on legislation to ban discrimination against gays and lesbians.

Mitch Marr says the bill will include anti-discrimination language on sexual orientation in North Dakota's human rights and fair housing laws.

Marr says it would prohibit discrimination against gays and lesbians in issues of housing, employment, public accommodations and credit transactions.

He said the legislation will be formally introduced in the North Dakota Legislature next week.

FARGO FORUM

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/227920/>

ND BILL WOULD GIVE SEX ORIENTATION PROTECTED STATUS

A bill that adds sexual orientation as a protected class to North Dakota's Human Rights and Fair Housing acts will be filed next week, according to the state's Human Rights Coalition.

If the bill passes, discrimination based on sexual orientation will be prohibited in housing, employment, credit transactions and use of public accommodations.

Mitch Marr, the Human Rights Coalition's executive director, said offices such as Fair Housing of the Dakotas and the state's Department of Labor get complaints and inquiries regarding sexual orientation discrimination, but "are just powerless to investigate those because it's not currently a protected class."

"I think it's essential to North Dakota because it shows that they value all of their citizens and their work force," Marr said Wednesday of the bill. "On top of that, it's going to help attract employees and retain students when they graduate."

The Human Rights Coalition said in an e-mail statement Wednesday that the bill will be introduced Monday, with public announcements slated that day in five North Dakota cities, including Fargo. A news conference is slated at 10 a.m. Monday at Babb's Coffee House, 604 Main Ave.

One of the bill's main sponsors is state Sen. Tom Fiebiger, D-Fargo. He could not be reached for comment Wednesday, but mentioned the bill's planned introduction in a column printed in The Forum on Aug. 6.

Areas currently protected under the state's Human Rights and Fair Housing acts include: a person's race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or status with respect to marriage or public assistance.

"If you look next door to Minnesota, they have these protections in place, and Montana is looking at the exact same legislation (this session)," Marr said. "If Montana passes it and North Dakota does not, we're going to be sitting between two states that are much more inclusive."

Minnesota amended its Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation as a protected class in 1993.

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<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/01/20/news/local/174473.txt>

GROUPS PUSH BILL BANNING DISCRIMINATION

GRAND FORKS (AP) - Groups pushing legislation to ban discrimination against gays and lesbians say the bill is not about same-sex marriages but about fairness.

The legislation, introduced by Fargo state Sen. Tom Fiebiger, aims to bar discrimination in housing,

employment, credit transactions and the use of public accommodations based on sexual orientation.

Supporters held news conferences in four cities to announce it.

Bo Chung is president of the University of North Dakota's Ten Percent Society. He says it's unfair to fire or evict someone because of their sexual orientation.

Chung says he knows of no specific incidents of such discrimination in North Dakota, but he says there's no way to track them. He says, "we don't want to wait until something happens to somebody before we can do anything about it."

Fiebiger discussed the bill on Monday during a press conference in Bismarck.

At the press conference was Ron Hildahl, a New Salem pastor who said he's been subjected to discrimination when he was asked to leave a former pastor job in Stanton because he is gay.

"Unfortunately I am not alone in that harsh experience of losing a job because of sexual orientation," Hildahl said.

Kevin Tengesdal, a 42-year-old Mandan resident who is gay, said the state needs a law that would protect gays and lesbians.

"Knowing that Minnesota already has it on their books and I guess Montana has it up for legislation as well, here in North Dakota we're stuck in the middle, it would give more people incentive to stay in the state."

Tengesdal's cousin, Jeff Tengesdal, a pastor, told reporters on Monday that the state needs a law to protect the gay community from discrimination.

"In my office I've listened to difficult stories of people who are living in fear," Tengesdal said. "Living in fear of letting their sexual orientation be known."

(Tribune reporter Brian Duggan contributed to this story.)

FARGO FORUM

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/228435/>

SEXUAL ORIENTATION BILL ADDRESSED

By Brittany Lawonn

The North Dakota Human Rights Coalition asked the public Monday to tell state legislators to support a bill that would add sexual orientation, including gender identity, as a protected class in the state.

The bill, introduced in the state Senate, "will bring our state one step closer to being a fair, welcoming place that we know North Dakota can be," said Mitch Marr, executive director of the coalition.

The proposed legislation introduced by Sen. Tom Fiebiger, D-Fargo, on Monday calls for the North Dakota Human Rights Act and Fair Housing Act to be amended to include sexual orientation as a protected class. It would prohibit discrimination in housing, employment, credit transaction and use of public accommodation.

Areas currently protected under the state's Human Rights and Fair Housing acts include: a person's race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or status with respect to marriage or public assistance.

Marr said supporting the bill may not be the popular choice, but he called it the right one, saying it would stop legalized discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons.

"They can be evicted because of who they love and who they call family," Marr told a crowded meeting room at Babb's Coffee House in Fargo, where dozens attended a news conference announcing the bill. The proposed bill has received a lot of positive feedback thus far, Marr said.

The proposed legislation is about fairness, said Moorhead City Councilman Greg Lemke.

"It's about equality and it's about justice," Lemke said. "It's the moral thing to do to support this. It's about family values. It's valuing all families."

Minnesota amended its Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation as a protected class in 1993. Similar legislation has been proposed in Montana, Marr said.

Bobbi Jo Merten, a 26-year-old graduate student at North Dakota State University, said she attended the announcement because it would directly impact her life.

"I'm living as a lesbian in this community and I'd like to have these equal rights as well," Merten said, adding being part of a protected class of residents could play a role in whether she gets a job here when she graduates in about two years. "Largely, if I move out of the university system, I'm not protected."

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/02/04/news/state/175665.txt>

Gay-rights advocates press for change in N.D. law

Feb 04, 2009 - 04:05:05 CST

By DALE WETZEL

Associated Press Writer

Gina Powers has her own example of why North Dakota needs anti-discrimination protection for gays and lesbians. She and her partner, Steph Rindy, were booted from their West Fargo apartment once their landlord discovered Steph wasn't a man.

It was just before Christmas, about seven years ago, Powers said.

"He literally came to our door, knocked on it, and said, 'Yeah, you guys are out of here,'" Powers said. "I contacted my attorney, who assured me we had, really, no rights because we were being told to leave with no reason other than our orientation."

North Dakota law now forbids discrimination by race, color, sex, religion, age, national origin and disability. It also bans discrimination based on whether a person is on public assistance, married, or unmarried.

Legislation introduced by Sen. Tom Fiebiger, D-Fargo, would add sexual orientation to the list of classes of individuals who are specifically protected against discrimination.

The measure got its first hearing Tuesday in the Senate Judiciary Committee. The panel will decide later whether to endorse the proposal. Its recommendation will be followed by a Senate vote.

Opponents of the measure said it was unnecessary, and argued it could force religious organizations to go against their own convictions about homosexual activity.

The legislation "provides no protection for churches, private schools and youth organizations, such as scouting organizations, from being forced to violate their sincerely held beliefs," said Christopher Dodson, director of the North Dakota Catholic Conference.

Janne Myrdal, state director for Concerned Women of America, which promotes Christian religious values, called the bill "a giant step toward the adoption of policies that discriminate against people with traditional views of morality."

"This law would not protect rights, but would rather grant special privileges based strictly on someone's sexual behavior," Myrdal said. "Further, those privileges would have a significant impact on the constitutional rights of North Dakotans who may have a moral objection to certain sexual behaviors."

Proponents of the legislation said it would reflect North Dakotans' own opposition to discrimination.

"It is time that the North Dakota laws matched our values," said Wade Schemmel, a conference minister for the Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Amy Nelson, director of Fair Housing of the Dakotas, a nonprofit agency that investigates allegations of housing discrimination, said a landlord's opinion of someone's sexual orientation should not be allowed to influence an apartment rental decision.

Declining to rent to someone because he or she had a history of not paying on time, bothering neighbors or damaging property "is legal and understandable when running a business," Nelson said. However, someone's race, gender, disability or sexual orientation should not play a role, she said.

"I tell housing providers, you have a right to have your personal views, but you do not have the right to bring those views into your business world and use them to make decisions which have no impact upon your business, and discriminate," she said.

Montana already offers anti-discrimination protection for gays and lesbians in public employment, while Minnesota bars any discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, advocates of the legislation said.

A number of companies that do business in North Dakota also prohibit discrimination against gays and lesbians, and offer insurance benefits to employees' same-sex partners, they said.

Powers and Rindy have been together for 11 years, they said in an interview. Both grew up in Fargo and graduated from Fargo North High School.

They considered moving to Minnesota after the West Fargo apartment eviction, Powers said, but they eventually decided to stand their ground.

"This is our home," Powers said. "North Dakota is where we live."

The bill is SB2278.

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/229948/>

Gays urge Human Rights Act changes

BISMARCK – Several years ago, Sherri Paxon of Mandan decided she would no longer hide from her co-workers that she is in a committed relationship with another woman.

By: Janell Cole ,

BISMARCK – Several years ago, Sherri Paxon of Mandan decided she would no longer hide from her co-workers that she is in a committed relationship with another woman.

Despite previously good job reviews and a positive atmosphere, “The climate quickly degenerated into instances of harassment and barely disguised workplace bullying,” she told a Senate committee Tuesday, in support of a bill to add sexual orientation to the protected classes in the state Human Rights Act.

Paxon was one of several who testified that Senate Bill 2278 is needed because it’s not fair that North Dakotans can be fired, denied housing and excluded from public accommodations just because they are gay or transgendered.

Paxon said she put up with a hostile atmosphere at her job until “it was clear nothing I could do would improve these work conditions. Because I had no legal recourse and in order to protect my mental and physical health, I felt I had to resign.”

If SB 2278 had been in state law at the time, she said, “I truly believe the outcome would have been different.”

Another, Gina Powers of Fargo, who was at the hearing with her partner and their daughter, pleaded with the Senate Judiciary to “have us emerge from this legislative session a better North Dakota.”

A bill sponsor, Rep. Kathy Hawken, R-Fargo, said everyone should have the same rights.

“It is really somewhat sad that we need to be here today with this bill. In a perfect world, there would be no need for protected classes of any sort,” she said.

But opponents told the Senate Judiciary Committee that the bill would unjustly protect people who have chosen a lifestyle that deserves no special rights.

Fargo’s Tom Freier, executive director of the North Dakota Family Alliance, said the definition of sexual orientation is “subjective and vague ... and can only invite litigation.”

The committee chairman, Sen. David Nething, R-Jamestown, asked Freier if the definition of sexual orientation is any more subjective than the definition of mental disability, which is a protected class under the existing Human Rights Act. Freier said that is a medical determination.

If passed, the bill would go against the rights of other people’s religious liberty and their rights to run their businesses and raise their families as they see fit, Freier said.

Janne Myrdal of Park River, state director of Concerned Women for America, agreed.

“The bill has no exemptions for those with personal convictions, thus forcing individuals to accept and support sexual behaviors with which they disagree,” she said. “SB 2278 actually creates discrimination ... against people with traditional views of morality.”

She said “facts show that sexual behavior is changeable” and not immutable like race and color.

Christopher Dodson, lobbyist for the North Dakota Catholic Conference, also opposed the bill, saying it was “flawed in its scope and reach.”

Freier and another opponent, Minot lawyer Reed Soderstrom, argued that gays and lesbians already have all the legal protections they need in state law and constitution, statements that brought challenges from the Judiciary Committee.

“Can you direct us to the specific sections (of law)?” Sen. Curt Olafson, R-Edinburg, asked Freier and Soderstrom. He noted that the bill’s prime sponsor, Sen. Tom Fiebiger, D-Fargo, testified that, as an attorney, he has to repeatedly advise gays and lesbians who’ve lost their jobs that there are no legal remedies in North Dakota law or federal law.

The committee will act on the bill next week, Nething said.

Cole works for Forum Communications Co., which owns The Forum. She can be reached at (701) 224-0830 or forumcap@btinet.net

FARGO FORUM

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/229842/group/News/>

NDSU HAS SEXUAL ORIENTATION POLICY IN PLACE

By Amy Dalrymple

A proposal in the North Dakota Legislature to add sexual orientation as a protected class has been a longstanding policy at North Dakota State University.

Now the college students are advocating for a statewide law.

Members of NDSU’s student government approved a resolution this week to support Senate Bill 2278, which would prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Joe Heilman, NDSU student body president, said even though students already have the protection on campus, this bill would make sure they have equal rights when seeking off-campus housing, a job or an internship.

Several students plan to be in Bismarck today to testify in support of the bill, which will go before the Senate Judiciary Committee at 10:15 a.m.

If the bill becomes law, it wouldn’t change much on campuses.

NDSU, the University of North Dakota and several campuses already list sexual orientation in their equal opportunity and non-discrimination policies.

NDSU added sexual orientation to its anti-discrimination policy in the early 1990s.

That was around the time when a group of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered students began forming an organization, said Sandra Holbrook, former director of diversity and equity at NDSU.

“There was no flap about that policy change at all,” Holbrook said. “We were all kind of dumbstruck.”

The only difference between the bill and NDSU’s policy is that the bill includes gender identity or expression.

That may soon become part of NDSU's policy, said Evie Myers, vice president for equity, diversity and global outreach.

Fargo Public Schools also list sexual orientation in the district's anti-discrimination policy. School Board members made that change in December.

ABERDEEN NEWS

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/N/ND_XGR_GAY_LESBIAN_PROTECTION_NDOL-?SITE=SDABE&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

Feb 3, 8:12 PM EST - Aberdeen American News

Gay-rights advocates press for change in ND law

By DALE WETZEL
Associated Press Writer

Advertisement

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BISMARCK TRIBUNE

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/229787/>

BILL IS NO THREAT TO OUR CULTURE

By Arthur W. Johnson, Richville, Minn.

With Ken Koehler's opinion piece (Jan. 24) titled "Sexual Orientation Bill Denies Centuries of Cultural History," my letter could be titled "Sexual Orientation Bill Celebrates Human Diversity" as it seeks to protect "sexual orientation" within the human rights legislation.

This bill is not seeking legal status for same-sex marriage. This bill is not threatening “the centuries of cultural history” regarding marriage. I’ve been married 52 years and this bill will not erode our marital foundation. Not passed, however, I wonder whose civil rights could be next challenged.

I am not comfortable with the slippery slope suggestion that the passage of this bill will naturally follow with the affirmation of same-sex marriage. This is the same logic that would suggest that anyone eating meat would naturally become a cannibal.

This bill is only for fairness and equity – and to celebrate divine creativity in human diversity. As Koehler quoted from the Gospel of Matthew, I close from the same writing (7:3) where Jesus asked, “Why do you seek the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?”

FARGO FORUM

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/229792/>

RIGHTS BILL AFFECTS ALL OF US

Mitch Marr, Fargo

The North Dakota Legislature is about to vote on an important bill. If passed, SB 2278 will prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation – including gender identity – in areas such as employment and housing.

It’s no exaggeration to say it affects everyone. It might touch friends, family or colleagues. Perhaps your town or business has trouble retaining or attracting people that value welcoming and diverse environments. Or maybe you’re one of the unlucky ones, and you’ve actually been fired or evicted because of your sexual orientation or gender identity.

This is a historic bill in that it offers us the chance to build a truly inclusive state, one North Dakota for all its citizens. It is historic, but not radical. Community and business leaders across the state, from educational institutions to hospitals to tech companies, already extend similar protections. Recently the Fargo City Commission voted 4-0 to support the legislation. This bill asks only that North Dakota laws reflect the values its community already holds.

While advocating for this bill, I’ve heard unwarranted concern that it might limit religious freedom. One radio caller went so far as to wonder why he shouldn’t be able to evict someone because of their sexual orientation, since homosexuality conflicts with his religious beliefs. The answer is simple; it is the same reason you can’t evict a person because of their gender, race or religious beliefs.

Imagine for a moment that your religion prohibits eating pork, working on Sunday or marrying someone of another race or religion. You are free to hold these tenants in your own life. However, you are not free to fire or evict someone because they do these things – even if they conflict with your own beliefs.

North Dakota human rights laws prohibit discrimination based on characteristics such as race, sex, religion, or disability. A list of protected classes already exists; this bill simply seeks to add sexual orientation and gender identity to that list.

This is not about “condoning” homosexuality or some perceived “lifestyle.” It is not about special rights. It is not in any sense about gay marriage. This is about fairness.

Right now in North Dakota, a person can be fired due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. They can be evicted or denied use of a public accommodation. This includes perceived sexual orientation and heterosexuality, too. Right now in North Dakota, this type of discrimination is entirely legal.

This is not fair. This is not how North Dakotans treat people. We must be clear that this is exactly what we’re talking about. Do we truly want to maintain the ability to discriminate against? That is what opposing this bill means.

One writer recently suggested that adding sexual orientation to the list of protected classes goes against our nation’s cultural history. On the one hand it does. Our nation does have a history of discriminating against its gay citizens. It also has a history of pay inequity, racial segregation and religious intolerance. Just because we’ve historically acted one way does not make it right. “Once a bigot, always a bigot” is not a useful maxim. Continuing to discriminate against a group of people simply because we always have is cynical, reductive and just plain wrong.

On the other hand, I would argue that this bill upholds our nation’s cultural history. In our better moments, we have overcome differences and prejudices to extend freedom and opportunity to our neighbors.

A little less than half the country extends these basic rights. If North Dakota turns to its values of fairness and an appreciation of a hard day’s work – no matter who does the work – we would set a fine example: Value your citizens, all of them. By passing this bill, we live up to our cultural history of overcoming differences, embracing our neighbors and working toward equality.

Marr, Fargo, is the executive director of the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition. He also serves as a board member of the Pride Collective & Community Center.

MINOT DAILY NEWS

<http://www.minotdailynews.com/page/content.detail/id/523802.html?nav=5008>

SEXUAL ORIENTATION BILL

POSTED: February 1, 2009

By Mary Ann Avitua, Minot

First of all, thank you for carrying the news about the bills being introduced at the state Legislature. I wouldn't have known about this without the article.

The bill I'm referring to is to add sexual orientation to the state's current anti-discrimination law. If the pastor had lost this job at a church because of a same-sex relationship, what does he expect? His

parishioners were simply following what the Bible teaches and they chose God's rules over the pastor's relationship. They thought it wrong. They didn't say he couldn't remain in the same-sex relationship, only he couldn't remain their pastor if he did.

