

opinion

NEWS
Mary Kelli Palka
Editor

Mark Nusbaum, President

EDITORIAL BOARD
Nusbaum, Denton, Clark, Bobby Martin,
Roger Brown, Paula Horvath and
citizen editorial members.

EDITORIAL
Frank M. Denton
Editor At Large
Michael P. Clark
Editorial Page Editor

A VERSE FOR TODAY
Take heed to yourselves. If your
brother sins against you, rebuke him;
and if he repents, forgive him.
Luke 17:3

HRO: All citizens deserve protection

Like a family argument around a Thanksgiving Day dinner table, the controversy over a Human Rights Ordinance in Jacksonville has been especially painful.

Both sides are passionate. Both sides are motivated by principles they hold to be righteous.

Jacksonville's current Human Rights Ordinance protects people from discrimination according to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age and disability.

The bill would expand the protections to include LGBT people from discrimination in the areas of employment, housing and public accommodations.

In short, you could not fire people solely for being gay, you couldn't toss them out of a rental unit for being gay nor throw them out of a restaurant for being gay.

NUMBERS ALONE CANNOT JUSTIFY DISCRIMINATION

As such, the new version of the HRO has made a few important improvements. It clarifies the fact that religious institutions and nonprofits affiliated with them are exempt from the bill and that restrooms do not have to be changed if the bill is passed.

To quote, "Nothing herein shall prohibit a business or a place of public accommodation from providing single-sex restrooms, locker rooms, shower facilities, bath houses, health spas, dormitory lodging facilities and similar facilities that are by their nature distinctively private."

Our wish would be to craft a bill that both protects the rights of LGBT people and respects the beliefs of those who disagree with the ordinance.

Small businesses with fewer than 15 employees would be exempt. A proposed amendment in a City Council committee would expand that limit to 50 employees only for employment. We prefer the 15-employee limit because it is consistent with the rest of the groups

protected by the Human Rights Ordinance and because about 80 percent of Jacksonville businesses have fewer than 15 employees. Nevertheless, if a 50-employee limit is needed to pass the bill, then we would support that amendment in the spirit of compromise.

Those opposing the ordinance often have sincere religious reasons for opposition even though a number of clergy have supported the bill.

Those supporting the bill often use civil rights reasons even though some African-Americans resist that comparison.

Those opposing the bill say that there aren't enough cases of discrimination to justify the bill. And we agree that there is no evidence of widespread discrimination.

Charlene Taylor-Hill, executive director of the Human Rights Commission, told the City Council Finance Committee that she has forwarded 11 cases of discrimination related to LGBT people to the federal government in the last four years.

However, numbers alone cannot justify discrimination in any form.

Opponents claim that LGBT people are already protected by existing laws. That is partially true.

The Obama administration expanded the definition of discrimination according to sex to include sexual orientation. So far the Trump administration has followed suit; but there is no guarantee that this will continue.

But to run away from a local ordinance because there is a similar federal law looks disingenuous. There are multiple examples of similar local and federal laws.

Opponents fear there will be a rash of frivolous lawsuits erupting from such an ordinance.

That fear is unjustified.

It hasn't happened in the decades-long history of the current Human Rights Ordinance, nor has it happened elsewhere in Florida. City Councilman Jim Love asked the mayor of Tampa about that city's ordinance, and no litany of horrors erupted there.

Much of the opposition reveals a lack of knowledge of how the Human Rights Commission works to enforce current law. It prefers persuasion and collaboration. It

EDITORIAL BOARD'S VIEW ON HRO

LGBT people deserve the same protections that other minorities already have in Jacksonville's Human Rights Ordinance. Current laws are not sufficient.

The proposed bill has broad business, nonprofit and clergy support.

Numerous cities have passed similar bills and have had no problems. The same thing would happen here in Jacksonville. The fears expressed by HRO opponents are unjustified.

does not accept every claim of discrimination.

Maybe the most important reason to pass the HRO is to make a public statement that Jacksonville, like other major cities in Florida, believes in fairness, tolerance and equal opportunity for all our citizens.

We agree with opponents that Jacksonville, by and large, is a welcoming city, a great place to live. But crimes do occur here as well as the occasional case of discrimination. Sad to say, hate crimes and bullying too often involve LGBT people as victims.

Once the expansion of the Human Rights Ordinance is passed, a year from now we will look back and wonder what all the fuss was about.

After all, Mayor Lenny Curry's executive order that included city employees and thousands of city contractors in the employment section of the HRO has been free of controversy.

Following suit were the Jacksonville Sheriffs Office, JEA, the Jacksonville Transportation Authority, the Jacksonville Port Authority and the Jacksonville Aviation Authority. Not a ripple of controversy.

LGBT people deserve the same protections in the law as other special classes of people that historically have experienced discrimination, such as racial and ethnic minorities, women, the elderly and the disabled.

Jacksonville cannot be great when we look the other way when some of our citizens suffer discrimination.

MOSH exhibit

Anne Frank exhibit had a real impact

The "Anne Frank: A History for Today" exhibit at MOSH — which ends today — was the centerpiece of the Voices of Hope community initiative.

It was an initiative that focused on the importance of tolerance, mutual respect and acceptance.

Over 40 community partners came together to create 40-plus programs heard by over 4,000 guests activating important conversations about the state of racial, religious, gender and socio-economic diversity in our community and the world.

For an entire month, we witnessed a steady stream of over 30,000 visitors, including more than 5,000 school children, as they listened to volunteer docents explain how an innocent girl like Anne Frank could become a victim.

