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# Diversity & Human Rights focus

## August/September

The price of the democratic way of life is a growing appreciation of people's differences, not merely as tolerable, but as the essence of a rich and rewarding human experience. – Jerome Nathanson

## Legislating in Utah

by Rebecca Chavez-Houck,  
Utah House of Representatives  
District 24

As a state representative, I often receive equal numbers of calls or emails asking me to vote both for and against a piece of legislation. How do I make such a decision? I usually try to look at the piece of legislation through three prisms: constituency, community and constitutionality.

In regards to *constituency*, I look at how many emails or calls I have received regarding a certain bill. As a representative, I weigh the arguments made by constituents who live within my district as to why they want a certain bill supported or defeated.

I then have to weigh those concerns or requests against whether or not the bill is in the best interest of the *community-at-large*. For me *community* also includes those who may not have the numbers to lobby for my vote but whose basic human rights should be protected. These might include those who are disenfranchised or those who are marginalized because of their sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic or immigration status. I

believe we are elected to represent the interests of all who live in our state, not just voters.

There are times when the interests of each of these prisms might come into conflict with each other. If I feel there is any possibility that the *constitutionality* of a bill might be called into question, I will not vote for that bill. While I am not an attorney, I do call upon legal experts who work in specialized fields of the law (i.e., immigration, labor, civil liberties) to share case law and their interpretation of possible constitutional challenges to proposed legislation

Constitutionality also guides my decision to sponsor legislation. A case in point is my attempt to revise current adoption law to allow cohabitating adults to foster or adopt.

The current law was adopted in 2000 in an effort to prevent second-parent adoption by LGTB individuals; many heterosexuals have also had their rights to adopt taken away.

I struggle with the state designating certain individuals as second-class citizens. While many have clearly exhibited the ability to provide shelter, care, and love for children, they cannot actualize becoming a parent.



The fact that Utah is only one of three states that impedes adoption by LGTB couples calls into question the fairness of current law.

This balancing act is not an easy one, by any means. But it is important to me to represent individuals in our community whose voices are often not heard or validated. I believe that part of my role as a public official is to see that the diversity of families who live in Utah and Salt Lake City is not encumbered, but rather, embraced and valued.

**Announcing  
The Mayor's Dialogue on  
Discrimination Panel  
October 23, 2008  
6:00 p.m.  
City Council COW Room  
City & County Building  
451 South State Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor**



**PUBLIC INVITED**



## Democracy as a Counter to Hate-Groups

Tony Stewart & Norm Gissel,  
Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations

The song of democracy never sounds so clear nor resonates so far as when all citizens are equal in the eyes of the law and are fully enfranchised; where each citizen shoulders all of a democracy's obligations and receives in full measure democracy's great benefits, freedom and the rule of law. Americans know this. We learned the hard way. The Declaration of Independence contains the promise of universal equality of all citizens. The Declaration was a statement of political philosophy. It did not carry with it the rule of law. Philosophy became law shortly after the end of the Civil War when the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution was passed. The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment was largely ignored after its passage in 1868. Jim Crow laws took over much of the South and the separation of the races replaced slavery as the cultural and legal imperative throughout large portions of America. In the 1950s a small group of religious leaders, permanently fed up with the dreadful inequalities that existed, started the modern civil rights movement. This movement demanded that the promises of the Declaration and the law of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment be enforced. The vast majority of Americans agreed. What followed was a sea change in the cultural and political life of America. Millions of Americans became for the first time truly full members of our great country. Civil rights, formerly a fringe concern, became almost overnight a mainstream concern of all Americans. The promise of the Declaration in 1776 was quickly becoming the reality of modern American Society. In a democracy great cultural and political changes do not occur without a large array of opponents.

The opponents to the civil rights movement came in the form of the Klan and other Klan-like groups. As the civil rights movement progressed, these groups appeared to be permanently apoplectic and profoundly angry. They were willing to do anything to stem the tide of this historical moment in our history. There were political assassinations, murders, bombings, arson, and a host of other criminal activities. The civil rights leaders did not flinch nor did the American people. After it became apparent that there were beneficial changes in American Society by virtue of the civil rights movement, and that there was no turning back, many in the Klan started to pursue other activities; still others re-entrenched themselves in their old Klan haunts in the South and began a defensive rear guard action, yet another group looked for a new location to pursue their agendas of racial hatred and racial exclusion. The Aryan Nation was one of the latter groups. Through some social Darwinism of their own concoction, the Aryan Nation believed that the predominately white Inland Northwest, and particularly Kootenai County, Idaho, were predominately white—not because of historical reasons or for patterns of employment during World War II—but because the residents wanted to escape the rest of American Society with its rich religious and racial diversity. The Aryan Nation also believed that once exposed to their beliefs, people in the Northwest would gravitate to the Aryan cause in great numbers and gradually create an all-white society that would secede from the rest of America.