I see where this is leading. People will not be able to "discriminate" in who they hire to teach and preach what the Bible says. Parochial schools will not be able to hire the people who they want to reinforce their values. We are not telling them how to live their lives, just not in the places we hold most sacred.

Let your representatives know how you feel on this issue. Sen. Tom Fiebiger, D-Fargo, introduced this bill.

JAMESTOWN SUN

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=79834§ion=Opinion>

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: SUPPORT SB 2278 TO PROTECT OUR NEIGHBORS

The Rev. Susan Lester

The Jamestown Sun - 02/06/2009

Well, here I go again. I am writing in support of North Dakota Senate bill SB-2278. I would like to start by inviting those who disagree with me to respectfully do so, but not to anticipate any further rebuttal.

Remember in the Feb. 4 article on the matter that Rep. Kathy Hawken said it was sad that we need a law at all? Yes, it is sad. However, our society has proven that it is necessary. It is not OK for employers to discriminate against non-hetero peoples. Discrimination is wrong at every level— Jesus of Nazareth taught us that in great detail. When one community is hurt continuously, we have the responsibility to protect them.

Frankly, everyone's sexuality is their own business. If that business is shared, treat it with respect — we are talking about God's unique creation here, not a multi-level moral society. SB-2278 will not force anyone to accept what he or she considers immoral behavior, but it will help all North Dakotans gain access to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The Rev. Susan Lester

Jamestown

GRAND FORKS HERALD

<http://www.grandforksherald.com/articles/index.cfm?id=105487§ion=opinion>

TWO SIDES TO EVERY STORY: SB 2278: DON'T FORCE CITIZENS TO SHUN MORALITY

JANNE MYRDAL

PARK RIVER, N.D. - 02/07/2009

PARK RIVER, N.D. — Concerned Women For America of North Dakota fails to see the evidence that sexual orientation meets the criteria set forth by the U.S. Supreme Court defining human rights.

The court has devised a three-part test to determine whether a class of persons qualifies as a true minority: They must be defined by an immutable characteristic (unchangeable, such as skin color), they must be economically deprived, and they must suffer from a history of discrimination and political powerlessness.

Sexual orientation fits into none of these categories. Instead, the facts show that sexual behavior is changeable, that those who practice nontraditional sexual preference are largely affluent and that their activists represent one of the most powerful lobbies in the world per capita.

Special rights historically have been afforded to certain groups in order to make sure that individuals are not discriminated against because of immutable characteristics. North Dakota law already protects these characteristics. Further, the bill has no exemptions for those with personal convictions, thus forcing individuals to accept and support sexual behaviors with which they disagree.

SB2278 actually creates discrimination. In general, when "sexual orientation" is added to a nondiscrimination code, it is a giant step toward the adoption of policies that discriminate against people with traditional views of morality. Indeed, if we look closely at the term "sexual orientation" itself, it is really a radical challenge to the beliefs of all major religious faiths because it attacks the notion that sexual behavior has moral dimensions.

According to the therapeutic manual of the American Psychiatric Association, there are at least 20 distinctive sexual variations of "sexual orientation" and perhaps many more. Because the underlying concept of "sexual orientation" is that all sexual behavior is equally valid, there are no good choices or bad choices, just inclinations.

Private businesses and organizations should not be forced by the state to set aside their moral or religious principles, based upon someone's proposed rights because of the individual's sexual behavior.

Other states that have passed similar laws have faced numerous lawsuits, including some filed by individuals claiming the right to use a restroom or other public space reserved for the opposite sex.

Both federal and North Dakota law already prohibits sex discrimination and sexual harassment. If SB 2278 becomes law, it will communicate to North Dakotans that the political agenda of a few is more important than the time-honored and cherished First Amendment principles upon which our country was founded.

Should sexual preference now trump the rights of free speech and freedom of religion?

If we allow sexual preference to become a matter of laws and policies, it will reach our workplaces, our schools, our families, our children, our youth and even our houses of worship to the great detriment of our society. This surely will challenge the common sense, strength of character and founding principles this great nation and state were built on.

The liberties we now all enjoy, regardless of sexual orientation, will stand defenseless against this discriminatory law. It will hurt our society, removing all moral boundaries and allowing further sexualization of our public square.

Allow us also to state that it should be the personal duty of all citizens to behave in such respectful manner toward fellow citizens, without being compelled or directed by law, so as to afford all the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. We should all strive to behave so.

Myrdal is state director of Concerned Women For America of North Dakota. This column is adapted from her testimony against SB 2278 to a North Dakota Senate committee.

GRAND FORKS HERALD

<http://www.grandforksherald.com/articles/index.cfm?id=105485§ion=opinion>

TWO SIDES TO EVERY STORY: SB2278: MEASURE HELPS BUILD TRULY INCLUSIVE STATE

Mitch Marr

Fargo - 02/07/2009

FARGO — The North Dakota Legislature is about to vote on an important bill. If passed, SB 2278 will prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation — including gender identity — in areas such as employment and housing.

It's no exaggeration to say it affects everyone. It might touch friends, family or colleagues.

Perhaps, your town or business has trouble retaining or attracting people who value welcoming and diverse environments. Or maybe you're one of the unlucky ones, and you've actually been fired or evicted because of your sexual orientation or gender identity.

This is a historic bill in that it offers us the chance to build a truly inclusive state, one North Dakota for all its citizens. It is historic but not radical. Community and business leaders across the state, from educational institutions to hospitals to tech companies, already extend similar protections.

This bill asks only that North Dakota laws reflect the values its community already holds.

While advocating for this bill, I've heard unwarranted concern that it might limit religious freedom.

One radio caller went so far as to wonder why he shouldn't be able to evict someone because of their sexual orientation, because homosexuality conflicts with his religious beliefs. The answer is simple: It is the same reason you can't evict a person because of their gender, race or religious beliefs.

Imagine for a moment that your religion prohibits eating pork, working Sunday or marrying someone of another race or religion. You are free to hold these tenets in your own life. But you are not free to fire or evict someone because they do these things — even if they conflict with your own beliefs.

North Dakota human rights laws prohibit discrimination based on characteristics such as race, sex, religion or disability. A list of protected classes already exists; this bill simply seeks to add sexual orientation and gender identity to that list.

This is not about "condoning" homosexuality or some perceived "lifestyle." It is not about special rights. It is not in any sense about gay marriage. This is about fairness.

Right now in North Dakota, a person can be fired because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. They can be evicted or denied use of a public accommodation. This includes perceived sexual orientation and heterosexuality, too. Right now in North Dakota, this type of discrimination is entirely legal.

It is legal, and it happens. The Legislature is hearing testimony from people who have been fired, parents whose children have been discriminated against and attorneys who hear these issues.

The North Dakota labor commissioner will testify. Currently, her department receives complaints but has no power to investigate — because right now, there are zero protections.

This is not fair. This is not how North Dakotans treat people. We must be clear that this is exactly what we're talking about. Do we truly want to maintain the ability to discriminate against? That is what opposing this bill means.

One writer recently suggested that adding sexual orientation to the list of protected classes goes against our nation's cultural history. I would argue that this bill upholds our nation's cultural history.

In our better moments, we have overcome differences and prejudices to extend freedom and opportunity to our neighbors.

A little less than half the country extends these basic rights. If North Dakota turns to its values of fairness and an appreciation of a hard day's work — no matter who does the work — we would set a fine example: Value your citizens, all of them.

By passing this bill, we live up to our cultural history of overcoming differences, embracing our neighbors and working toward equality.

Marr is the executive director of the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition.

GRAND FORKS HERALD

<http://www.grandforksherald.com/articles/index.cfm?id=105750§ion=Opinion>

JESSA HULTENG, GRAND FORKS, LETTER: N.D. NEEDS EDUCATION ON GAY-RIGHTS ISSUES
- 02/09/2009

GRAND FORKS — In reading the story, "Gay-rights advocates press for change," it became clear that too many North Dakotans still are not well-enough educated about topics related to sexual orientation (Page B1, Feb. 3)

I am truly appalled by the ignorance of someone who suggests that sexual orientation is "changeable." If one actually looks at the research, one sees that people do not choose their sexual or gender orientation.

Looking into hate crime and anti-discrimination laws, only 20 states include sexual orientation in hate crime laws, and only eight include protection for gender identity. Only 10 states offer protection to include sexual orientation, with nine of them including gender orientation.

I want my child to grow up in a state that gives everyone the same rights to security and safety.

People should not fear losing their home or job because of their sexual or gender identification.

Failing to pass this law would reinforce negative attitudes toward people who are nonheterosexual.

Rather than trying to redefine religious texts to justify discrimination, I urge people to really think about what is morally right.

Do we want to teach our children that discrimination is acceptable in our state?

Jessa Hulteng

BISMARCK TRIBUNE

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/02/13/news/opinion/letters/176477.txt>

EXPANDING PROTECTION IS WARRANTED

By SONVY SAMMONS
Bismarck

I favor Senate Bill 2278 to add sexual orientation to the list of classes of individuals who are specifically protected against discrimination in North Dakota.

The objection that this bill would negatively affect "the constitutional rights of North Dakotans who may have a moral objection to certain sexual behaviors" is astounding. It would give objectors reason enough to allow rental discrimination based on sexual orientation to continue. With this reasoning, one could legally discriminate against unwed mothers, someone who is having an affair (should the landlord become aware of such behavior), or someone who has had a divorce or remarried without an annulment.

Certainly, problems with not paying one's rent, damaging property or bothering neighbors are appropriately considered by a landlord, and SB2278 wouldn't change that.

We can't prevent people from judging the sex lives of others, but we can prevent them from having legal power to deny those of whom they disapprove a place to live or work. All people in North Dakota deserve the same rights to live out our lives with responsibility and commitment to one another.

As to fears that churches and private schools and clubs won't be protected, aren't churches and private schools able to decide who is welcome in their membership? It seems to me that, other than state expectations regarding educational standards in private schools, that both of these entities can evict people that don't conform to their standards. This law can surely be written so as to reassure such groups that their sanctity can be maintained and that membership can remain as selective as they feel it needs to be.

It is time that North Dakota laws match our values. I hope that our values could reflect truly Christian teachings of inclusiveness, love, forgiveness and compassion to all people.

JAMESTOWN SUN

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=80296§ion=Opinion>

SB 2278 IS ABOUT BASIC RIGHTS OF RESIDENTS

By MITCH MARR, Fargo

The Jamestown Sun - 02/13/2009

The North Dakota Legislature is about to vote on an important bill. If passed, SB 2278 will prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation — including gender identity — in areas such as employment and housing.

It's no exaggeration to say it affects everyone. It might touch friends, family or colleagues. Perhaps your town or business has trouble retaining or attracting people that value in welcoming and diverse environments. Or maybe you're one of the unlucky ones, and you've actually been fired or evicted because of your sexual orientation or gender identity.

This is an historic bill in that it offers us the chance to build a truly inclusive state, one North Dakota for all its citizens. It is historic, but not radical. Community and business leaders across the state, from educational institutions to hospitals to tech companies, already extend similar protections. This bill asks only that North Dakota laws reflect the values its community already holds.

While advocating for this bill, I've heard unwarranted concern that it might limit religious freedom. One radio caller went so far as to wonder why he shouldn't be able to evict someone because of his or her sexual orientation, because homosexuality conflicts with his religious beliefs. The answer is simple; it is the same reason you can't evict a person because of their gender, race or religious beliefs.

Imagine for a moment that your religion prohibits eating pork, working on Sunday or marrying someone of another race or religion. You are free to hold these tenants in your own life. However you are not free to fire or evict someone because they do these things — even if they conflict with your own beliefs.

North Dakota human rights laws prohibit discrimination based on characteristics such as race, sex, religion or disability. A list of protected classes already exists; this bill simply seeks to add sexual orientation and gender identity to that list.

This is not about “condoning” homosexuality or some perceived “lifestyle.” It is not about special rights. It is not in any sense about gay marriage. This is about fairness.

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It is legal and it happens. The Legislature has heard testimony from people who have been fired, parents whose children have been discriminated against and attorneys who hear these issues. The North Dakota Labor Commissioner will testify. Currently, her department receives complaints but has no power to investigate — because right now there are zero protections.

This is not fair. This is not how North Dakotans treat people. We must be clear that this is exactly what we’re talking about. Do we truly want to maintain the ability to discriminate against others? That is what opposing this bill means.

One writer recently suggested that adding sexual orientation to the list of protected classes goes against our nation’s cultural history. I would argue that this bill upholds our nation’s cultural history. In our better moments, we have overcome differences and prejudices to extend freedom and opportunity to our neighbors.

A little less than half the country extends these basic rights. If North Dakota turns to its values of fairness and an appreciation of a hard day’s work — no matter who does the work — we would set a fine example: value your citizens, all of them. By passing this bill, we live up to our cultural history of overcoming differences, embracing our neighbors and working toward equality.

(Marr is the executive director of the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition)

GRAND FORKS HERALD

<http://www.grandforksherald.com/articles/index.cfm?id=106312§ion=Opinion>

W. GLEN JOHNSON, ST. PAUL, LETTER: COLUMN TWISTS FACTS IN DEFENSE OF 'MORALITY'

Grand Forks Herald - 02/13/2009

ST. PAUL — Janne Myrdal, North Dakota director of Concerned Women for America, ignores important facts about Senate Bill 2278 (“Don’t force citizens to shun morality,” Page A4, Feb. 7).

Under current North Dakota law, it is legal to discriminate against someone based upon perceived or actual heterosexuality — in other words, “If you are straight, I won’t hire you.” Imagine the conservative uproar if someone put an employment ad in the Herald that stated “Heterosexuals need not apply” and justified the statement based upon, to use Myrdal’s words, “moral or religious principles.”

The specific language of SB 2278 will protect all citizens against discrimination based upon sexual orientation, not just gays. Ensuring equal rights for all is not granting “special rights” to some.

Myrdal also clearly implies that sexual orientation and sexual behavior are the same and that orientation can be changed. She even quotes the American Psychiatric Association.

But here are two quotes from the APA Web site: "Sexual orientation is different from sexual behavior" and "No, human beings cannot choose to be either gay or straight."

Just as some selectively quote the Bible to justify discrimination against gays, so Myrdal's group selectively quotes the APA.

W. Glen Johnson

JAMESTOWN SUN

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=80478§ion=news>

LEGISLATIVE SESSION: SENATE: 'DO PASS' ON HUMAN RIGHTS BILL

*By Janell Cole , N.D. Capitol Bureau
The Jamestown Sun - 02/17/2009*

BISMARCK — A bill outlawing discrimination against North Dakotans based on their sexual orientation will go the Senate with a do-pass recommendation.

The Senate Judiciary Committee voted 6-0 Monday to give the favorable nod to Senate Bill 2278, which adds North Dakota's gay men and lesbians to the protected classes in the state Human Rights Act.

The bill was amended to clarify that religious organizations are exempt from the law, said Sen. Tom Fiebiger, D-Fargo, prime sponsor of the bill.

The bill had a hearing on Feb. 3.

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/02/19/news/state/177133.txt>

N.D. Senate endorses protection for gays, lesbians

Feb 19, 2009 - 04:05:40 CST

By DALE WETZEL

Associated Press Writer

Extending North Dakota law's anti-discrimination protections to gays and lesbians will not provide special rights - it means only someone cannot be fired or denied housing or credit because of sexual orientation, a supporter says.

"If someone is not doing their job, or habitually tardy, or doesn't get along with people, they can still be fired, whether gay, lesbian or straight," said Sen. Tom Fiebiger, D-Fargo. "What employers can't do under this law is fire someone because they are gay."

North Dakota's Senate agreed on Wednesday, voting 27-19 to include sexual orientation in a list of categories protected by the state's human rights law. The bill now moves to the state House.

Aside from a presentation by Fiebiger, who is the bill's principal sponsor, there was no debate on the legislation.

As written, it bars discrimination against gays and lesbians in matters of housing, employment, credit, insurance, public accommodations and public services.

North Dakota already bans discrimination by race, color, sex, religion, age, national origin and disability.

The law also prohibits discrimination based on whether a person is on public assistance, married or unmarried.

The legislation contains exemptions, in response to issues raised by the North Dakota Catholic Conference and other religious groups.

It says religious organizations may limit employment and volunteers to people of the same religion or who believe in its doctrines. Religious groups also may limit access to their churches and schools, the bill says.

The bill "does not restrict religious rights," Fiebiger said.

The bill is HB2278.

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/231507/>

Published February 19 2009

Human rights bill passes ND Senate

Proposal prohibits discrimination on basis of sexual orientation

The North Dakota Senate voted 27-19 on Wednesday in support of a bill that adds gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender individuals to the protected classes in the state Human Rights Act.

By: [Amy Dalrymple](#) , INFORUM

Proposal prohibits discrimination on basis of sexual orientation

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Senate Bill 2278 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in housing, employment, credit transaction and use of public accommodation.

Sen. Tom Fiebiger, D-Fargo, the prime sponsor of the proposal, said the bill affects about 4 to 5 percent of North Dakota residents, according to testimony.

The bill was amended to clarify that religious organizations are exempt from the law.

It does not change North Dakota's status as an at-will employment state, Fiebiger said.

"This bill will not provide North Dakota citizens special rights because of their sexual orientation," he said. "What employers can't do under this law is fire someone because they're gay."

Mitch Marr, executive director of the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition, said he and many other supporters of the bill watched the vote through an online webcast.

"I'm pretty ecstatic with that vote," Marr said. "I thought it was pretty significant and a large margin of victory."

Sixteen Democrats and 11 Republicans supported the bill.

Marr said the bipartisan support makes him optimistic about the measure as it moves to the House.

The bill has received endorsement from college students across the state, including unanimous support by the North Dakota Student Association.

Angela Mathers, a graduate student at North Dakota State University, said students are gearing up to show their support for the bill to members of the House.

"It's very clear that the youth and the young generation of the state ... that this is something that they are passionate about and something they expect," Mathers said.

How they voted

How Cass County legislators voted on the bill to include sexual orientation in the state Human Rights Act:

Yes: Tom Fiebiger, D-Fargo; Tim Flakoll, R-Fargo; Tony Grindberg, R-Fargo; Judy Lee, R-West Fargo; Tim Mathern, D-Fargo; Carolyn Nelson, D-Fargo; and Jim Pomeroy, D-Fargo.

