

# 'Hate crimes!' They're ba-ack!

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Plan to federalize penalties for 'perceptions' reappears in Congress

Posted: January 15, 2009  
11:50 pm Eastern

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A federal "hate crimes" bill that officially is to enhance punishments for "violence motivated by bias that is a relic of slavery" but is feared by Christians as a potential bludgeon against basic biblical teachings has been returned to the congressional agenda by Democratic Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee of Texas.

The proposal had been stymied during the Bush administration by the president's threat of a veto but President-elect Barack Obama's own website has promised an expansion of federal "hate crimes" laws.

The bill, the "[David Ray Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009](#)," has been pending in Congress in one form or another since at least 2007 but never was advanced into law because of stated opposition from President Bush, who found it unneeded and probably unconstitutional.



Sheila Jackson-Le

"The administration favors strong criminal penalties for violent crime, including crimes based on personal characteristics, such as race, color, religion, or national origin. However ... if [then plan at that time] were presented to the president, his senior advisers would recommend that he veto the bill," the White House said.

Former White House insider Chuck Colson, in his [Breakpoint commentary](#), has called such proposals "Thought Crimes" plans.

"This bill is not about hate. It's not even about crime. It's about outlawing peaceful speech – speech that asserts that homosexual behavior is morally wrong," he said.

A new twist for 2009, however, is the [introduction of a companion piece of legislation](#) by Jackson-Lee that would "provide support services for victims of hate crimes."

It's been referred to the Committee on the Judiciary as well as the Committees on Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce, Education and Labor, Oversight and others.

It allows victims of "hate crimes" to take federally authorized family and medical leave and collect unemployment insurance, creates grants for housing for such victims and provides counseling and "related assistance."

Well down in the long list of provisions in the second plan is an attempt to "establish and operate a national clearinghouse and resource center for information and statistics relating to ... hate crimes."

The "clearinghouse" would be run by "a private nonprofit organization," according to the legislation.

In the United Kingdom, the Christian Institute today issued an updated report on some of the cases that have developed there under similar legislation. For example, a pastor was detained for "homophobia" for reading from the biblical book of Romans, a Christian campaigner was arrested for handing out tracts and a Roman Catholic archbishop was investigated for criticizing homosexual partnerships.

"Lynette Burrows, an author and family-values campaigner, took part in a radio talk show about civil partnerships for homosexuals. Mrs.

Burrows said she did not believe that adoption by two [gay](#) men would be best for a child. Subsequently, a policewoman telephoned Mrs. Burrows to speak to her about her comments," [the report said](#). "The police officer said a 'homophobic incident' had been reported against her and that record of it would be kept by police."

The UK law has a provision recognizing that "the discussion or criticism of sexual conduct or practices or the urging of persons to refrain from or modify such conduct or practices shall not be taken of itself to be threatening or intended to stir up hatred."

But government officials have announced plans to try to remove that section, leaving even the "criticism" of homosexuality a criminal offense. In actuality, a Christian charity that serves the needs of older Christians already has been penalized by the loss of thousands in grant money because it declined to interrogate its elderly nursing home residents, many retired Christian missionaries and pastors, about their sexual orientation and promote homosexual couples within the home.

Christian organizations such as [Concerned Women for America](#), the largest women's public policy organization in the U.S., long have battled special privileges for those who engage in a specific sexual lifestyle.

The group cited an admission from Kelly Anders, a policy associate for the National Conference of State Legislatures, whose members already have acted on the issue.

"You have to make sure when you're drafting legislation that you're not punishing people for their thoughts. And that's a very difficult thing, because that's what it is," she told the CWA.

"Civil rights laws are normally based on immutable characteristics – which cannot be changed – such as skin color, sex or disability. Adding sexual orientation to hate crimes laws wrongly legitimizes the claim that sexual orientation is immutable rather than chosen behavior. Therefore, those who hold religious or moral objections to homosexuality could be prosecuted for 'hate,'" CWA said.

Matt Barber, chief of cultural affairs at [Liberty Counsel](#), has spoken out repeatedly in opposition to the idea.

"The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees equal protection under the law," he has said. "Hate crimes legislation is ... [a] violation of the Fourteenth Amendment in that it elevates one class of citizen based upon their chosen sexual behaviors above other people."

[Coral Ridge Ministries](#), launched by the late D. James Kennedy, has published a book on the issue by John Aman, which says such laws put into doubt "the future of religious liberty and freedom of speech for Christians."

Jackson-Lee's bill says Congress "finds that" crimes motivated by "the actual or perceived ... sexual orientation, gender, or disability of the victim poses a serious national problem."

It also alleges the "violence" related to such crimes impedes interstate commerce because members of "targeted groups" cannot purchase goods and services.

Jackson-Lee also claims that the "violence" is "motivated by bias that is a relic of slavery."

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