The Aryan Nation soon learned that the peoples of the Inland Northwest were not gravitating to them in any significant numbers if at all. The Aryan Nation switched tactics. The group began a prison ministry throughout the United States seeking out white prisoners to come to the Inland Northwest. They believed that if they could not change the minds of the people living in the Northwest, they would import people who shared their beliefs. It was surmised that if enough criminals came to the Aryan Nation compound — the infamous “Campus of Hate” — to learn the doctrines of vitriolic racism, and then enter our communities to preach their views, ultimately the culture would become so toxic with their venom that ordinary Idahoans would be forced to leave. This idea we had to take seriously. There are many examples of successful voluntary enclaves in our large cities to force us to take this matter seriously. Not surprisingly, as the Aryan Nation recruited criminals to North Idaho, residents experienced a decades-long crime spree of stupendous size that included murder, bombing, arson, bank robbery, armed car robbery, counterfeiting and felony assault. The Aryans came to Idaho in the early 1970s with some money, lots of time, an agenda, and a virulent anti-American set of beliefs that would place all of us in harm's way. They have now left broke, demoralized and disorganized. What went wrong for them and what went right for Idaho occupies the second half of this article. *Article continues on page 3.*

## Democracy as a Counter to Hate-Groups – continued from page 2.

The good citizens of Idaho and the Inland Northwest made the crucial decision in 1980 to organize and speak out aggressively in opposition to the message and activities of these hate groups and dedicate themselves to the promotion of human rights. The decision to organize the Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations would result in a campaign that has now lasted for almost 28 years, rallying people in support of human rights and the basic human desire to be judged fairly and with dignity. This movement sparked the creation of a significant number of other Northwest local and regional human rights groups in a successful effort to advance human rights and counter the virus of hate. Early on we developed a vision that our challenge was to promote an evolving culture in which communities would both reject hate and build a society that embraced respect and dignity for all people. In order to accomplish this goal, we made sure members from the religious, educational, business, labor, civic and political communities as well as families were included in all our efforts. It was essential to have a grassroots response to this challenge. If we as a people did what was right, hate could not thrive in our midst, as has been proven again and again throughout history. The Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations made several important decisions early in its history. We decided never to remain silent in the face of hatred. History gives no examples of the benefit of silence when hatred is on the loose. Secondly, we adopted a policy of organizing counter events during Aryan Nation activities such as the Aryan World Congress and the marches they conducted over several years. We never engaged the Aryans directly by being present at any of their events.

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We were proactive rather than reactive or confrontational. A close reading of the civil rights activities of Mohandas Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. suggested these tactics to us and ultimately proved successful here. This planned vision has led to almost three decades of a successful coordinated effort in advancing human rights. Among the successes of this large coalition of individuals and organizations was the passage of a series of Idaho anti-hate crime laws; public rallies, human rights banquets; press conferences; the now-famous Task Force “Lemons to Lemonade Campaign” that raised \$35,000 for human rights as a counter to the 1998 Aryan Nation march in Coeur d’Alene; a 23-year coordinated Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Children’s Human Rights Week in the Kootenai County Public Schools sponsored by the schools and the Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations; creation of human rights clubs in the region’s colleges and high schools; and an opportunity for speakers to attend regional and national conferences and support victims of hate crimes. In 2000 our Task Force joined with the Southern Poverty Law Center of Alabama in winning a \$6.3 million civil judgment against the Aryan Nation for victims Victoria and Jason Keenan. This case bankrupted the Aryan Nation. One of our most successful political actions was to defend and support the 2003 re-election of Hayden, Idaho Mayor Ron McIntire, when his opponent, Richard Butler, viciously attacked the mayor’s religious affiliation as a member of the LDS Faith. The 2004 death of Richard Butler brings to an end this challenging era, and launches us on a new era



with the building of a major human rights center in Coeur d’Alene, largely due to a very generous \$1 million gift from Idaho native Greg Carr.

When the dust finally settles, when we can look back with clear maturity and judgment brought to us with the passage of time, we will be able to say that the final victory over this dark and evil opponent here in Kootenai County, here in Idaho, and here in the Northwest was simply democracy at work. Democracy for each of us and to all of us.

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