No: Tom Fischer, R-Fargo and Gary Lee, R-Casselton.

<http://www.minotdailynews.com/page/content.detail/id/524601.html?nav=5583>

Minot Daily News

Senate endorses gay protection

BISMARCK (AP) - North Dakota's Senate wants to extend the state's anti-discrimination protections to gays.

Senators voted 27-19 to approve a bill that covers discrimination complaints dealing with employment, housing, credit, insurance and public accommodations. It prohibits discrimination in those areas based on a person's sexual orientation.

The bill now goes to the state house.

Before Wednesday's vote, senators agreed to change the bill to exempt religious organizations from some of its provisions.

The bill is HB2278.

<http://www.grandforksherald.com/articles/index.cfm?id=107206§ion=News>

Human rights bill passes ND Senate

Amy Dalrymple, The Forum
Published Thursday, February 19, 2009

BISMARCK

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The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead and the Herald are Forum Communications Co. newspapers.

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=80625§ion=News>

Human rights bill passes

**By Amy Dalrymple , The Forum, The Jamestown Sun
Published Thursday, February 19, 2009**

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The Forum and The Jamestown

Sun are both owned by

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ABERDEEN NEWS

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/N/ND_XGR_GAY_LESBIAN_PROTECTION_NDOL-?SITE=SDABE&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

ND SENATE ENDORSES PROTECTION FOR GAYS, LESBIANS

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) -- North Dakota's Senate wants to extend the state's anti-discrimination protections to gays and lesbians.

Senators voted 27-19 to approve a bill that covers discrimination complaints dealing with employment, housing, credit, insurance and public accommodations. It prohibits discrimination in those areas based on a person's sexual orientation.

The bill now goes to the state house.

Before Wednesday's vote, senators agreed to change the bill to exempt religious organizations from some of its provisions.

North Dakota law already bans discrimination by race, color, sex, religion, age, national origin and disability. The law also prohibits discrimination based on whether a person is on public assistance, married, or unmarried.

BISMARCK TRIBUNE

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/03/02/news/opinion/editorials/doc49aaed779ae4f995009639.txt>

TRIBUNE EDITORIAL: NO DISCRIMINATION

Protection from discrimination in North Dakota should be extended to gays and lesbians.

This does not endorse sexual orientation or lifestyle choices, but protects gays and lesbians from discrimination when it comes to housing, employment, credit, insurance, public accommodations and services.

Already discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, age, national origin and disability are protected.

These are fairness issues that deserve support.

The state Senate passed the bill doing this by a 27-19 margin, and now it's in the state House of Representatives. The House should pass it.

<http://www.argusleader.com/article/20090313/VOICES09/903130310/-1/voices09>

Letters: Word of God cannot be avoided

Wendell H. Hanson • Sioux Falls • March 13, 2009

Writing about homosexuality, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America states: The Bible alone cannot be used for Christian life concerning moral judgment. In the Feb. 20 Argus Leader, Pastor Erma Wolf strongly disagreed: "No church has the authority to overturn the word of God."

Church doctrine states the Bible, as a whole or in all its parts, is the word of God under all circumstances regardless of man's attitude toward it. The Evangelical Lutheran Church refusal to consider any Biblical homosexual references is contrary to church doctrine: a classic definition of heresy.

Read Genesis 19:1-26 homosexual story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Jesus uses the story Matthew 10:14-15 and Matthew 11:20, 23-24.

Harsh Biblical warnings follow, describing homosexuality as a cancer to society.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.

Romans 1:26-27. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones, men committed indecent acts with other men, and received the due penalty for their perversion.

I Corinthians 6:9. The wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God. The sexually immoral nor idolater nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders.

I Timothy 1:8-10. Law is for law breakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, for murderers and perverts.

John 5:14. Jesus said, "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

Page 1,394 in Volume III of the book "What (Martin) Luther Says:" "Today, nothing is so common as turning right into wrong and wrong into right by employing all sorts of clever expedients and strange tricks. As long as immorality is still considered vice and sin, help and remedy are possible; but when it is regarded as right, one cannot help."

The fatal danger? Attempting to avoid the Bible through legislation by people.

TV Coverage:

<http://kxnet.com/video.asp?ArticleId=346622&VideoId=26814>

http://kfyrvtv.com/News_video.asp?news=28166

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/03/19/news/state/179861.txt>

Anti-discrimination bill draws crowd

Mar 19, 2009 - 04:06:09 CDT

By DAVE KOLPACK

Associated Press Writer

Opponents of a proposal meant to protect gays and lesbians from discrimination pleaded Wednesday with lawmakers to kill the bill, saying state law already provides for equal rights.

People on both sides of the issue lined up single file in a crowded Capitol room to give their comments to the House Human Services Committee. The bill, which passed the Senate last month, is expected to reach the House floor next week.

"I told both sides if they have anything additional, to get it to me by Monday," Rep. Robin Weisz, D-Hurdsfield, said after Wednesday's two-hour hearing. "I don't know how much more they have. I've got a pile here."

The bill aims to bar discrimination against gays and lesbians in matters of housing, employment, credit, insurance, public accommodations and public services. Supporters says it is long overdue.

"It expands rights. It does not infringe upon them," said Mitch Marr, director of the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition.

Opponents said the bill would grant special status to one group of people and lead to reverse discrimination. They cited legal, moral and religious objections, referring to the proposal as the "crazy sex and unusual acts bill" and the "predatory heterosexual dream bill."

Rep. Jim Kasper, R-Fargo, did not testify Wednesday, but offered encouragement from his front row seat to some who spoke out against it.

"I think the arguments against the bill were profound," Kasper said. "I think they made a good impression."

Proponents of the bill went first at Wednesday's hearing. They said it would provide fairness without forcing religious groups or such other organizations as the Boy Scouts to hire gay leaders.

"I want to prove to people that we're not narrow-minded," said Rep. Kathy Hawken, R-Fargo, who spoke in favor of the bill.

At least two people who testified for the bill said they lost jobs because of their sexual orientation. The Rev. Ron Hildahl said he was fired by one church and knows "the pain and the reality" of discrimination.

"I wish I could say I was the only one who had that experience," Hildahl said. "But I am not alone."

Susanna Magstadt, who identified herself as a 34-year-old lesbian mother of three, said she has been forced to settle for jobs she doesn't like.

"I've never lost my job for wearing glasses or being left-handed. I have lost my job for being gay," she said.

Mike Lindemann, an NDSU student, said he would like to stay in North Dakota when he graduates, but will leave if the bill fails to pass. He said he fears for his safety.

"To me, that is completely unacceptable," Lindemann said.

Tom Freier, a spokesman for the North Dakota Family Alliance, said the bill "grants special status to the limited few, at the expense of many." He said it could lead to legal challenges because it infringes on the constitutional rights of others.

Minot lawyer Reed Soderstrom said the bill is not fair to business because it does not allow employers to follow their religious and moral convictions in the work place.

"When I look through the Yellow Pages of the phone book, I see no one who escapes this bill," Soderstrom said.

Others complained that the bill promotes an unhealthy lifestyle, opens up avenues for sexual predators and allows transgendered people to go into bathrooms with people of the opposite sex. They said the bill will lead to legislation allowing gay marriage.

"Do we want this in North Dakota?" asked Lisa McKee of Fargo, a member of United Families International. "Do we want the homosexual lifestyle to be taught in our schools? Do we want it to be painted on billboards?"

The bill is SB2278.

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/234534/>

Published March 19 2009

Sexual orientation rights bill gets large turnout

BISMARCK – Gay and lesbian North Dakotans shouldn't have to fear losing their jobs if they display pictures of loved ones at work, a Fargo legislator said Wednesday.

By: [Amy Dalrymple](#), INFORUM

BISMARCK – Gay and lesbian North Dakotans shouldn't have to fear losing their jobs if they display pictures of loved ones at work, a Fargo legislator said Wednesday.

Senate Bill 2278 would eliminate the need many residents feel to hide their personal lives from employers, said Sen. Tom Fiebiger, the bill's prime sponsor.

Supporters and opponents of the bill lined up to testify during a more than two-hour hearing before the House Human Services Committee.

The bill seeks to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, employment, credit transaction and use of public accommodation.

Opponents said the bill would have unintended consequences and argued that sexual orientation is a choice, unlike race or other characteristics that fall under protected classes.

Others said the bill is part of a larger agenda to make homosexuality part of the mainstream.

A concern raised often by opponents was that the bill allows transgender individuals to use public restrooms that correspond to their gender identity.

Several, including Tom Frier of the North Dakota Family Alliance, said sexual predators would take advantage of that protection and target women and children in restrooms.

Committee member Rep. Kari Conrad, D-Minot, asked several times if people fear using the restrooms in Minnesota, which already has such a law.

The testimony from some opponents about sexual orientation elicited shaking heads and gasps at times, with at least five audience members walking out of the hearing.

The biggest reaction came after Fargo resident Martin Wishnatsky used some graphic language to describe sexual intercourse between same-sex partners.

Mitch Marr, executive director for the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition, asked legislators to consider the widespread support the bill has received, particularly from young people. The North Dakota Student Association that represents 42,000 students gave the bill a unanimous endorsement.

North Dakota State University student Mike Lindemann said if the bill doesn't pass, he feels he'll have to leave the state when he graduates, as do many others who don't have protection.

Bill supporter Sherri Paxon, a Bismarck-Mandan resident, said she lived in a "climate of fear" at one job and edited her conversations so co-workers wouldn't learn her sexual orientation.

When she stopped hiding, she was harassed and bullied in the workplace until she quit because she had no legal recourse, Paxon said.

Chairman Robin Weisz, R-Fessenden, said the committee will discuss the bill Monday and likely make a recommendation. It could be considered by the full House next week.

The Senate approved the bill 27-19. Weisz anticipates the vote will be closer in the House.

Readers can reach Forum reporter Amy Dalrymple at (701) 241-5590

<http://www.grandforksherald.com/event/article/id/111175/>

Published March 18 2009

Human rights bill draws large turnout for House committee hearing

Gay and lesbian North Dakotans should not have to fear losing their jobs if they display pictures of loved ones at work, a Fargo legislator said Wednesday.

By: **Amy Dalrymple**, The Forum

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"This bill gives us a chance to not only value those students, but to listen to what they have to say," Marr said.

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Others told legislators they have sons or daughters who feel their options are limited in North Dakota because of their sexual orientation.

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The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead and the Herald are Forum Communications Co. newspapers.

<http://www.minotdailynews.com/page/content.detail/id/525711.html?nav=5010>

Bill aims to bar discrimination against gays, lesbians

By Gwen Bristol Correspondent

POSTED: March 19, 2009

BISMARCK - During his growing up years in Minot, Josh Boschee wasn't sure whether or not he was homosexual. He openly admitted it during a Wednesday hearing for Senate Bill 2278, which would add sexual orientation to North Dakota's anti-discrimination law.

"Our main concern is allowing people to stay in their jobs and their homes," he said in a conversation following the hearing before the House Human Services Committee.

Boschee, a career adviser at North Dakota State University, served on the committee that helped to develop the bill. He testified for himself at the hearing, saying the bill is meant to provide a measure of safety to gays, lesbians and bisexuals who might lose their jobs or be kicked out of homes they rent because of discrimination.

The bill would not mean that employers couldn't fire employees for bad behavior or that landlords couldn't evict tenants for issues other than sexual orientation.

"I want us to prove to the rest of the people that we're not narrow-minded, because we shouldn't be," said Rep. Kathy Hawken, R-Fargo, one of the first people to speak for the bill.

Opponents of the bill said it was a civil liberties issue, and that giving a protected status to some people because of their sexual orientation would diminish the civil rights of others.

"A chosen lifestyle has nothing to do with civil rights and everything to do with conduct," said Janne Myrdal, state director for Concerned Women for America.

Preserving religious freedom, preventing exposure in public facilities like bathrooms and limiting the access of sexual predators in public facilities were some of the issues that opponents of the bill brought up.

"This bill says one thing," said Joseph McCormick of Fargo. "What it does to a community is another."

"If anything, it would improve our community," Boschee said later. He said that helping people feel secure in their jobs and homes would allow them to continue contributing positively to the community and could help recruit or retain people to the state.

Boschee also said that the religious implications are answered by an amendment put on in the Senate, which would exempt churches.

Another concern opponents had was whether the bill would lead to wider legislation in future years, including the possible overturn of a constitutional amendment that defines marriage in North Dakota as being between a man and a woman.

"Whatever the intended consequences, the unintended consequences are huge," said Tom Freier of the North Dakota Family Alliance.

Boschee later reiterated that the bill is only meant to protect gays, lesbians and transsexuals in North Dakota.

"We all have our individual ways, and we all contribute to the community," Boschee said during the hearing. "Discrimination is not a part of that."

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=82286§ion=News>

Large turnout for human rights bill

**By Amy Dalrymple , The Forum, The Jamestown Sun
Published Thursday, March 19, 2009**

Published March 18 2009

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Senate Bill 2278 would eliminate the need many residents feel to hide their personal lives from employers, said Sen. Tom Fiebiger, the bill's prime sponsor.

Supporters and opponents of the bill lined up to testify during a more than two-hour hearing before the House Human Services Committee.

The bill seeks to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, employment, credit transaction and use of public accommodation.

Opponents said the bill would have unintended consequences and argued that sexual orientation is a choice, unlike race or other characteristics that fall under protected classes.

Others said the bill is part of a larger agenda to make homosexuality part of the mainstream.

A concern raised often by opponents was that the bill allows transgender individuals to use public restrooms that correspond to their gender identity.

Several, including Tom Frier of the North Dakota Family Alliance, said sexual predators would take advantage of that protection and target women and children in restrooms.

Committee member Rep. Kari Conrad, D-Minot, asked several times if people fear using the restrooms in Minnesota, which already has such a law.

The testimony from some opponents about sexual orientation elicited shaking heads and gasps at times, with at least five audience members walking out of the hearing.

The biggest reaction came after Fargo resident Martin Wishnatsky used some graphic language to describe sexual intercourse between same-sex partners.

Mitch Marr, executive director for the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition, asked legislators to consider the widespread support the bill has received, particularly from young people. The North Dakota Student Association that represents 42,000 students gave the bill a unanimous endorsement.

"This bill gives us a chance to not only value those students, but to listen to what they have to say," Marr said.

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Others told legislators they have sons or daughters who feel their options are limited in North Dakota because of their sexual orientation.

Chairman Robin Weisz, R-Fessenden, said the committee will discuss the bill on Monday afternoon and likely make a recommendation. It could be considered by the full House next week, Weisz said.

The Senate approved the bill 27-19. Weisz said he anticipates the vote will be closer in the House.

The Forum and The Jamestown Sun are both owned by Forum Communications Co.

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/234909/group/News/>

Published March 22 2009

We're not pedophiles, predators or perverts

The North Dakota House Human Services Committee has heard the supporters and opponents to SB 2278, a bill that would amend the North Dakota Human Rights Act and Fair Housing Act to include sexual orientation.

By: **Joshua A. Boschee**, Fargo

The North Dakota House Human Services Committee has heard the supporters and opponents to SB 2278, a bill that would amend the North Dakota Human Rights Act and Fair Housing Act to include sexual orientation. Essentially, allowing straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender North Dakotans to not lose their jobs or home because their supervisor or landlord does not agree with their sexual orientation.

It was amazing to see the large number of supporters, including Republican and Democrat state legislators, representatives from Fair Housing of the Dakotas and the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition, lobbyists, parents, friends, partners and, yes, even gay people themselves.

It was frightening to hear the statements being made by individuals and representatives from the North Dakota Family Alliance, Concerned Women of America and the North Dakota Catholic Conference in opposition to the legislation.

One individual graphically shared with the committee and audience the mixing of body fluids and how women sexually pleasure themselves. Another stated that passage of this bill will mean that North Dakotans will soon be able to marry and make love to their livestock, as well as referenced “colored people” as the reason why diversity initiatives are occurring. Another representative cited wikipedia.com as her source for information regarding sexual orientation, a Web site that every educator, researcher and scientist knows is not a valid source of information.

I am a gay man. I attended Bishop Ryan High School, a Catholic school in Minot, N.D., and never heard these types of lies from my teachers, priests and friends. I am college-educated, receiving both my bachelor’s in political science and master’s in education leadership from North Dakota State University.

I have called Fargo my home for the past nine years and would like to continue being an advocate for this great state as well as continue to make a living here and contribute to the success of the state, which can

be contributed to all North Dakotans. I am not a pervert, predator or pedophile, as many of these pro-discrimination advocates would like you to believe.

The Fargo City Commission unanimously supports SB 2278. The North Dakota Student Association supports SB 2278, along with both University of North Dakota and NDSU student senates. The North Dakota University System and several other employers in the state protect employees from discrimination based on sexual orientation, including Target, Best Buy, Microsoft, Choice Hotels, ING and Cargill, to name a few. Finally, the North Dakota Senate voted in favor of SB 2278, demonstrating North Dakota values in action.

I ask you to contact the House Human Services Committee and the North Dakota House of Representatives to make it official: North Dakota is a state that does not support discrimination. Vote "aye" on Senate Bill 2278.

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/03/21/news/opinion/letters/doc49c3fa96150d3292863213.txt>

N.D. believes in the "golden rule"

Mar 21, 2009 - 04:05:59 CDT

By TY HEGLAND

Fargo

I am seeking the House of Representatives support of SB2278.

From the metro legislative districts of Fargo, to the rural districts of New Rockford and Watford City, individuals are looking toward representatives for responsible leadership at this critical juncture.

During the past few days, the amount of rhetoric in opposition surrounding this piece of legislation has become ridiculous. Too many extreme individuals have coalesced this piece with personal beliefs that have nothing to do with the issue. I would sincerely ask that you don't allow them to insult your intelligence. This piece of legislation is simple and clear cut: Do we believe in discrimination in North Dakota?

In my heart, I believe that the citizens of North Dakota obtain the highest morals and intelligence in the nation. Never have we allowed either to be compromised due to petty beliefs by a loud minority of discriminatory individuals. We are a state that truly upholds the Golden Rule, and does not pick and choose which moral values to uphold. Furthermore, I believe that we elect our legislators to represent these values. Let me state clearly that how you vote will be a direct reflection of your morality and whether you believe that an individual in the state of North Dakota deserves to be discriminated against.