These volunteer docents were dedicated not only to the exhibit but also to educating about the dangers of discrimination.

Now the hard work begins to carry forward the lessons learned, so that what happened to Anne and her family never again happens to another group of people.

The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that the presence of hate groups is an expanding one. Their presence is noted in all 50 states and in Jacksonville. So the effort to resist hatred must be ongoing — and it is as relevant now as ever.

The exhibit and Voices of Hope served to remind us that we cannot look away from what is happening in our world because by remaining silent, we allow the senselessness of what happened to Anne to possibly happen to others.

Tremendous gratitude is extended to the many sponsors, docents, members of the advisory board and community partners for their commitment to this undertaking.

Each played an integral part of making this project a success.

The community is cordially invited to join us at MOSH today at noon as we plant a tree in memory of Anne Frank and honoring all those who have perished due to discrimination.

Arlene Wolfson, project director, Anne Frank Exhibit/Voices of Hope, MOSH Consultant, Jacksonville

Another view: Bob Gorrell Creators Syndicate



Letters from Readers

ANCIENT ADVICE

STILL RELEVANT

"The budget should be balanced, the treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled, and the assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed, lest Rome will become bankrupt. People must again learn to work instead of living on public assistance." — Cicero, 55 BC

Apparently we've learned nothing over the past 2,071 years.

James M. White, Jacksonville

HRO

CONSIDER NEGATIVES

Since some are crying "discrimination" in regard to the HRO bill, has anyone considered the negative consequences if this is passed?

As far as Shad Khan and Darnell Smith (the JAX Chamber chair) indicating that our city will suffer as a top destination for sporting events if this bill isn't passed, they obviously haven't observed that Texas hasn't been affected negatively because of it!

And although some are saying that companies looking to invest and expand in Jacksonville are asking about this issue, it's strange that those companies haven't been named!

When asked to name even one company, it was stated that the bill sponsor, Councilman Aaron Bowman, replied with, "I'm not at liberty to say."

But it was also reported that later during the 2016 ordinance debate, he stated, "The companies won't tell us."

So this must not be too big of a deal for those so-called companies to not press the issue!

Let's please not allow money to take precedence over common sense.

If one's sexual preferences were kept private, there would be no reason for anyone to be discriminated against. It's unfortunate that this proposed ordi-

nance has escalated from a mole hill to a mountain, thereby creating much division within the citizens of our community.

Becky Calhoun, Jacksonville

CIVIL RIGHTS?

OR SPECIAL INTERESTS?

Why is it that when it comes to civil rights, no one has the right to expect civility? Recently, the phrase "civil rights" has been used to beat down anyone in the way of a specific agenda.

Seems not very civil.

When "equal protection under the law for all" is replaced with "unequal protections for the special few," it is often for a well-intentioned "civil right."

Our civil liberties should be the gentle hand of opportunity for racial or ethnic minorities, the elderly, women or the disabled.

They are not a sword used to strike down all others in your path.

No one can be against civil rights.

Right?

They should be about caring for our fellow man, not the few taking care of themselves.

"Civil rights" is another phrase we have lost to the special interests.

Eduardo Balbona, Jacksonville

HRO AND RELIGION

WRONG IS WRONG

The letter from "devout Catholics" supporting the Human Rights Ordinance and quoting scripture in doing so was off base.

There are plenty of "devout Catholics" who support abortion, too. But wrong is wrong, and the Catholic Church certainly does not support the radical homosexual agenda or abortion.

The HRO is a threat to small business, just look at what the radical left has done to small, usually Christian, businesses around the country simply because they refuse to pay homage.

They use false, worn out slogans like: "A vote against gay rights (insert whatever

left wing term here you want) is racist (or homophobic or Islamophobic)."

But they are organized, vocal and supported by money from God knows where, and they believe if they shout it again and again that the weak-minded at least will believe it.

The "new" HRO is not needed!

There is plenty of anti-discrimination legislation on the books already.

Councilman Jim Love happens to live in a gay-friendly part of town. No wonder he supports their efforts — they are his constituents and future voters.

What about the 850,000 Duval County residents who don't want this legislation forced upon them?

Hint: How about Council Member Bill Gulliford's idea to let the citizens vote on it in a referendum?

If it passes, you know the LGBT advocates will not stop. They have already redefined marriage, they've trashed Christians, they've infiltrated our schools and the Boy Scouts.

When do Christians take a stand? Kill the HRO once and for all.

Mike Devine, Jacksonville

CROSSROADS FOR AMERICA

GREAT SERVICE TO READERS

While reading Thursday's edition of the Times-Union, I came across a letter by two residents that got my attention.

They spoke of an article placed as an insert in the Sunday's Times-Union, Crossroads for America.

So I retrieved the 24-page publication by Morris Publishing Group.

I read the whole 24 pages. I agreed with every page of what America needs to do.

One of the letter writers said it was "intriguing," and I agree.

This information needs to be included in the schools. It will keep you in your reading chair for the whole 24 pages.

Jim Nolting, Jacksonville

Note to readers:

To read Crossroads for America online, go to www.crossroadsforamerica.com

LETTER POLICY

■ Letters of about 200 words are preferred.

■ Include a name, address, occupation and telephone number.

Email is preferred:
letters@jacksonville.com

Mail: Letters From Readers
The Florida Times-Union
P.O. Box 1949
Jacksonville, FL 32231

Web: jacksonville.com/opinion