

State hate-crime bill sent to Calendars Committee

AUSTIN (AP) — One day, Stella Byrd hopes to sit her great-grandchild on her lap and tell the child that her grandfather's death was not in vain. If Texas lawmakers pass the James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Act, named in remembrance of Stella Byrd's son, she says she will be able to do that. The House Judicial Affairs Committee approved the bill on a 7-2 vote Monday after hearing from Stella Byrd and others.

"I'll have something good to explain with what happened with this bill and maybe that will help her grow stronger," Stella Byrd told the panel.

The bill is meant to toughen penalties for crimes directed against minorities, gays, women and other groups. A similar bill has passed through a Senate committee. Reps. Will Hartnett of Irving and Robert Talton of Pasadena, the only Republicans on the committee, voted against the bill Monday.

"I oppose anything that does not treat everybody equally," Talton said. James Byrd Jr. was a black man from Jasper who was dragged to his death behind a pickup truck in 1998. Three white supremacists were convicted of capital murder. Two are awaiting execution and the third is serving life in prison.

The full House approved a James

Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Act during the 1999 legislative session, but the bill died in a Senate committee when critics said it created unnecessary distinctions for homosexuals.

This year's bill now goes to the House Calendars Committee, although bill sponsor, Senfronia Thompson, D-Houston, said she will wait to act on the bill until the full

"I'll have something good to explain what happened with this bill."

— Stella Byrd
mother of James Byrd Jr.

Senate takes action on the Senate hate crimes bill.

"I know I could pass it in the House," Thompson said when the hearing ended, after nearly five hours of testimony.

The proposed bill enhances the penalty for crimes motivated by race, religion, color, disability, sexual orientation, age, gender and national origin. It also would require that a jury determine the motive of a hate crime be proven beyond a reasonable

doubt, require counties to annually report hate crime prosecutions to the state, provide aid to smaller counties for prosecuting hate crimes, place a hate crimes coordinator in the attorney general's office and call for civil remedies.

Texas passed its first hate-crime bill in 1993. That law increased penalties if a crime was proven to be "motivated by bias and prejudice" but prosecutors have criticized it as too vague and virtually unenforceable.

Detractors say this bill punishes people for their thoughts and protects only certain classes of people.

"Hating all people is just as bad as hating a group," said Marc Levin, the vice chairman of the Young Conservatives of Texas.

"This bill protects everyone equally because everyone has a race, a color, a nationality or a sexual orientation," Thompson said.

The bill does not intrude on anyone's freedom of speech, Thompson said, because the bill calls for punishment of behavior, not punishment of thoughts.

Maria Ross of Katy said federal officials had to step in to help her get justice after she woke up on June 19 to find a cross burning in her front yard. "When I walked outside I thought I was in the twilight zone," said Ross.

Clinton speaks to software developers

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Bill Clinton, shunning discussion of the Marc Rich pardon, told business software and Internet specialists Monday he was fortunate to be president while their industry blossomed.



CLINTON

With about two dozen demonstrators gathered outside the hall protesting the Rich pardon and other of Clinton's recent political troubles, the audience of nearly 10,000 inside the convention hall gave Clinton a standing ovation before and after his speech.

Larry Ellison, Oracle Corp. CEO, introduced Clinton as a courageous leader whose aggressive moves to foster global trade — while unpopular in the former president's Democratic Party — gave America's technology leaders unprecedented opportunities to tap world markets.

Ellison invited Clinton four months ago to speak at this week's Oracle Appsworld Convention, a massive

gathering of the company's software developers and trading partners. Clinton was paid for the speech, but the fee was not disclosed. He was paid \$100,000 for his first speaking engagement after leaving the White House.

Clinton praised his audience for taking a leading role in America's prosperity during most of the past decade, and said, despite the recent downturn in technology stocks, the Internet would remain central to economic growth.

"I know there have been a few dot-coms falling on the NASDAQ for the last several months, but don't kid yourselves, the Internet is still our future," Clinton said.

Clinton told the technology leaders it was up to them to use their new political influence to support international trade, debt reduction and "dramatic" increases in spending on research and development.

Clinton also called on the industry to join government in exploring ways to make key consumer technology more available and easier to use for the poor and less educated.

The Ladies of Alpha Delta Pi Crush

Wednesday, February 21
9 p.m. - 1 a.m.

@ Riley's

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Fun, Free Events

National Engineers Week
February 18-24, 2001
Open to all majors

- PROFS Sharing Research (2/20) 10am-2pm in Zachry Lobby
- FREE Subway Lunch (2/20) 11am-1pm in ENPH Courtyard
- LIFE Moonwalk (2/20) 10am-4pm at Rudder Fountain
- Art Gallery (2/21) 9am-4pm in Zach Lobby. See the creative side of engineers.
- Video Games (2/21) 10am-3pm in Zachry Lobby
- Interviewing Skills Workshop (2/21) 7pm location TBA
- Sumo Wrestling (2/22) 11am-4pm @ Rudder Fountain Suit up and get wrestling.
- Pool/42 Tournament (2/22) 7pm-12am @ Poet's Billiards. Prizes, so play to win!

50 Years
February 18-24, 2001

Sponsored by the Student Engineers' Council

Visit <http://sec.tamu.edu/e-week> for details and a complete list of events.

Get outdoors.

bouldering

HUECO TANKS

spring break
with TAMU Outdoors

Go out west.

Horsepack
THE TEXAS FRONTIER

Registration: Now - March 1
Event Date: March 11 - 16
Cost: \$230/\$253/\$276 depending on Rec Affiliation

Registration: Now - March 1
Event Date: March 14 - 18
Cost: \$415/\$456/\$498 depending on Rec Affiliation

<http://recreports.tamu.edu>