In closing, let me state that I am a heterosexual, Christian, white male like a lot of you and your colleagues. By pure fate, our backgrounds have allowed us to be in the majority in the state of North Dakota. However, let us not rest on fate and sit quietly during this period of needed leadership. This is your chance to support legislation that transcends and truly matters. Do the right thing. Vote to pass SB2278.

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/03/21/news/opinion/letters/doc49c3fac51eea4856391058.txt>

Rights bill raises some questions

Mar 21, 2009 - 04:05:59 CDT

By RENA HELBERG

Williston

I have been encouraging a no vote on SB2278, which would add sexual orientation to the list of "discriminatory practices" prohibited by the state of North Dakota.

I believe sexual orientation is a behavioral choice made by an individual.

Current discriminatory practices already prohibited include issues which are not made by choice: race, color, sex (gender), national origin, age and physical or mental disability. But the remaining prohibited discriminatory practices include issues that are made by choice: religion, status with regard to marriage or public assistance, or participation in lawful activity off the employer's premises during nonworking hours.

What if my religion teaches that heterosexuality is the only appropriate orientation? As a believer in my religion, I might establish ways and means to incorporate my beliefs in all I do, perhaps even while employing workers for my company. If SB2278 passes, then somebody who doesn't believe as I do about orientation will be able to prosecute my actions based on their disagreement with my religious viewpoint. So how will the current statute protect me after the proposed amendment? I would be discriminated against for my religion.

I have heard speculation that there might be transgenders (mental or physical) or even sexual predators taking advantage of the gender identity provision in order to gain access to restrooms, locker rooms or other areas previously segregated by gender. I suppose that could be possible, considering that under the proposed amendment, gender identity will mean "actual or perceived ... identity, appearance or mannerisms ... regardless of the individual's designated gender at birth."

What about the current prohibition against discrimination based on sex, or one's designated gender at birth? Gender identity under the proposed amendment seems to be based on choice, i.e., "perceived." So what trumps, choice or birth? If the proposed amendment passes, any responsible prosecution of sexual discrimination as currently defined will be impossible.

This also ran in Minot Daily News:

<http://www.minotdailynews.com/page/content.detail/id/525791.html?nav=5008>

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/234860/>

Published March 22 2009

ND Legislature sees light at end of tunnel

BISMARCK – It's not the end, but maybe you can see it from here. The North Dakota Legislature this week begins moving into its third and last phase, which must finish no later than April 30, its 80th day.

By: [Janell Cole](#),

BISMARCK – It's not the end, but maybe you can see it from here.

The North Dakota Legislature this week begins moving into its third and last phase, which must finish no later than April 30, its 80th day.

Most bill hearings are completed, and conference committees will soon start popping up in which lawmakers will reconcile their differences on bills. None have been appointed yet.

Most of the few dozen or so bills and resolutions still to have hearings this week are in Senate committees.

Hot topics

Several hot-button bills are awaiting committee action before they can go to the floor for a vote.

The Senate Judiciary Committee must decide what to recommend on the controversial "personhood" bill, House Bill 1572, and the chairman, Sen. David Nething, R-Jamestown, said it won't be discussed until Tuesday at the earliest. The bill has brought national attention to the state.

Nothing's committee also must act on House Bill 1445, which would require abortion providers to tell women seeking abortions that the procedure will end the life of a unique human being. Both had hearings Monday.

Also controversial and awaiting action is Senate Bill 2278, a gay rights measure that says gay men, lesbians and their supporters in North Dakotans should not be fired from their jobs or denied housing simply due to their sexual orientation.

Rep. Robin Weisz, R-Hurdsfield, said his House Human Services Committee will deliberate and act on the bill Monday afternoon. A host of conservative and religious groups and individuals oppose the measure.

Also yet to be deliberated are two bills in separate committees that seek to restrict cities' rights to extend their zoning ordinances beyond their borders. The Senate Government and Veterans Affairs Committee must act on House Bill 1554 and the House Political Subdivisions Committee on Senate Bill 2027. A deal will have to be made to pass one or the other or combine the best of each.

The same goes for Senators and House members who are wrestling over bills to boost the amount of oil tax money going to cities and counties in the oil-producing counties, where roads, school buses, courthouse facilities and other infrastructure are suffering from the effects of heavy oil boom traffic. The conundrum is whether to enact Senate Bill 2229, which is in the House or House Bill 1304, which is in the Senate.

Then there is the agreement that will have to be reached between the House and the Senate on state agency funding bills, where the House trimmed operating and salary funds and the Senate is busy amending it all back in.

Here, by the numbers is a rundown on what's left:

- As of Friday afternoon, the House has about 140 bills left to act on, plus any delayed bills that might be approved for introduction. Most—79—are still being considered in the Appropriations Committee; 28 are still in other committees and about 50 ready for floor votes.

The House is behind its pace from the 2007 session. As of Friday, the 51st day of the session, it had about 20 more bills still in committee than it did on the 51st day in 2007.

- In the Senate, nearly 160 bills are left to be acted on, 55 of which are still awaiting Appropriations Committee action. About 85 bills are spread out among nine other Senate committees that still need to vote on whether to recommend passage. The remaining 20 are ready for floor votes.
- To see hearing schedules, floor calendars, to contact your legislators or read bills, consult the links at www.legis.nd.gov/assembly/61-2009/sessionlinks.html

Cole works for Forum Communications Co., which owns The Forum. She can be reached at (701) 224-0830 or forumcap@btinet.net

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=82502§ion=news>

N.D. Legislature has 29 days left

**By Janell Cole, N.D. Capitol Bureau, The Jamestown Sun
Published Monday, March 23, 2009**

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Rep. Robin Weisz, R-Hurdsfield, said his House Human Services Committee will deliberate and act on the bill Monday afternoon.

SB 2278 would add sexual orientation to the classes against whom discrimination would not be allowed in the state. The state's Human Rights Act already bars discrimination on the basis of race, sex, and disability among other characteristics. Gay men, lesbians and their supporters say North Dakotans should not be fired from their jobs or denied housing simply because of their sexual orientation. A host of conservative and religious groups and individuals oppose the measure.

Also yet to be deliberated are two bills in separate committees that seek to restrict cities' rights to extend their zoning ordinances beyond their borders. The Senate Government and Veterans Affairs Committee must act on House Bill 1554 and the House Political Subdivisions Committee on Senate Bill 2027. A deal will have to be made to pass one or the other or combine the best of each.

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Cole works for Forum Communications Co., which owns The Jamestown Sun

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/03/24/news/opinion/letters/doc49c84b2e031f3481320608.txt>

Not special, but same treatment

Mar 24, 2009 - 04:05:09 CDT

By JEANNIE SCHULTZ

Grand Forks

I was in college before I was friends with individuals who were openly homosexual. Since then, when I think of a gay man, the face of a friend, a companion, a person, comes to mind.

When I think about SB2278, I think of how many of us it affects. For the majority of us a vote “yes” means friends and family members simply have equal rights and cannot be discriminated against.

Stereotypes and prejudices are easy to adhere to, that’s why they thrive. However, poor decisions are made by individuals — not races, genders, religions or homosexuals. It has been argued that this is the “predatory heterosexual dream bill.” I propose that if an individual is seeking to do already illegal, predatory sexual acts — that person is not concerned about the law and will find ways to complete these acts regardless of this legislation. Additionally, I propose that if a lesbian woman is performing poorly at work she should be fired — based on merit and not sexual preference.

Being raised Catholic, I need only look to the Catechism for support. Paragraph 2358 calls for “respect” and that no “unjust discrimination” happen against persons with alternative sexual orientation. With this in mind, I was interested to hear how the opposition could justify discrimination. I was disappointed. I was left wondering if the opposition had read the context of the bill. Unlike Rep. Jim Kasper, I did not find these arguments “profound.”

The only concrete argument the opposition had was that individuals of varying sexual orientation don’t deserve special treatment or more protection. I agree with this. They don’t deserve special treatment or more protection under the law, they deserve equal treatment — precisely what SB2278 is designed to do.

<http://www.thedickinsonpress.com/articles/index.cfm?id=21445§ion=Opinion>

Letter: N.D. has way to go when it comes to rights

The Dickinson Press

Published Tuesday, March 24, 2009

The story, “Anti-discrimination bill draws crowd” I found to be nothing more than ignorant rhetoric.

Civil rights for gays and lesbians in North Dakota is like saying there are no alligators in Florida. Both not true.

Don't get me wrong, I grew up in the Dickinson area and that is my heritage. But, being a gay man living in North Dakota being constantly submitted to ridicule, bigotry and outright undeserved hatred would have been a recipe for disaster.

Amazingly not that far away in Minnesota, where I live in a small community, much smaller than Dickinson, I live with my partner of nine years and our children. We are accepted and made to feel welcome in our community. We are able to walk down the street as a family and not be harassed, or taunted. There is no animosity, only a family in a community that contributes and interacts as other families do.

Gay people are not out to convert your children. We live our lives day to day as most of you do. We go to the grocery, we go to church (the ones that accept us), we pay our bills and taxes, we love our children and help them grow into well-rounded individuals and we teach them acceptance, and that differences are ok.

Do we receive the same civil rights and benefits as the majority? No. Because of your bigotry and uneducated biases we are forced to seek baby steps in gaining what the Constitution guarantees to all Americans, not just you.

I know of families who do have gay and lesbian members in their family and due to ignorance those relationships are no more, how sad for you North Dakota.

Are you that willing to give up on your children, because they may be "different." Shame on you.

Dale M. Sand, Warroad, Minn.

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=82666§ion=Opinion>

Column: Pass SB 2278

**Logan C. Adams, The Jamestown Sun
Published Wednesday, March 25, 2009**

Forty below is not the only reason potential North Dakota residents choose to live elsewhere.

There's also the stigma that this rural state is a backward one where minorities are not welcome and people who are different from the norm should look to other states. We have a chance to prove this image wrong with Senate Bill 2278.

The bill, which awaits a vote in the North Dakota House of Representatives, would add sexual orientation to the criteria on which North Dakotans can not be discriminated against in terms of employment, housing and other necessities of modern life.

Critics of this bill have claimed that it makes homosexuals into a special, protected class. That is untrue. This bill would protect every single resident of this state because you do not have to be a homosexual to be discriminated against.

I say this because, though I am a heterosexual man, I have been called a "queer" — among several related words — quite a few times in my life. I have also not been on a real date in years; not because of a lack of interest, mind you, but from every attempt being met with absolute, and often hilarious, failure.

Don't worry about my dating life, I'll get that sorted out eventually. What deserves your concern is that people like me are at risk of losing their livelihoods, should their bosses be bigoted enough. Imagine that I worked at a company where my supervisor is known for disliking gays, and a rival coworker spread a rumor about my love life. If my unscrupulous colleague lied well enough and that bigoted boss believed I was gay, I could be out of a job.

I'd like to believe that no one in North Dakota could be that that prejudiced, but I know better. Luckily, I have an employer who would not make this mistake, but not all North Dakotans are so fortunate. We need SB 2278 because everyone should be protected from this sort of discrimination. Your sexuality is none of your employer's business.

Not only that, but this state's businesses will be better off economically if it passes the bill.

There is plenty of talk about a bright future for North Dakota once the economic crisis is over and oil prices pick themselves up off the floor. But for that to become a reality, this state needs people to build its work force with fresh blood, and the younger, the better.

But the stigma I mentioned at the beginning of this column hurts our chances, and failing to pass SB 2278 will only hurt it more.

My generation is the most supportive one of gay rights in American history. We grew up seeing openly gay people on television and discussed the issue of homosexuality in school. In fact, tons of us have gay friends who made us realize that, while we may not necessarily like the idea of homosexuality, we do not want to cast people out of our lives just because they are different. In fact, we like meeting people who live and act in different and possibly bizarre ways because they make life more interesting.

But if members of my generation see North Dakota vote down SB 2278, it will hit the national news and hundreds of thousands of young people will see our state saying, basically, that gay people are not welcome here. Few will approve of the decision, and thousands could very well decide to look to other places for work.

North Dakota might be doing well for now, but it cannot afford to cut itself off from so many potential workers. One of this state's worst problems is that many outside of here have never even heard of us, let alone heard anything bad. If this bill fails, the first impression many will get of us will be that of a state made up of ignorant bigots — bigots desperate to hold on to a means of hurting those who are not like them.

The opposition to this bill stands for that one thing: hurting others. It harms people to deny them employment or shelter in an apartment. When critics of SB 2278 say they want to be able to discriminate based on sexual orientation, they're saying they want to hurt people for being different.

The opposition to SB 2278 doesn't understand that letting homosexuals (or people they suspect to be homosexuals) live and prosper does not equate to approving of their sexual orientation. It just means they would be letting them be.

It is fair to argue that homosexuality is a sin, and that God commands against it. But it is for God and God alone to decide whether those suspected of sin should suffer consequences.

Our job as North Dakotans is to look out for one another and try to make our state into a better place. SB 2278 will help us achieve that.

(Logan C. Adams is the assistant editor of The Jamestown Sun. He blogs at www.areavoices.com/adams and can be reached at 701-952-8451 or by e-mail at ladams@jamestownsun.com)

<http://www.thedickinsonpress.com/articles/index.cfm?id=21569§ion=news>

Westboro Baptist Church thanks God for N.D. flooding

Ryan Johnson, Grand Forks Herald
Published Thursday, March 26, 2009

GRAND FORKS -- The Westboro Baptist Church, whose members tour the country protesting at military funerals because of America's tolerance of homosexuality, is thanking God for record flooding in North Dakota.

"God sent the flood waters to cover the evil people of Bismarck and Fargo, ND, where you flipped off God and raised your hands against His anointed by criminalizing WBC's gospel preaching against" gays and their supporters, declared a statement released Wednesday by the church, which is Topeka, Kan.

The statement referred to House Bill 1040, a N.D. state law passed in January 2007 that bars protestors from getting within 300 feet of a funeral. That law was aimed at the Westboro Baptists and its members, who protest because they believe soldiers' deaths are God's punishment for America's support of gays.

The Grand Forks Herald and The Dickinson Press are both owned by Forum Communications Co.

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/235438/>

Published March 27 2009

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By: **Associated Press**, Associated Press

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<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/235275/>

Published March 26 2009

Advocacy lacks real conscience

Vigorously debated legislation in the North Dakota Legislature, House Bill 1572, right to fetal life, and Senate Bill 2278, sexual orientation rights in employment/housing, raises an important question:
By: **Sarah Laducer**, Fargo

Vigorously debated legislation in the North Dakota Legislature, House Bill 1572, right to fetal life, and Senate Bill 2278, sexual orientation rights in employment/housing, raises an important question:

Why would a group or individual so vocally support one and condemn the other? “When the fetus whose rights you are currently fighting for grows up and is gay – will you still fight for its rights?”

Those individuals claiming a right to life, yet denying life to those already living, need to check themselves. Their advocacy needs some endurance and a little consonance.

<http://www.grandforksherald.com/event/article/id/112049/>

Published March 24 2009

Jeannie Schultz, Grand Forks, letter: Equal rights, not discrimination

The only concrete argument the opposition had was that individuals of varying sexual orientation don't deserve special treatment or more protection. I agree with this. They don't deserve special treatment or more protection under the law; they deserve equal treatment — precisely what SB 2278 is designed to do.

Equal rights, not discrimination

GRAND FORKS — I was in college before I was friends with individuals who were openly homosexual. Since then, when I think of a gay man, the face of a friend, a companion, a person, comes to mind.

When I think about Senate Bill 2278, I think of how many of us it affects. For the majority of us, a vote “yes” means friends and family members simply have equal rights and cannot be discriminated against. Stereotypes and prejudices are easy to adhere to; that's why they thrive. However, poor decisions are made by individuals — not races, genders, religions or homosexuals.

It has been argued that this is the “predatory heterosexual dream bill,” apparently because of misguided fears about public restrooms and the like. I propose that if an individual is seeking to do already illegal, predatory sexual acts, then that person is not concerned about the law and will find ways to complete these acts regardless of this legislation.

Additionally, I propose that if a lesbian woman is performing poorly at work, she should be fired — based on merit and not sexual preference.

Being raised Catholic, I need only look to the catechism for support. Paragraph 2358 calls for “respect” and that no “unjust discrimination” happen against persons with alternative sexual orientation.

With this in mind, I was interested to hear how the opposition could justify discrimination. I was disappointed. I was left wondering if the opposition had read the context of the bill. Unlike Rep. Jim Kasper, R-Fargo, I did not find these arguments “profound.” The only concrete argument the opposition had was that individuals of varying sexual orientation don't deserve special treatment or more protection. I agree with this. They don't deserve special treatment or more protection under the law; they deserve equal treatment — precisely what SB 2278 is designed to do.

Jeannie Schultz

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/235438/>

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<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/03/30/news/opinion/letters/180788.txt>

It is immoral to discriminate

Mar 30, 2009 - 04:05:12 CDT

By PAUL EVERSON

Mandan

I was so displeased to read that the House committee voted against extending discrimination protections for people based on sexual orientation. The opponents claim they don't want to carve out protections for one group of people. This is not protections for one group of people, this is giving "everyone" the rights they deserve.

Wake up people, if you don't like a group of people, for whatever reason, you still don't condone, turn away, ignore, or be complicit in the mistreatment of someone based on something as, what should be trivial, and that is the sexual orientation of a person.

Gay people are the same as you and I, they just are attracted to members of the same sex, that is all, everything else in their DNA makes them a "human" being, worthy of being treated as such.

I am appalled that there still exists any semblance of "bigotry," in this fine state of North Dakota. Maybe after this flood we are going through people will see the humanity in everyone, especially after everyone, even gay people, helped sandbag. Everyone deserves the same rights. End of story,

One last thing, if I hear another "religious" argument supporting discrimination of any kind I am going to puke. This is a copout, with people using religion for self-serving ways, all of which give religion a bad name.

Finally, the federal government overturned Colorado's amendment two years ago, which essentially was the same language and we should learn from that.

<http://www.grandforksherald.com/event/article/id/112852/>

Published March 30 2009

Margaret Erickson, Hoople, N.D.: Abandon hope, ye who fail to heed warnings

Whatever happened to true Lutheranism which Martin Luther taught? People these days don't care for sound doctrine, the sound teaching of the word of God or the "old-time religion."

HOOPLE, N.D. — The Herald's Feb. 20 story about homosexuality and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is enough to shake the foundations of our true Christian churches, few that they may be ("ELCA panel urges church to allow clergy to live in gay and lesbian relationships," Page A1).

Whatever happened to true Lutheranism which Martin Luther taught? People these days don't care for sound doctrine, the sound teaching of the word of God or the "old-time religion."

The truth was put on the scaffold when individuals from the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church of America, and the Association of American Lutheran Churches — individuals lacking in the inspired, inerrant and infallible truths of the Holy Scriptures — instigated the liberal ELCA.

Over the past 25 years, lethargic Christians in these churches have not heard God's law in all its severity and the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. Instead, they've heard philosophies of the world, which are nothing but bastions of heresy and apostasy — godless socialism.

If present conditions are not enough in the ELCA to cause every would-be Christian to get back to the teachings of the Bible, then they will have lost not only their churches but their souls as well.

Margaret Erickson

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/235693/>

Published March 29 2009

Do the right thing: Pass SB 2278

I am writing in order to ask for your support of Senate Bill 2278. From the metro legislative districts of Fargo to the rural districts of New Rockford and Watford City, individuals are looking toward you for responsible leadership at this critical juncture.

By: **Ty Hegland**, Fargo

Dear North Dakota House of Representatives:

I am writing in order to ask for your support of Senate Bill 2278. From the metro legislative districts of Fargo to the rural districts of New Rockford and Watford City, individuals are looking toward you for responsible leadership at this critical juncture.

During the past few days, the amount of rhetoric in opposition surrounding this piece of legislation has become ridiculous. Too many extreme individuals have coalesced with personal beliefs that have nothing to do with the issue. I would sincerely ask that you don't allow them to insult your intelligence. This piece of legislation is simple and clear cut: Do we believe in discrimination in North Dakota?

In my heart, I believe that the residents of North Dakota obtain the highest morals and intelligence in the nation. Never have we allowed either to be compromised due to petty beliefs by a loud minority of discriminatory individuals.

We are a state that truly upholds the "golden rule" and does not pick and choose which moral values to uphold. Furthermore, I believe that we elect our legislators to represent these values.

How you vote will be a direct reflection of your morality and whether you believe that an individual in North Dakota deserves to be discriminated against.

I am heterosexual, Christian white male like a lot of you and your colleagues. By pure fate, our backgrounds have allowed us to be in the majority in North Dakota. However, let us not rest on fate and sit quietly during this period of needed leadership.

This is your chance to support legislation that transcends and matters. Do the right thing. Vote to pass Senate Bill 2278.

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/03/29/news/opinion/letters/180774.txt>

We are people, not pedophiles

Mar 29, 2009 - 04:05:11 CDT

By JOSHUA BOSCHEE

Fargo

The North Dakota House Human Services Committee has heard the supporters and opponents of SB2278, a bill that would amend the North Dakota Human Rights Act and Fair Housing Act to include sexual orientation.

Essentially, it prevents straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender North Dakotans from losing their jobs or homes because their supervisors or landlords do not agree with their sexual orientation.

It was frightening to hear the statements made by various individuals and nonprofit representatives in opposition to the legislation. One individual graphically shared with the committee and audience the mixing of body fluids and how women sexually pleasure themselves. Another stated that passage of this bill will mean that North Dakotans will soon be able to marry and make love to their livestock, as well as referenced "colored people" as the reason why diversity initiatives are occurring.

Finally, many of the representatives associated our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender family members, co-workers, neighbors and community members as perverts, predators and pedophiles.

The testimony included extremely disturbing lies, a common fear tactic used to advocate for discrimination, non-equality and, in some cases, violence against people who are different.

I am a gay man. I have called North Dakota home my entire life and would like to continue being an advocate for this great state. I am not a pervert, predator or pedophile like many pro-discrimination advocates would like you to believe, and neither are your gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender family members, co-workers, neighbors or community members.

I ask you to contact the House Human Services Committee and the North Dakota House of Representatives to make it official that North Dakota does not support discrimination. Vote "aye" on Senate Bill 2278.

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/03/28/news/opinion/letters/180735.txt>

Sexual orientation is not a choice

Mar 28, 2009 - 08:11:54 CDT

By FLORAMAY MILLER

Bismarck

I believe people are born with sexual orientation in place. For some reason, about 10 percent of humans end up with same-sex orientation. About 10 percent of humans are born left- rather than right-handed. Sexual orientation and handedness both affect the whole person, not just one aspect.

My belief in creation over choice comes from knowing many who were born with same-sex orientation. Many are faithful churchgoers. I have witnessed the anguish, grief, fear and depression that many of them endure as they grapple with a reality they did not and would not have voluntarily chosen.

A good percentage of homosexuals do engage in heterosexual relationships, including marriage. This choice is an attempt to be like everyone else. This choice is to retain respect and avoid discrimination. Some are successful in behaving like heterosexuals. Others find it too repugnant to continue. Acting heterosexual does not change sexual orientation. If it were a choice, many would simply change.

Ms. Helberg expressed concern over individual rights to apply one's religious beliefs. Since I may not belong to the same religious community she does, I do not want her religious beliefs rather than mine to affect my employment, housing, health care, marital status or personal behavior. I don't believe any American wants that.

Religious bodies believe differently about blood transfusions, birth control, divorce, remarriage, alcohol, caffeine, makeup, clothing, cutting hair and foods. They observe different days of the week as their holy day.

In America, each person has to observe his or her own beliefs without imposing them upon persons outside their belief group. Otherwise, they are infringing on the rights of another faith. That is what religious freedom means.

FARGO FORUM

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/235856/>

THERE'S SOME MAJOR CONFUSION IN THIS

By: Heather Lambert, West Fargo

Well, now I'm just confused. Last week, the Rev. Fred "Dreamboat" Phelps informed us that the Red River Valley flood crisis was God's punishment for our tolerance of homosexuality. Just as I was wrapping my head around that factoid, the Sunday Forum features a letter writer letting us know that the flood is actually God's punishment for abortion. So, now I don't know what to think, other than the following:

- It cannot be caused by both homosexuals AND abortion, because who has fewer abortions than homosexuals? One would think that the more homosexuals we have, the less abortions. It is these sort of Catch-22s that make theology so gosh-darned interesting.
- The previous record flood for the area was in 1897. I've tried desperately to find out about the locations of the abortion clinic and gay bars in Fargo at that time, but have turned up nothing. But they must have been there, right? Otherwise, what reason would God have had to punish us way back then? Maybe Fargo's first bookstore opened then ...
- If the good Lord is doling out natural disasters based on the morality of a city's residents, how on Earth is Las Vegas still standing? I hear that place is the most deplorable town in the country. They even call it "Sin City." I'd expect it to be one giant pillar of salt by now, yet this modern Gomorrah never seems to make the news for tornadoes or firestorms or anything. Either geography and meteorology are playing a part here, or even his omniscience fails to find a loophole in "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas."

- The vengeful floodwaters will have to take out a great many fine churches on their way to strike at the local abortion clinic, which seems, at the very least, like poor planning.

Keep your chin up, F-M area. Any community that has shown the ridiculous levels of compassion, hard work, and neighborly kindness on display during this crisis is OK in God's book, I assure you. May the sound of your triumphs drown out the repugnant words of those who don't deserve to be a part of such a wonderful place.

<http://www.minotdailynews.com/page/content.detail/id/526124.html>

Supporting SB2278

POSTED: March 30, 2009

Jacob Erickson, Minot

I'm writing to support SB 2278, a bill that would add "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" to the list of protected classes in North Dakota.

As a Lutheran Christian student studying theology and currently in seminary, I believe that the vocation of Christian people is just what the Gospel tells us-love of God and of neighbor. Part of this love of neighbor includes advocating justice for people who are discriminated against in society because they are minorities, oppressed or simply because they don't seem to "fit in" with the dominant culture. Some of these people marginalized in present day society include those of minority sexual orientations and gender identities.

I recognize that not all Christians or those in other religions will agree about how to understand homosexuality. Many churches are in discussion right now about how to understand sexuality-indeed, many churches support people with variety of sexualities as a gift and example of God's grace. My own church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is in such a discussion right now. Presbyterians, Episcopalians and others are in similar processes and dialogues. But I turn to the example of the American Lutheran Church, one of the ELCA's predecessor bodies, which, even though it believed homosexuality was contrary to God's will, in 1980 decided that the church should begin publicly advocate for the full humanity of those who understand themselves as gay, lesbian or those with other gender identities, regardless. The social statement "Human Sexuality and Sexual Behavior" read as follows:

"Truth, mercy, and justice should impel members of congregations of The American Lutheran Church to review their attitudes, words, and actions regarding homosexuality. Christians need to be more understanding and more sensitive to life as experienced by those who are homosexual. They need to take leadership roles in changing public opinion, civil laws, and prevailing practices that deny justice and opportunity to any persons, homosexual or heterosexual. We all need recognition and acceptance as human beings known to and loved by God."

Advocating for the addition of "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" to the list of protected classes in North Dakota is not about special rights, it's about justice and doing what's right for human beings who may understand themselves differently than you do. Advocating against discrimination in society, against unjust hiring and firing practices, whether it be with regards to race, sex, gender, economic status or sexual orientation is, for me, a Christian and biblical value I hold on to dearly and prayerfully.

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=83328>

Gay rights bill voted down by House

By Janell Cole, The Jamestown Sun
Published Friday, April 03, 2009

BISMARCK — The North Dakota House has voted down a bill to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

The vote this afternoon to defeat Senate Bill 2278 was 54-34.

Opponents said adding sexual orientation to the classes protected in the state Human Rights Act would protect a behavior not a characteristic.

ABERDEEN NEWS

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/N/ND_XGR_GAY_LESBIAN_PROTECTION_NDOL-?SITE=SDABE&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

ND House defeats anti-gay discrimination bill

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) -- North Dakota's House has defeated legislation that was meant to protect gays and lesbians from discrimination.

Representatives voted 54-34 to reject the measure. It sought to ban discrimination in housing, employment and credit on the basis of a person's sexual orientation.

Hurdsfield Rep. Robin Weisz (WHYZ) says the bill goes too far because it protects someone against discrimination because of his or her behavior.

Supporters of the bill say it's wrong to discriminate against gays and lesbians because of their sexual orientation.

The bill is SB2278

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/04/03/news/opinion/letters/181390.txt>

Sexual orientation is about who we are

Apr 03, 2009 - 04:05:19 CDT

By LOLA HUWE

Bismarck

After attending hearings at the Capitol and reading letters to the editor, I feel I must set some people straight (no pun intended).

There seems to be some confusion about what sexual orientation is. It is about who we are, all of us, homosexual or heterosexual.

In the 20-some years since our lesbian daughter came out to us, I have met hundreds of gays. I am using gay as all encompassing, because some people cannot see or hear beyond the three middle letters in homosexual. They did not choose to be gay any more than I chose to be heterosexual. Why would someone choose to be something that is treated so despicably by others.

It seems that the opponents of SB2278 are mistaking sexual relations for sexual orientation. While sexual relations are a part of most, if not all of us, it is not who we are. Sexual orientation does not constitute a lifestyle, it is only a small part of it.

Gays have the same concerns as we heterosexuals do; having a job that will allow them to pay their bills and taxes, and helping to make their communities a better place to live. They care for their children and

see that they are raised with good morals and family values, such as respect for others, even when they are not respected, showing love instead of hate and kindness and compassion to those less fortunate than they are.

Housing and employment are not special rights, but a part of the "pursuit of happiness" we are all entitled to.

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/236162/>

Published April 03 2009

It's easy to point to blame

We have all seen various churches and/or their leaders make statements in regard to our current flood situation. Westboro Baptist Church in Kansas states, "God sent the floodwaters to cover the evil people of Bismarck and Fargo, N.D., where you flipped off God and raised your hands against his anointed ..."

Obviously the psychological stability equates David Koresh. Yet it is disturbing to see an organization try to kick a community while it's down.

By: **Sarah Laducer**, Fargo

We have all seen various churches and/or their leaders make statements in regard to our current flood situation. Westboro Baptist Church in Kansas states, "God sent the floodwaters to cover the evil people of Bismarck and Fargo, N.D., where you flipped off God and raised your hands against his anointed ..."

Obviously the psychological stability equates David Koresh. Yet it is disturbing to see an organization try to kick a community while it's down.

The statement caused me to think about the flooding. I grew up learning that a flood was a natural way to rejuvenate the soil, replenishing nutrients for the year's luscious harvest.

Noah and the Ark received a promise from God through a symbolic rainbow that such a worldwide destruction would never take place again (unless you're in Hollywood). That rainbow is the only connection I can see between a flood and gay people, but that symbol is of promise and hope.

It is easy to point to blame during a disaster, let alone find a positive side. However this community has done everything but dwell on blame and negativity. An organization, sports team, church or business that holds an event that pulls the community together as this flood has does not exist. Schools can hold pep rallies, the police department holds picnics, churches have family fun night, but nothing crosses barriers between age, class, disability, religion, ethnicity, sex or sexual orientation like fighting a flood.

I could never have imagined my lesbian friends and I spending a day sandbagging with the National Guard.

Don't get me wrong, the losses have been great, unfortunate and sad. However, this flood has been a natural way to not only rejuvenate the soil, but to replenish nutrients in the community. We live in an area known for welcoming community and rich soil, and despite the awful destruction, may this rainbow promise replenish the spirit.

JAMESTOWN SUN

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=83335§ion=news>

Gay rights bill defeated

*By Janell Cole, N.D. Capitol Bureau
The Jamestown Sun - 04/04/2009*

BISMARCK — House members argued Friday that outlawing discrimination against gay and lesbian North Dakotans would protect behavior that can be changed and which God abhors, then soundly voted down Senate Bill 2278.

The bill would have added sexual orientation and transgendered persons to the list of classes protected by the state's Human Rights Act from discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations.

The vote was 54-34 to kill the bill.

"There's a big difference between a behavior and a lifestyle and something you don't have a choice in," said Rep. Robin Weisz, R-Hurdsfield.

Weisz is chairman of the House Human Services Committee that heard the bill and recommended its defeat.

"I don't think it's needed. I believe it has consequences that aren't in the best interests of this state, that do intrude on the rights of others who are also protected under this great constitution," Weisz said.

Rep. Corey Mock, D-Grand Forks, one of the six sponsors of the bill, noted that 20 other states already have laws barring discrimination against gays and lesbians. In those places, he said, the laws do not grant special rights, privileges or legal immunity for sexual deviants, as some bill opponents have claimed would happen here.

"There is not a person in this chamber that is not related to or friends with someone that would be affected by Senate Bill 2278," he said. "That means people we know and love may be evicted, denied services or terminated because they are gay, straight, bisexual or transgendered with no regard or consideration of merit."

Mock and another co-sponsor, Rep. Kathy Hawken, R-Fargo, were among several bill supporters who noted how North Dakotans of all kinds came together in recent days to help others hit by or endangered by flooding.

"I'm relatively sure no one was checking the sexual orientation of the volunteer sandbaggers in Fargo. It simply didn't make a difference. People were just people," she said.

"It has been said that this is a choice," Hawken said. "Religion is also a choice but yet that's protected," she noted. "To make our Constitution work, protection must be put in statute. Right now we can and do

discriminate on our citizens based on sexual orientation."

Those who now actively protect the rights of gays and lesbians include 90 percent of the nation's Fortune 500 companies, Hawken said.

Other bill supporters noted that the state Human Rights Act also protects North Dakotans from discrimination based on their marital status, which is also a choice and not a characteristic of birth.

Several opponents cited religious beliefs

"It does violate what God wanted for this world," said Rep. Wes Belter, R-Mapleton.

Weisz and other opponents of the bill argued that the state constitution already gives gays and lesbians all the same rights that all North Dakotans have to free speech and voting, to hold office, "and have their day in court and everything else is protected the same as everyone else."

But to pass a bill protecting gays, lesbians and transgendered people's rights to jobs infringes on employers' rights to freedom of thought and expression in their own businesses, he said.

"Then their rights would supersede my rights," he said.

Cole works for Forum Communications Co., which owns The Jamestown Sun

MINOT DAILY NEWS

<http://www.minotdailynews.com/page/content.detail/id/526326.html?nav=5583>

Sexual orientation not added to discrimination law

By GWEN BRISTOL, Correspondent

BISMARCK Senate Bill 2278, which would add sexual orientation to North Dakota's discrimination law, was the first bill debated on the House floor Friday.

"This is probably one of the most difficult bills I've had to get up on in my legislative career," said Rep. Robin Weisz, R-Hurdsfield, who carried the bill.

The bill would make it so people who are gay and lesbian would be protected from losing employment, being denied credit and being evicted from their homes because of their sexual orientation. Debate was passionate.

"This is a question of civil rights," said Rep. Scott Kelsh, D-Fargo.

Rep. Corey Mock, D-Grand Forks, said not passing the bill would mean the state isn't extending equal rights to everyone. Rep. Thorpe, D-Minot, shared an experience where two gay couples he knew had to move out of the state.

"If these people were not discriminated against, this legislation wouldn't be here," he said.

Weisz said the bill is not about individuals but about the future impacts of creating a protected class for a behavior.

The bill failed the House with 34 votes for it and 54 against.

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/04/05/news/opinion/letters/181526.txt>

Let's not legislate morality

Apr 05, 2009 - 04:05:10 CDT

By MARILYN SCHOENBERG

Hebron

Oh, the ironies of life. Now the Catholic church comes out as anti to an anti-abortion bill. I supported the "personhood" bill until my bishops made me stop and think. What a mess we would have if Roe v. Wade were reversed and law enforcement had to track down abortion mothers to prosecute them for murder.

We have too many laws and too much law enforcement now. I agree we should stop the police-state trend and start leaving more people alone to "live and let live."

Just because abortion is legal doesn't mean anyone has to get an abortion. Why don't more churches have programs like the Catholic church has to give young mothers viable choices. The Catholic church is the only church I know of that has a supportive program to care for young mothers to choose adoption versus abortion, and a reconciliation weekend to help mothers heal from the guilt following abortions.

So why don't right-to-life groups refocus on becoming pro-life and help young mothers choose life instead of judging and condemning them as murderers as they do now?

And why do we have gay-rights laws? Why does anybody have to know they're gay? We shouldn't have laws against gays, but we shouldn't have laws for them, either. If you want to placate gays, you should give alcoholics civil rights, too. We alkie's can't help getting drunk, so we want our right to go to work and church drunk.

Why don't we quit legislating morality and get back to letting the government run the country and let God rule the human heart?

(This letter was written prior to the state Senate voting 29-16 Friday to reject legislation to bestow human rights on a fertilized egg, and the state House voting Friday 54-34 to reject a bill banning discrimination in housing, employment and credit on the basis of a person's sexual orientation. - Editor)

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/04/04/news/opinion/letters/181488.txt>

It's found inside the Bible

Apr 04, 2009 - 04:05:16 CDT

By RAY MAKEEFF

Bismarck

This is for all you liberals - Floramay Miller apparently doesn't read her Bible. God does not have a person born just so he can send them to hell. Each person makes that choice to believe in God or not.

Why don't you read Leviticus 18:22, "Thou shalt not lie with man-kind as with woman-kind it is abomination" - read to the end of the chapter. I also want to point out Verse 29, "For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people."

A friend of mine was married to a woman, had kids and she first turned to a lesbian in her late 30s. So, if she was born a lesbian, why did she wait until she was 30-something?

This is for all you who believe in global warming. It says in the Bible, Genesis 8:22, "While the Earth remaineth seed time and harvest and cold and heat and summer and winter and day and night shall not cease." So there isn't such a thing as global warming.

If you think it's getting warm now and if you don't become a born-again Christian and believe in Jesus Christ, where you are going is going to be a lot hotter than humans could ever make it.

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/04/04/news/opinion/letters/181486.txt>

Hatred was visceral at hearing

Apr 04, 2009 - 04:05:16 CDT

By CORINNE LEE

Bismarck

I am still reeling from my experience at the House of Representatives Human Services committee hearing on SB2278. The bill would protect people of the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transsexual community from discrimination based on their sexual orientation.

It was a shock to witness the hostility, verbal abuse and hatred directed at the GLBT community by those in opposition to this bill.

I know very well that discrimination exists against GLBT people. I hear thoughtless remarks, cruel jokes, the use of "gay" as a pejorative word (even by children in middle school and high school) on a regular basis.

However, I could actually feel the hatred from those in opposition to SB2278 as they proceeded to insult and degrade GLBT people based on misinformation, prejudice and religious dogma.

The brave people from the GLBT community who made themselves vulnerable and shared their experiences of discrimination were met with hurtful, hateful statements, attacks on their character and accusations of being perverted and depraved.

The fact that some live in fear of repercussions if they are honest about their sexual orientation makes it quite obvious that discrimination exists and that there must be laws to protect people from this shameful treatment.

The committee recommended "do not pass" on this bill. Apparently a slight majority of those committee members failed to recognize that the hearing provided undeniable evidence that vicious discrimination exists against people because of their sexual orientation.

There must be laws to protect GLBT people from abuse so they can function in our society to their fullest potential and attain job security, a home and family just like the rest of us.

I can only hope that there will be a majority of representatives who understand that this bill is necessary to provide justice for the GLBT community and that they will vote yes on SB2278.

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/04/04/news/local/181504.txt>

Discrimination bill fails

Apr 04, 2009 - 04:05:16 CDT

By BRIAN DUGGAN

Bismarck Tribune

House lawmakers defeated a bill Friday that would have expanded fair housing and employment protections to gays and lesbians.

Opponents to the bill said that sexuality is a behavioral choice that should not be tied to other protected classes such as race, gender, disability and religious beliefs. The House voted 54-34 in opposition.

Rep. Robin Weisz, R-Hurdsfield, said defining sexual orientation as a protected class under North Dakota statutes would mean people who believe that homosexual orientation is wrong, including himself, would be unable to express their religious or moral beliefs.

"Sexual orientation is not something that you're born with, that you have no choice in," Weisz said. "If you're born black, you can't wake up one day and say, 'I'd really like to be white.'"

Supporters said the legislation is needed because discrimination does happen in North Dakota when it comes to sexual orientation, even if it's not openly done. About 20 other states have similar protections for gays and lesbians in their laws.

"There is not a person in this chamber that is not related to, or friends with someone that would be affected by SB2278," said Rep. Corey Mock, D-Grand Forks. "That means people we know and love may be evicted, denied services or terminated because they are gay, straight, bisexual or transgendered, with no regard or consideration of merit."

Kevin Tengesdal, a Bismarck graphic designer who is gay, said Friday's vote "shatters hope," and that some of his friends who are homosexuals are thinking twice about staying in North Dakota.

"It's something that I've always known all my lie," Tengesdal said of his sexuality. "I cannot see it as being

a choice. It's who we are, who the infinite creator made us to be."

Religious groups testified in opposition to the bill, saying that it would restrict First Amendment rights for those who say homosexuality is morally wrong.

Rep. Wesley Belter, R-Leonard, said his religious convictions played a role in his opposition.

"I certainly do not approve of the gay movement," Belter said. "I really think it violates what God wants for man."

Human rights groups as well as homosexuals testified in favor of the bill before lawmakers last month, telling them that the state needs to treat all people equally regardless of what happens in their private life.

They said under current North Dakota law, gays, lesbians and transgendered people would be unable to legally challenge an employer who fired them because of their sexuality.

"If you vote against SB2278, you are saying it's OK to discriminate against someone based on sexual orientation," said Rep. Jasper Schneider, D-Fargo. "This is North Dakota; we should hire and fire people based on their merits, on who they are, not what they are."

Rep. Dan Ruby, R-Minot, said employers do not have to give a reason for firing employees in North Dakota.

"To say that voting against this bill is a vote for discrimination, I reject," Ruby said.

Sen. Tom Fiebiger, D-Fargo, introduced the legislation, which passed the Senate last month 27-19.

"I'm disappointed for the folks who are still going to have to go into a work environment and can be fired because they're gay or evicted because they're gay," said Fiebiger, whose son is gay.

He added, "I'm convinced that this is going to pass, it's just a matter of when it's the way the country is heading."

(Reach reporter Brian Duggan at 223-8482 or [@bismarcktribune.com](mailto:brian.duggan).)

How they voted

State representatives defeated SB2278 on Friday in a 54-34 vote. The bill would have added sexual orientation to fair housing and human rights protections. The vote largely came down to party lines, with very few lawmakers crossing the aisle:

Yeas: 34

Democrats: 29

Republicans: 5

Bill Amerman, D-Forman

Merle Boucher, D-Rolette

Tom Conklin, D-Douglas

Kari Conrad, D-Minot

Lois Delmore, D-Grand Forks

Mary Ekstrom, D-Fargo
Eliot Glassheim, D-Grand Forks
Chris Griffin, D-Larimore
Ed Gruchalla, D-Fargo
Lyle Hanson, D-Jamestown
Kathy Hawken, R-Fargo
Richard Holman, D-Mayville
Nancy Johnson, R-Dickinson
Lee Kaldor, D-Mayville
George Keiser, R-Bismarck
Scot Kelsh, D-Fargo
Jerome Kelsh, D-Fullerton
Joe Kroeber, D-Jamestown
Bob Martinson, R-Bismarck
Ralph Metcalf, D-Valley City
Corey Mock, D-Grand Forks
Phillip Mueller, D-Valley City
Lee Myxter, D-Fargo
Kent Onstad, D-Parshall
Lavonne Pietsch, R-Casselton
Louis Pinkerton, D-Minot
Louise Potter, D-Grand Forks
Arlo Schmidt, D-Maddock
Jasper Schneider, D-Fargo
Elwood Thorpe, D-Minot
Ben Vig, D-Aneta
Lonny Winrich, D-Grand Forks
Lisa Wolf, D-Minot

Steven Zaiser, D-Fargo

Nay: 54

Republicans: 50

Democrats: 4

Larry Bellew, R-Minot

Wesley Belter, R-Mapleton

Rick Berg, R-Fargo

Randy Boehning, R-Fargo

Mike Brandenburg, R-Edgeley

Al Carlson, R-Fargo

Donald Clark, R-Fargo

Charles Damschen, R-Hampden

Duane DeKrey, R-Pettibone

Jeff Delzer, R-Underwood

David Drovdal, R-Arnegard

Mark Dosch, R-Bismarck

Rod Froelich, D-Selfridge

Bette Grande, R-Fargo

RaeAnn Kelsch, R-Mandan

James Kerzman, D-Mott

Lawrence Klemin, R-Bismarck

Glen Froseth, R-Kenmare

Patrick Hatlestad, R-Williston

Craig Headland, R-Montpelier

Brenda Heller, R-Beulah

Curt Hofstad, R-Devils Lake

Bob Hunskor, D-Newburg

Dennis Johnson, R-Devils Lake

Karen Karls, R-Bismarck
Jim Kasper, R-Fargo
Keith Kempenich, R-Bowman
Robert Kilichowski, D-Minot
Joyce Kingsbury, R-Grafton
Matthew Klein, R-Minot
Kim Koppelman, R-West Fargo
Gary Kreidt, R-New Salem
William Kretschmar, R-Venturia
Lisa Meier, R-Bismarck
Dave Monson, R-Osnabrock
Michael Nathe, R-Bismarck
Jon Nelson, R-Rugby
Chet Pollert, R-Carrington
Todd Porter, R-Mandan
David Rust, R-Tioga
Michael Schatz, R-New England
Bob Skarphol, R-Tioga
Gary Sukut, R-Williston
Ken Svedjan, R-Grand Forks
Blair Thoreson, R-Fargo
Dan Ruby, R-Minot
Gerry Uglem, R-Northwood
Don Vigesaa, R-Cooperstown
Frank Wald, R-Dickinson
John Wall, R-Wahpeton
Robin Weisz, R-Hurdsfield
Dave Weiler, R-Bismarck

Alon Wieland, R-West Fargo

Dwight Wrangham, R-Bismarck

Absent or not voting: 6

Republicans: 3

Democrats: 3

Tracey Boe, D-Mylo

Stacey Dahl, R-Grand Forks

Robert Frantsvog, R-Minot

Shirley Meyer, D-Dickinson

Darrell Nottestad, R-Grand Forks

Clark Williams, D-Wahpeton

FARGO FORUM

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/236499/>

Act of blind faith and intolerance

By: Richard Hasenauer, Fargo

I watched the debate on the bill that would have added sexual orientation to the list of protected classes in North Dakota on matters of housing and employment. There were absolutely no intelligent statements made in opposition to the bill.

Here are the facts: Anyone who voted against this bill is either a bigot or ignorant. It is that simple. It is not intolerant to call out bigotry, even if the bigotry is justified by faith. If your faith teaches you to treat others as second-class citizens, perhaps you should question your faith.

Blind faith is always wrong. We must question and evolve our faiths around science, not make science fit our faiths. Regardless, if you have to mention G-d when making an argument, you have no argument at all. There are good reasons why we have the separation of church and state. House members reinforced these reasons during the debate.

Those who rejected the bill cited that homosexuality is a choice. This is absurd. But giving them this, I ask, is marriage or cohabitation a choice? Should we protect heterosexuals? Maybe I am crazy, but I think logic should dictate decision-making – not emotions – and certainly not a G-d that not all of us believe in.

I hope the House members who voted against this bill are pleased they are teaching their children hate and bigotry as a family value. How very proud their children must be.

FARGO FORUM

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/236500/>

Vote on SB 2278 shames majority

By: Vicki Voldal Rosenau, Valley City, ND

We can be ashamed of the majority of North Dakota House members who voted Friday for institutionalized prejudice and discrimination in defeating Senate Bill 2278, which would have added sexual orientation to the classes of people protected by the state's Human Rights Act from inequity in housing, employment and public accommodations.

But we can be proud and grateful that 34 representatives and 27 senators did rightly vote to support this human rights measure. Thank heaven they rejected the hateful arguments that reportedly were made in the Legislature claiming that "outlawing discrimination against gays and lesbian North Dakotans would protect behavior that can be changed and that God abhors."

All too often, it's a nasty, mean-spirited world "out there." I am very thankful for the six lawmakers who sponsored SB 2278 and stood up against injustice and bigotry: Sens. Tom Fiebiger, D-Fargo; JoNell Bakke, D-Grand Forks; and John Warner, D-Ryder; and Reps. Kathy Hawken, R-Fargo; Nancy Johnson, R-Dickinson; and Corey Mock, D-Grand Forks.

FARGO FORUM

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/236501/>

Flood fight taught 'unity in diversity'

By: Maren Ortmeier, Fargo

It is a bittersweet time. While I have been e-mailing friends all over America of how proud I am to be living in Fargo, the failure to pass the bill adding GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender) as a protected status is a failure of justice for the proud people of North Dakota.

If the flood taught us anything, it was "unity in diversity." Thousands stood side by side throwing sandbags without questioning each other's religion, yearly income or sexual orientation. How could the same community who bent over backward to help strangers deny basic human rights (such as housing and employment) to anyone?

As a straight wife, mother and pro-life Catholic who has held up a picket sign reading "Choose life," I struggle to see how Christians fail to see this as blatant anti-life discrimination. This lack of defending

dignity and love is what is flawed in “the right to abortion” as well as the religious condemnation of those who don’t “fit the mold.”

It is sad that the inclusiveness Jesus lived and died for has been reduced to exclusiveness and, even worse, that it is done in his name. It is easy to understand why so many who are excluded are cynical and secular. The black-and-white labels of conservative and liberal should be replaced by compassionate.

This is not a matter of whether you believe it is moral, it is a matter of loving and not judging your neighbor. It is time to let God be the judge and for us to love our neighbors as Jesus commanded us to do.

DICKINSON PRESS

<http://www.thedickinsonpress.com/articles/index.cfm?id=21864§ion=Opinion>

Letter: Time to update views about gays, lesbians

The Dickinson Press - 04/07/2009

I am angered and saddened by the defeat of Senate Bill 2278, the “gay rights bill.”

Once again our state has chosen to dismiss the fact that a portion of our population deals with discrimination because of their sexual orientation.

Is being gay a choice? Certainly not. Scientific studies have shown that sexual orientation is innate. Do we choose to ignore science?

Then we may as well regress to beliefs of the past, such as scientific racism, which propagates the notion that some races are inferior to others, or the scientific view that women are not capable of rational thought and should not hold positions of leadership.

But our country has unequivocally legislated against these outdated viewpoints. We tackled women’s suffrage, and passed the 19th Amendment; we tackled slavery, and passed the 13th Amendment; we tackled civil rights and passed the 24th Amendment (outlawing the use of poll taxes) and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (outlawing racial segregation and gender discrimination).

When is the struggle for gay rights going to be over? When we enact legislation protecting our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender friends from those who would wish to dismiss them as deviants and unworthy of protection by law.

Colleen McKirdy, Dickinson

GRAND FORKS HERALD

<http://www.grandforksherald.com/event/article/id/113830/>

Prairie Rose, Fargo, letter: N.D. shall overcome lawmakers’ fear of rights

FARGO — Political rights were never achieved without struggle, and in North Dakota, the struggle for equality continues.

Recently, the North Dakota House voted down Senate Bill 2278, a bill that would have added sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of protected classes in North Dakota. Voices across North Dakota expressed strong support for the passing of this bill. Common people united with organized groups such as the North Dakota Student Association, North Dakota Human Rights Coalition, UND Student Senate, North Dakota State University Student Senate, Fargo City Commission, the Bismarck Tribune and others.

Major employers and leaders in North Dakota business, such as the North Dakota University System, MeritCare and Microsoft, include sexual orientation as a protected class in their antidiscrimination policies.

And as the North Dakota Senate and House debated the issue, thousands of North Dakotans stood up and spoke out against discrimination.

Many other states have already passed legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. The North Dakota Senate Judiciary Committee stamped “do pass” on SB2278, which went to pass through the state Senate.

But I am disappointed in our elected officials in the state House, who let fear, ignorance, intolerance and the excuse of religion deny civil rights to citizens of North Dakota. If we are to attain equality, than we need to acknowledge and break down the barriers that sustain the systems of oppression.

Faith, regardless of denomination or affiliation, has innate principles of empathy, love, compassion and humanity. Religion is not an excuse for divisive actions. Equality is attainable, and every North Dakotan and American has the right to employment, housing and public accommodation.

I thank the senators and Representatives who voted in favor of the bill. A special thanks to those who spoke bravely in support of its passage. Together in solidarity, we continue to make the change for what is just and right for our community and state.

Prairie Rose

Rose chairs the Fargo Human Relations Commission.

GRAND FORKS HERALD

<http://www.grandforksherald.com/event/article/id/113829/>

Richard Shafer, Grand Forks, letter: Civic spirit fell short in vote on rights bill

GRAND FORKS — The North Dakota Legislature should not presume to interpret what “God abhors” as an excuse to deny our citizens basic human rights.

The defeat of Senate Bill 2778 on Friday, which wisely would have extended protection under the state Human Rights Act to North Dakota's gays and transgendered persons, means they remain at risk of falling victim to the kind of bigotry and narrow-mindedness shown by those House members who voted against the bill.

We have been very self-congratulatory regarding our collective courage in the face of recent flood conditions. How about showing similar courage and civic spirit with regard to extending democratic protections to this important minority group of fellow North Dakotans?

Richard Shafer

JAMESTOWN SUN

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=83551§ion=Opinion>

Letter to the editor: It's nice to know people can discriminate against others

Roger Pringle

The Jamestown Sun - 04/08/2009

I was tickled pink to read that our North Dakota Legislature saw fit to defeat the gay rights bill. It is good to know that discrimination is still alive and well in our state. It is nice to know that I can still discriminate against someone in the areas of employment, housing and public accommodations. Laws have been passed that make it risky to discriminate against our old favorite scapegoats — women, blacks, American Indians, Jews and the handicapped. At least we have one scapegoat left that we can legally discriminate against.

The Bible is quite clear about the detestability of homosexual behavior and suggests harsh punishment, death, as it does for cursing your parents, adultery (Leviticus 20:9-13), promiscuousness (Deuteronomy 22:20), and not keeping the sabbath (Exodus 35:2). I am proud to live in a state that still bases its laws on the Bible. I am sure that when Jesus returns to the earth he will look with favor on the Christian-based laws of North Dakota.

Every good Christian knows we must be concerned with the letter of the law and not tolerate deviance. As we must love our neighbors, we must maintain some control over who our neighbors are.

We can thank the good Lord that our legislators are such astute biblical scholars and are not swayed by public opinion or common sense.

Roger Pringle

Jamestown

BISMARCK TRIBUNE

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/04/08/news/opinion/letters/doc49dbb238205ec968492851.txt>

Which do we want to model?

**By NICOLE SAUR
Bismarck**

On the day that Iowa took a progressive step forward, North Dakota took two steps back.

I am writing in response to the article "House kills fair housing, employment bill." While saddened by the vote's outcome, the arguments behind it were appalling.

Rep. Robin Weisz's statement reminded me of something said, accepted and repeated in a time before the civil rights movement. Whether or not we believe that the LGBT community chooses their sexual orientation is not the issue. The issue is whether we as North Dakotans believe all people are created equal.

Rep. Weisz commented on the difference he sees between race and sexuality. I see more similarities. Both have had subsets marginalized due to fear and hatred, and thus, discrimination has been tolerated throughout history. Both have been used as an excuse to taunt, abuse and even murder. By spreading messages of intolerance and hatred in our newspaper, we make it easier for ourselves and others to continue to discriminate.

In the article, the focus was on the word "gay." The governing body that heard a "personhood" bill during this session ought to also put the focus of this issue on 'personhood.' Have some legislators forgotten that gay rights are human rights?

North Dakotans received national media attention for supporting each other during this year's floods. Excluding some of our neighbors from basic rights taints this sense of community. We should not be discussing whether we believe homosexuality is moral, right, innate or approved by God. We should be deciding whether we will act as a model of tolerance and acceptance, or as a model of discrimination and bigotry. I hope we choose the former.

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/04/12/news/opinion/letters/182130.txt>
Legislature ignored the call for equality

Apr 12, 2009 - 04:05:10 CDT
By PRAIRIE ROSE
Fargo

Political rights were never achieved without struggle, and in North Dakota the struggle for equality continues. We cannot forget that hatred and injustice on the basis of race and gender were once legal and a matter of national policy. Today it is difficult to comprehend why it took so long to guarantee to the most oppressed the basic civil rights of employment, housing and public accommodation.

Recently, the North Dakota House voted down Senate Bill 2278, a bill that would have added sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of protected classes in North Dakota. If passed, it would have prohibited discrimination in housing, employment, credit transaction and use of public accommodation.

Voices across North Dakota expressed strong support for the passing of this bill, common people uniting with organized groups such as the North Dakota Student Association, N.D. Human Rights Coalition, UND Student Senate, UND Student Association, the NDSU Student Senate, the NDSU University Senate, Fargo City Commission and the Fargo Human Relations Commission, the Bismarck Tribune and others.

Major employers and leaders in North Dakota business, such as the North Dakota University System, MeritCare and Microsoft include sexual orientation as a protected class in their antidiscrimination policies.

Many states in the nation have already passed legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. The N.D. Senate Judiciary Committee stamped "do pass" on SB 2278, which went to pass

through the state Senate.

Prior to the North Dakota Senate and House votes, thousands of North Dakotans stood up and spoke out against discrimination.

I am disappointed in our elected officials in the state House who let fear, ignorance, intolerance and the excuse of religion to deny civil rights to citizens of North Dakota. If we are to attain equality, than we need to acknowledge and break down the barriers that sustain the systems of oppression.

Faith, regardless of denomination or affiliation, has innate principles of empathy, love, compassion and humanity. Religion is not an excuse for divisive actions on humanity. Equality is attainable, and every North Dakotan and American has the right to employment, housing and public accommodation.

As a people, we need to be united for our prosperity and strength as a state and as a nation.

(The writer is chair of the Fargo Human Relations Commission. - Editor)

DICKINSON PRESS

<http://www.thedickinsonpress.com/articles/index.cfm?id=21963§ion=Opinion>

Letter: Support needed for anti-discrimination bill

The Dickinson Press - 04/10/2009

Thank you for printing Colleen McKirdy's letter regarding Senate bill 2278, the "gay rights bill," in the April 7 Dickinson Press.

The assertion in the news account presenting the argument that the bill was about a choice of behavior shows ignorance of all the scientific literature, as the McKirdy letter points out. The scientific evidence is so overwhelming that virtually every professional counseling and medical association also asserts that homosexuality is an inborn trait, not either an illness or a choice.

As to rights, how can we fail to support an anti-discrimination measure in the face of all the evidence that such discrimination exists? GLBT persons suffer not simply discrimination in housing and employment, but also violence with greater frequency than any other group. I hope the bill or a version of it surfaces again with greater and more informed support in the next legislative biennium.

When will we see simply the common humanity of all, gay and lesbian folks and straight folks, without the labels we figuratively paint on our foreheads. I know that many of us seek God's help to grow in acceptance of love and understanding of all sorts and conditions of humanity.

Speaking for my own small part of the religious community, I apologize for my own inaction in not writing my support of this legislation to my senators and representatives before the vote, and for my denomination's failure to speak out as well, at least insofar as I could influence that. It will be a measure of healthy growth for our society when we willingly guarantee the rights supported in Senate Bill 2278.

(Rev. Dr.) Bruce L. MacDuffie, St. John's Episcopal Church, Dickinson

DICKINSON PRESS

<http://www.thedickinsonpress.com/articles/index.cfm?id=21975§ion=Opinion>

Letter: Sexual orientation has nothing to do with equality

The Dickinson Press - 04/11/2009

In response to Tuesday's letter to the editor, we'd like to express some opposing arguments concerning gay rights.

The question was asked, "is being gay a choice?" It certainly is. The supposed "science" that claims otherwise is largely based on the sloppy science of the Kinsey Report. It has been well documented that Alfred Kinsey, an ardent atheist, had sexual perversions of his own and his report was based mostly on prison inmates, not the general population. No scientific study can conclusively state that one is born innately gay.

How does one explain the ministry of Exodus International, started by a former homosexual, that has led thousands of gays out of that lifestyle into healthy, heterosexual relationships, if they can't help being gay?

As to beliefs of the past and amendments passed, Mrs. McKirdy is comparing apples to snakes. Sexual orientation has nothing to do with one's equality or capabilities. If we insist on viewing sexual orientation as a right, then where does it end? Pedophile rights? Incest rights? Lest you pooh-pooh that; who would have thought that calling a baby a fetus and making the repeated false claim that it's not a baby until it's born, would lead us to kill our unborn in the womb, or begin to accept the idea of euthanasia?

Once again, we challenge all to think from what and where we derive our ideas of right and wrong. Calling homosexuality wrong doesn't necessarily make us or anyone else a bigot or hateful. For we know that "... while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8); that includes the homosexual, liar, cheat, drunkard, hypocrite, prideful, gossip, etc. Some of those things, we once were.

There are some beliefs we must hold on to; such as a sound, reasonable sense of moral right and wrong.

Truth doesn't cease to be true because one wants to deny it.

Gary and Cathy Ladbury, Dickinson

DICKINSON PRESS

<http://www.thedickinsonpress.com/articles/index.cfm?id=21974§ion=Opinion>

Letter: Homosexuals in need of salvation, not equality

The Dickinson Press - 04/11/2009

I am Christian, my creed is Jesus Christ. I am responding to the letter to the editor, "Time to update views about gays, lesbians" by Colleen McKirdy, April 7. I have two goals in mind: One is to challenge the content of that letter and two is to express my viewpoints on the issue of homosexuality.

First, in her second paragraph she states, "a portion of our population deals with discrimination because of their sexual orientation." I understand the "our" to refer to North Dakota. You may be right, but I have a hard time believing it. Do you have any authority for saying that? If you do I would be interested in hearing where you got that information.

Next you state, "is being gay a choice? Certainly not. Scientific studies have shown that sexual orientation is innate." That is red herring.

Natural inclination does not dictate moral acceptability. People are born sinners, yet God finds fault when they sin. Morel standards are not based on our capacity to keep them.

Next you state (I'm paraphrasing so if I am mischaracterizing, I apologize) that our country has overcome "outdated viewpoints before — women's rights, slavery and so on. Again, a red herring. In no way does the fact that this country has changed its moral views on other issues support the idea that we should change them concerning this.

Lastly, I take offense of your broadstroking anyone who is not pro-gay rights (it also seems you're implying approval of homosexuality) as a person who would consider them "deviants unworthy of protection by the law."

Part two: I love homosexual persons and I want them to know that Jesus died for their homosexuality, for their lying, stealing — all their sins. But as long as they deny that they are sinners deserving of Hell, they will deny Christ. That's what's at stake. And I am bewildered that a pastor's wife seems primarily concerned about discrimination, and not their eternal destination. They need salvation, not equality. They need forgiveness, not understanding. And so does anyone who treats them like second-class citizens.

God hates when people discriminate against homosexuals and God hates homosexuality, and Jesus died for both.

David Hegstad, Dickinson

JAMESTOWN SUN

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=83632§ion=Opinion>

Letter to the editor: Bill was meant to protect people from discrimination

Lucille Gould

The Jamestown Sun - 04/09/2009

How ironic is it that on Friday, the state of North Dakota failed to pass a bill that would outlaw discrimination against gays, and on that very same day the Supreme Court in the state of Iowa legalized gay marriage. How is it that two Midwestern agricultural states can be so completely different?

An article in Friday's Jamestown Sun, "Gay rights bill defeated," said that "House members argued Friday that outlawing discrimination against gay and lesbian North Dakotans would protect behavior that can be changed and which God abhors."

Did God himself tell the North Dakota House of Representatives that he abhors homosexuality? That would be kind of funny since it was God who created homosexuals, just like he created everyone and everything else.

Or were they influenced by the likes of preachers like Jerry Falwell or James Dobson (who claims that with treatment, homosexuals can become straight)? It was Falwell, I believe, who said the events of Sept. 11 were God's punishment for homosexuality in this country. Yeah, right.

I grew up in the Twin Cities, and living in a big city, I had the opportunity to meet and work with many gay people, and I'm glad I did. I honestly don't believe that any of them "chose" to be gay. And for the life of me, I can't understand how gay marriage could possibly be any kind of "threat" to the institution of marriage, itself.

Just because more than half of all heterosexual marriages nowadays fail, has nothing to do with gay people getting married. Anyway, the bill that didn't pass here in North Dakota didn't have anything to do with marriage, it was just a bill to protect gay people from discrimination mostly in jobs and housing. And

they won't even do that here in North Dakota. How sad is that? Maybe North Dakotans would like to live in a Christian theocracy. You know, a government run by officials who believe they are "divinely inspired."

Well, that wouldn't work either. They would just end up fighting about which church is "the true Christian Church," just like many of the Christian churches already do.

I just hope since both the churches and the state government condemn homosexuality as being bad and sinful it doesn't give some people the idea that it's OK to harass or do physical harm to gay people. Remember what happened to Mathew Sheppard in Wyoming in 1998. If something like that were to happen here, the "divinely inspired" North Dakota state government would certainly have to share the blame.

Lucille Gould

Alfred, N.D.

JAMESTOWN SUN

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=83782§ion=Opinion>

Letter to the editor: House made the right decision with SB 2278

Robert Craig

The Jamestown Sun - 04/11/2009

After reading four letters chastising the North Dakota House for its principled rejection of SB 2278, I would come to the defense of both their decision, and my beliefs.

I do agree with one writer that homosexual behavior (his choice of wording) is termed to be detestable in the Bible, which then also condemns unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, murder, envy, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, theft, adultery and drunkenness. I question what prompts the writer to believe that he is entitled to remove homosexual behavior from the list and force me to affirm it as a good thing? Did homosexual behavior become healthful and I just missed the news? Is there anything else on the list which he would have me support against my beliefs? As for Matthew Shepard, was he not murdered, which was and is still against the law, even here in this "bigoted" state?

In my 1 1/2 years of living in North Dakota (that's right — we moved here, not away) I have seen that

people here are fair and tolerant, willing to fill, deliver, stack and receive the sandbags that life sends their way, without discrimination against their neighbors. Why should we now undertake to discriminate against our neighbors by not tolerating their deeply held moral beliefs, not capriciously formed, but held from long past, based on the general understanding of God's word and will for their lives?

With many media reports of persecution of Christians from all parts of our country who merely want to live peaceful, more lives who are now under fire, being fined or fired for not conforming to the tyranny of another's values opposed to their own, I say, "Well done, North Dakota, loving and serving your neighbors unselfishly, without discrimination, during both rising waters and calm days, and repelling efforts such as SB 2278 to force discrimination against fellow citizens."

As for the death penalty statements made by the SB 2278 supporters, I encourage those writers to reach out to one of their Christian neighbors and actually, truly dialogue with them — we are all over, you know, not that hard to find — and discover that only you believe that moral offenses carry the death penalty here in this Christian age. Your Christian neighbor believes in God's grace and mercy. It's time for you to stop the slanderous, intolerant hate speech you are so willing to use against others.

Robert Craig

Jamestown

JAMESTOWN SUN

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=83915§ion=Opinion>

Letter to the editor: People who support civil rights for all should act

Jackie Hyra

The Jamestown Sun - 04/14/2009

I was disappointed and discouraged when the North Dakota House of Representatives failed to pass the bill providing human rights protection to gay, lesbian and transgendered people. What should have been an obvious "yes" vote based on basic civil rights was defeated by a group of legislators who held their personal religious beliefs above the fundamental principle of separation of church and state.

Voting to support the civil rights of others doesn't mean you accept or like those people. It simply means you accord all human beings the protections and rights you enjoy yourself.

Instead of remaining disillusioned with my state, I let this failure of government motivate me to do more than write a letter. I went to www.ndhrc.org on the Internet, joined the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition and volunteered to become active in the struggle for human rights for all.

I am sure the issue of gay, lesbian and transgendered rights will come before the Legislature again. I urge all fair-minded readers to join the NDHRC and work to ensure the right outcome next time. Contact the NDHRC at 701-239-9323 or P.O. Box 1961, Fargo, ND 58107-1961

Jackie Hyra

Jamestown

BISMARCK TRIBUNE

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/04/14/news/opinion/letters/182412.txt>

Bill's defeat a sad day for North Dakota

By JANET DALEY

Bismarck

I thank the 29 Democrats and five Republicans in the North Dakota House of Representatives for their courageous yes votes on Senate Bill 2278 to make discrimination based on someone's sexual orientation illegal.

I am deeply saddened by the bill's defeat. It is hard for me to believe that 50 Republicans and four Democrats in the House, some of whom invoked God in their decision-making, have forgotten the principles of Christian kindness and charity. My professional work in the humanities has given me opportunities to travel nationally, and everywhere I have gone, people have asked me (particularly when North Dakota is in the news for its blizzards, record snowfalls and floods) why I choose to live in this state.

It has always been relatively easy for me to respond with my belief in the goodness of the people who live here, their neighborliness, kindness to strangers, the sense of community, the lack of crime, our good schools and the quality of life here, but that vote has made a liar of me. It was a public slap in the face not just to the gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgendered among us, but to all of those who believe that all people are created equal and deserve equal protection under the law. Most studies have proven that one's sexual orientation is something we're born with, but even if it were a choice, it should be an option that is just as protected as one's choice of religion.

What a sad day for our state. And how troubling it is to have my belief in our state's humanity so clearly repudiated. The Legislature is supposedly interested in keeping and attracting young people to North Dakota, but they now have to explain that North Dakota only wants you if you are willing to live under a "don't ask, don't tell" mentality.

For all the gays and lesbians who have been living here for decades as our neighbors, friends, colleagues, church and family members like everyone else ... please know that this vote does not speak for anyone except for the 54 people in that one room in the Capitol who voted and chose discrimination over equal rights. I'm so sorry for the defeat of this bill, and I am wondering now how to explain North Dakota's hospitality and good neighborliness to the strangers who will only know us by this vote.

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/04/11/news/opinion/editorials/182110.txt>

Eminently quotable: 'We don't trust the parents'

Apr 11, 2009 - 04:05:13 CDT

"Sexual orientation is not something that you're born with, that you have no choice in. If you're born black, you can't wake up one day and say, 'I'd really like to be white.'"

Rep. Robin Weisz, R-Hurdsfield, talking in opposition to a bill that would have made it illegal to discriminate in housing and employment against gays and lesbians. The bill failed.

BISMARCK TRIBUNE

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/04/14/news/opinion/letters/182416.txt>

Denying basic human rights

By RICHARD SHAFER
Grand Forks

The North Dakota Legislature should not presume to interpret what "God abhors" as an excuse to deny our citizens basic human rights.

The defeat of Senate Bill 2778 recently, which wisely would have extended protection under the state Human Rights Act to North Dakota's gays and transgendered persons, means they remain at risk of falling victim to the kind of bigotry and narrow-mindedness shown by those House members who voted against the bill.

We have been very self-congratulatory regarding our collective courage in the face of recent flood conditions throughout the state. How about showing similar courage and civic spirit with regard to extending democratic protections to this important minority group of fellow North Dakotans?

BISMARCK TRIBUNE

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/04/11/news/opinion/letters/182116.txt>

Legislature stands against citizens' liberties

By the Rev. SUSAN LESTER
Jamestown

I am shocked.

How could our House of Representatives have turned down the opportunity to protect American citizens? The vote to not adopt the human rights bill to protect the LGBT community is truly a step backward for this state. This bill in no way would have infringed on any employer who is interested in equal opportunities for all hard-working people of this state.

Our civic leaders should be concerned about making this state a safe and desirable place to live, not creating reasons for people to leave. Justice is not being maintained - I am truly disappointed.

The opinions of this letter do not necessarily reflect those of my congregation.

(Susan Lester is the pastor of the United Church of Christ in Jamestown.)

FARGO FORUM

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/237588/>

Letters to editor show sin is alive and well

By: Martin Wishnatsky, Fargo

I would like to acknowledge all the people who wrote in lamenting the failure of Senate Bill 2278, the sexual orientation bill. The four letters printed in The Forum in early April show that sin is still alive and well, and clamoring for favorable recognition.

I also would like to acknowledge the consistency of the homosexual rights movement in branding their adversaries as nasty and mean-spirited, hateful, intolerant and ignorant bigots. Jesus told his followers to expect such persecution when they speak for righteousness.

JAMESTOWN SUN

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=84144§ion=Opinion>

Letter to the editor: Bill was about legitimizing inappropriate lifestyle

Tom J. Tracy

The Jamestown Sun - 04/17/2009

Congratulations to the North Dakota legislators who voted to kill SB 2278; the so-call gay discrimination bill. This bill had nothing to do with protecting homosexual people from discrimination. It had everything to do with legitimizing a lifestyle that is wrong, inappropriate and harmful.

It is not appropriate for a governing body to provide extra special protection for improper acts people commit. The argument that gay people are in the same category as black people and other minorities who have been legitimately discriminated against is not correct. Blacks have been discriminated against for who they were and the color of their skin. Their skin is not their sexual behavior. Why provide special protection for the sexual acts people practice, acts that most churches still see as sinful?

Homosexual organizations and the people who support them, have many goals for the future of our country. One goal is the downgrading or possible elimination of the institution of marriage between a man and women.

State legislators who voted to deny these groups another opportunity to cause great disruptions in our society are to be commended.

Tom J. Tracy

Jamestown

JAMESTOWN SUN

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=84143§ion=Opinion>

Letter to the editor: Lawmakers' action shows that diversity not welcome

Anthony Barnes

The Jamestown Sun - 04/17/2009

As a North Dakota native, I agree wholeheartedly with Roger Pringle's opinion piece printed in The Jamestown Sun April 8. I have found myself feeling a greater longing for home each time I read about the activities of the proud and true Legislature of our great 40th state, perhaps the only remaining state governing body with any common sense. With the most recent defeat of the gay rights bill, I am at the pinnacle of my feeling of homesickness and I begin to wonder why I was so foolish to have left the state in the first place.

I was astounded and disgusted to find out that in my own current state of residence, discrimination based on sexual orientation was prohibited in 1982, only a year after I was born! This indicates that while some states like Wisconsin, clearly caving to public sentiment, are unable to clear the necessary bureaucratic hurdles in creating a legitimate barrier to unwanted peoples, states like North Dakota are able to develop a cutting-edge social idea rooted in exclusion and put it into practice with efficient governing practices (and possibly some help from a merciful Christian God).

And now I'll give you the not-so sarcastic truth. Is anybody aware of the percentage of your tax dollars the state spends on keeping young people in the state and attracting businesses and professionals? I do not, but I do know an immeasurable amount of your money's worth is immediately nullified by the state's unwillingness to accept a diversity of culture.

North Dakota states that homosexuals are not protected under any anti-discriminatory law in the name of the Christian religion. This is a sad and embarrassing reflection for the state, a state clearly not afraid to announce its culture of exclusion. For starters, non-Christians and non-heterosexuals are marginalized or deterred from coming to the state. Also marginalized are people who realize that learning about, working with and understanding people who are different from you is a fact of life, even an enriching one. Believe it or not, a lot of people fall into all of these groups.

The Legislature has now made it official that the state of North Dakota does not take kindly to these people, whether they live in North Dakota or not. To assist them in keeping the riff-raff out, I will delay my

own return indefinitely, and I would encourage all young people to leave the state and discover what's beyond that state line when they turn 18.

The best part about leaving is you don't have to worry about missing anything while you're gone. If anything, North Dakota excels at delaying any recognizable positive change at all for at least 30 years.

Anthony Barnes

Milwaukee, Wis.

<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2009/04/marriage-can-wait>

Marriage Can Wait

Thu April 16, 2009 11:35 AM PST

Tom Fiebiger, a Democratic state senator from North Dakota, has mixed emotions about the events of April 3. On that morning, he learned that [Iowa](#) was to become the first state in the Midwest to recognize same-sex marriages. In the afternoon, he watched as his own state's House of Representatives voted 54-to-34 to kill a bill that would have protected North Dakotans from being fired, denied credit, or evicted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. As the father of a gay son and the bill's chief sponsor in the Senate—where it passed 27-to-19 in a bipartisan vote—Fiebiger views the Iowa ruling as "kind of bittersweet."

The news from [Vermont](#) was kind of bittersweet, too. For four days, the Iowa Supreme Court's unanimous decision was being talked about as perhaps the unlikely tipping point for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender ([LGBT](#)) rights movement. But then Vermont's legislature gave a thumbs-up to same-sex marriage, and the attention turned back toward the coasts—and ongoing battles in California and the Northeast.

While New England has several short-term prospects for same-sex marital bliss, the Midwest is primed for a bumper crop of basic anti-discrimination bills—legislation unthinkable just a few years ago—needed to build foundations for marriage equality down the road. Sure, marriage is nice and all that, but it's nicer still to have laws that make it illegal for a gay man's boss to say, "Hit the road, faggot."

A little national support now, state activists say, might mean the difference between incremental progress and a burst of progressive legislation in the Heartland. After all, just about everybody expects California and New York—where Gov. [David Paterson](#) is pushing same-sex marriage legislation—to cave at some point. But in states that have never passed a gay-rights bill, a string of legislative victories would make it hard to argue, as anti-discrimination opponents did in North Dakota, that those rights embody "New York" values. "For the people on the coasts, this is flyover territory, and nothing really important ever happens in the Midwest," says Glenn Carlson of Fair Wisconsin, a gay-rights group. "But that's really not true at all. History shows that, and the Iowa decision really affirms it."

And in these Midwestern states, where much of the groundwork is already laid, a concentrated push could also lead to domestic partnerships and marriage rights faster than many people realize. "Iowa passed their nondiscrimination bill in 2007," says Karen Mudd of Equality South Dakota Institute, "and look where they're at now."

Indeed, marriage rights in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, and Vermont were preceded by years of lobbying for more fundamental protections and benefits for same-sex couples. Until recently, in fact, activists in the Heartland were resigned to spending their time and energy blocking bills aimed at stripping away their rights. Marriage seemed like a distant goal. "We're used to playing defense," says Mudd, whose group formed two years ago to pass pro-rights legislation.

Activists like Mudd have to contend with [constitutional bans](#) on same-sex marriage—and repealing those will require unprecedented levels of public support. "It's important for people to realize why we can't have the same result that Iowa has right away," warns Fair Wisconsin's Carlson. "It raises expectations—maybe unreasonably—about what we can achieve in the next three to five years."

And yet the next legislative session could usher in a wave of game-changing achievements. Before Iowa was on anyone's lips, 2009 was already notable for the amount of pro-LGBT legislation in play. Gay-rights groups pushed anti-discrimination bills in Montana, Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Kansas, Missouri, Utah, Ohio, and North Dakota. Lawmakers in Minnesota, Indiana, and Utah sought limited rights for gay couples, like power of attorney, hospital visitation, and right of inheritance. The most controversial bills of the lot looked to expand same-sex adoption rights in Utah and create domestic partnerships in Montana and Wisconsin.

While the bills that were brought to a vote failed (narrowly), first-time legislation fared surprisingly well, and legislation reintroduced from past sessions went further through hearings, committees, and floor votes than ever before. Notably, pro-gay bills fared considerably better than anti-gay legislation. Wyoming's House nixed a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage in February, and Indiana Republicans killed a similar measure shortly thereafter. In March, conservatives tried to bring a marriage amendment to the floor in West Virginia, but were trounced, 67-to-30.

In Minnesota, a perennial attempt to preempt gay marriage was postponed until session's end before finally fizzling. Amy Johnson of OutFront Minnesota sees this as a sign that the bigots are losing traction. "I just don't think their message resonates with people," she says. "These families exist, and people are figuring it out."

Polls numbers bear this out. Well over half of Montanans say they support anti-discrimination laws; in Utah and Indiana it's about 70 percent and 80 percent, respectively. Even in states that have seen bruising campaigns against same-sex marriage, a growing number of people have apparently made peace with some level of equality. "Pretty much across the board, the responses were incredible," says Travis McAdam of the Montana Human Rights Network. "When you tell them how the law is currently drafted, people say, 'Well, that's not right, how can that be legal?'"

It's hard to say exactly when these sentiments will translate into law, for while conservative voters may believe in fairness, their elected leaders usually proceed with trepidation. "In the Midwest, I think the people, the voters, have changed more rapidly than the legislators," notes [Indiana Equality's](#) Kathy Sarris. "But legislators are beginning to notice."

That's part of the reason state-level activists are now openly optimistic about their near-term prospects. Lynne Bowman of Equality Ohio, for instance, predicts that her state's [Equal Housing and Employment Act](#) will finally pass this session, and Carlson has high hopes that Wisconsin will become the second Midwestern state to recognize same-sex relationships. "The walls are coming down faster and faster," he says. "I think we'll get our domestic partnerships."

Virtually every state-level activist I spoke with says Iowa has helped matters along considerably. "People in Wisconsin relate to people in Iowa better than people in California, Vermont, or Massachusetts," explains Carlson, who sees same-sex marriage spreading across the Midwest within five to ten years. Bowman and Sarris also predict a domino effect with more and more states acknowledging gay relationships. "I would predict that Illinois will have civil unions very quickly," Sarris says. Minnesota's Amy Johnson envisions "a three- to five-year horizon" for marriage legislation in her state, where activists' efforts have been waylaid by Republican governor Tim Pawlenty's vow to veto anything resembling a step toward same-sex marriage.

While they would welcome help from the national gay-rights crowd, the state-level folks have no intention of ceding control. "I think they can help on some of the language framing and the arguments," Fiebigler

says, "but so much of this is based on long-standing values that differ from other parts of the country...I think the local folks have a better handle on that piece."

What they do need is money, especially in states with small gay populations. But historically, national groups have been reluctant to open their wallets unless a bill is close to passage. This, state-level activists say, makes it hard for them to do the grunt work needed to secure those long-term victories.

They would also welcome national help to elect more Democrats at the state level. The latest votes on gay rights in Montana, Utah, and West Virginia were split along party lines, and leaders in Minnesota and Wisconsin stress that their outlook has improved dramatically since the Dems took power.

In Wisconsin, bigotry itself helped facilitate the power shift. "I think under Karl Rove, the Republican Party decided that this was going to be a really good wedge issue for them—and it actually was, for a few years," notes Carlson. The turning point, he says, came in 2006, when anti-gay campaigning backfired on state Republicans, likely costing them control of the statehouse. "Not to sound like it's the school yard," Carlson quips, "but they started it."

Ryan Thoreson, a Rhodes scholar, studies social anthropology at Oxford University. His work has appeared in the Advocate, the American Prospect, and the Nation.

MINOT DAILY NEWS

<http://www.minotdailynews.com/page/content.detail/id/526918.html?nav=5008>

God's judgment?

Brian D. Stein, Minot

Is the economic downturn the start of God's judgment on America? Let's look at America. In our country homosexuality is considered an "alternative lifestyle." We murder babies (unborn Down syndrome babies) that are "socially inconvenient." We change marriage partners like we are changing our clothes. We have abandoned the sanctity of commitment in all of our relationships. God judged Israel for its brutality, murder and civil warfare and He will judge America. We've had Waco, Columbine High School, church shootings, church invasions by radical homosexual groups

New York City has recorded more crime than Great Britain, Ireland, Switzerland, Spain, Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, and Denmark combined (look it up). Our culture has clearly disconnected character from actions. Our politics have condoned more murders (abortion) than we dare list.

Our entertainments celebrate fornication, adultery, violence, abhorrent social practices, and every imaginable form of evil. We have become the primary exporter of all that God abhors. Indeed "it is the worst of times." Thomas Jefferson said, "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just [and] that His justice can not sleep forever." God will forgive repented sin, but He will not condone persistent sin. If God does not judge America then He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorra.

The great and terrible day of the Lord (Joel 2:31) is near. It will be a great day for the believer, a terrible day for the unbeliever, but a worse day for the make-believer. We all fit into one of these three categories. Which one do you fit into?

BISMARCK TRIBUNE

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/articles/2009/04/19/news/opinion/letters/182774.txt>

Hopeful for our nation's morality

**By DARLENE WHITE
Hazen**

This letter is in response to the fearfulness I hear in some letters to the editor.

I feel more hopeful about the morality of our nation than I have for a long time. Economic difficulties also bring out the best in us.

Equality for all people has become more real. We have changed centuries of institutional cruelty and prejudice. It is no longer acceptable to enslave another human being based on skin color or gender. Women can vote. There is no justification for discrimination, including sexual identity. We keep moving toward treating all human beings with respect and dignity. This makes us more moral. I don't believe anyone sees abortion as a general means of birth control, but there are situations when it is needed as an option.

I would see more consistency in the anti-abortion position if it also encompassed an anti-war position. If we have strong feelings about abortion, shouldn't we have strong feelings against war which takes so many young lives?

Despite several economic difficulties, we keep moving toward treating all segments of our society with respect and protection. I see people will to work together and help each other. There are so many stories of people helping others during the flood in North Dakota and during other problem times all over the country.

I love this country and it feels very good to see it moving in a positive direction. We become more moral each time we refuse to judge others and offer respect instead. I do believe our president and first lady are examples of this principle.

JAMESTOWN SUN

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=84578§ion=Opinion>

Letter to the editor: Right-wing extremists are hypocrites on protecting life

Brad Mills

The Jamestown Sun - 04/24/2009

Is there a point at which the right-wing extremists will find their limit? Their radicalism is not just limited to the hate-mongering "tea party" lunatics marching the streets. This madness is also rampant in the state Legislature, in particular the North Dakota House of Representatives. They voted to grant full citizenship to embryos, voted in favor of bigotry and discrimination against gays, voted to protect the rights of bars to poison and kill non-smokers with secondhand smoke, voted to allow concealed weapons on college campuses so we can increase the possibility of gun battles at those institutions, voted completely against the will of the voters on the tobacco measure that was passed last year and voted to express their vicious contempt against the federal government by passing a resolution reminiscent of the proslavery secessionists. Thankfully, not all of this was put into law because the state Senate is not as radically right wing as the House and they put the brakes on at least small fraction of it all.

These right-wingers are the most unprincipled pack of self-righteous, drunk-on-power hypocrites I have ever seen. On the one hand they scream about wanting to protect the unborn and then they turn around and vote in favor of death for non-smokers. Apparently they value life in the delivery room, but not the bar.

They scream about less laws and less government and then they try to legislate our sex lives and religious beliefs through embryonic citizenship laws. After fewer than three months into the Barack Obama presidency, they scream about how the feds are becoming too overbearing, yet I don't remember

them passing any anti-federal resolutions when George W. Bush was jack hammering the Patriot Act and No Child Left Behind down the states' throats.

The Republican political strategy is to completely cleanse North Dakota of anyone who is not an angry right-wing religious extremist. Once they can accomplish this goal, North Dakota will be 100 percent Republican. The legislative actions this year are incredibly offensive toward anyone who even occasionally votes for Democrats. However, it is precisely the recipe to rid the state of these people.

Brad Mills

Jamestown

JAMESTOWN SUN

<http://www.jamestownsun.com/articles/index.cfm?id=84502§ion=Opinion>

Letter to the editor: Letter didn't convey the true meaning of what was said

Roger Pringle

The Jamestown Sun - 04/23/2009

In my April 8 letter to the editor, I wrote that I was tickled pink over the North Dakota House's rejection of Senate Bill 2278 and that I was in favor of discrimination and happy that the majority of our lawmakers did not use common sense in voting on that bill. I have learned that some people did not understand the sarcastic nature of my letter and took my words literally. I would like to make my position on this issue clear and clarify my meaning by dropping the sarcasm.

It saddened me to see that some of our legislators, who I thought were intelligent, fair-minded people, were so influenced by their bias or their perception of public opinion that they would not pass a law of simple, common decency. There is a segment of the Christian community clinging to archaic Old Testament law, preaching against homosexuality and spreading hateful propaganda, while other Christians stand quietly by and wonder if an anti-gay attitude might be all right.

I think one of the guiding principals of Christianity is to love one's neighbor. Whether we like it or not, homosexuals are our neighbors. The passing of SB 2278 would have been a small gesture in the direction of love. I meant to challenge those who call themselves Christians to examine their interpretation of the Bible and their attitudes in the light of Christ's example of love, and to consider how their attitudes may do harm to our neighbors.

Roger Pringle

Jamestown

FARGO FORUM

<http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/238486/>

Atheist ignores the evil

By: Brad Prothero, West Fargo

On April 12, The Forum published a letter in which Marcel Stratton used his God-given right to disagree with how some in the community, including The Forum, responded after the flood. Throughout his letter, it

is clear that he does not believe in anything that he cannot sense, let alone the God of the Bible. While I do not go so far as to say the flood is punishment, as some have done, I also do not go as far as Stratton and say that God does not exist and was not working in and through the people of Fargo-Moorhead during this time.

In his frustration at the community for not believing the way he does, he presents one of the common arguments against God. He says, "If all power is vested in a deity, but it is not able to prevent evil, then what good is it?" The implication is that if it is no good, we should not bother with believing in such a god. If those are the only variables, I would agree. That god is not worth much.

But what if there was more to the picture than just power and evil? What if evil is, forgive the expression, a "necessary evil"?

As mentioned above, Stratton chose to disagree. Which means that he had options: He could agree with the article or disagree. The God of the Bible, I believe, gives the human race free will, or the opportunity to choose. Some choices are more benign, like on an article in the paper. Other choices are more serious, like taking someone's life or not. Evil is a result, or consequence, of bad choices that people have the ability to make. Just like the fact that God cannot make square circles, he cannot truly give people free will without giving them the chance to make wrong choices.

The God of the Bible did not promise to take away all problems. The Bible even says that there will be struggles. The "popular view" of the God of the Bible is that because he is loving, he should take away all problems. The "biblical view" is that he shows us his love by being there to carry us through the problems we face. There is a Christian song by Scott Krippayne that puts this well. "Sometimes he calms the storm with a whispered peace be still. He can settle any sea but it doesn't mean he will. Sometimes he holds us close and lets the wind and waves go wild. Sometimes he calms the storm and other times he calms his child."

There is one other point I would like to make. God is a victim of the evil in the world as well. According to the Bible, God knew that his son, Jesus, would have to come and die to conquer evil. Thus, the God of the Bible did not take the easy way out. He would much rather put his only son through the horrors of the cross than cause humans to be robots. That is a loving God.

Stratton does not believe in this God, and that is his God-given right. Many people, though, felt God calming them and helping them through the flood.