The Hate State

Is it just us, or are some of Missouri’s legislators seeking to make Missouri the most hateful state in the union? In recent months, members of the state legislature have put forward bills that would:

• Prevent schools from punshing kids who bully gays. 
• Prevent large swaths of Missourians from voting without an out-of-state ID, citing no evidence of significant evidence of voter fraud.
• Bashing women’s reproductive rights by letting hospitals, doctors and pharmacists refuse to provide services and medicine.
• Take a hard stance against immigrants.

It seems fairly evident at this point that those who put forward and support such bills are now effectively saying that they want to curtail civil rights and liberties for:

• The LGBT community
• Minorities who are disproportionately affected by voter ID laws
• Women who want to exercise freedom over their own reproductive rights.

Immigrants.

Does this sound like a throwback to the bad old days, or what?

It’s one thing to try to camouflage that the state under current leadership has made little progress on improving the economic status of its citizens in need. It’s quite another to use rhetoric, discrimination and hateful tactics to distract attention from the total lack of progress, or apparent concern, for the well being of all Missouri’s citizens.

To paraphrase from the political right’s battle-based rhetoric, this is essentially a War on Everyone Except a Particular Few. Those under many difficult circumstances.

The Missouri Senate is about to vote on a series of bills that would not be specifically tailored to the withholding of care surrounding women’s rights, stem cell research and other targets of the religious right.

Others think that we ought not to talk to those legislators who support Israel. That to us is a particularly weak argument.

Just, government cannot sacri- face every conviction about civil rights and liberties—yes, the very same rights and liberties that have so beautifully shaped our survival, growth and prosperity in America—so as not to offend those legislators whose defense of Israel is rooted in End of Days theism.

This is not only a poor approach, it’s also dangerous.

To take it logical conclusion, it enables a legislator or other leader to avoid con- demnation from the Jewish community for horrendous deprivations of liberty simply by waving the blue and white flag. Yes, we respect and strongly desire support for Israel, but its presence does not give carte blanche to evic- tate rights.

We are in the first instance all about finding common ground, building coalitions and collaborative leadership. Unfortunately, we are seeing none of it, and this is largely because those in the legislative leadership putting forth these bills have shown no evidence of respect for the values of those with whom they disagree.

Missouri government is in substantial peril of losing any semblance of being for all of the state’s population. To be meaningful, democratic and just, government cannot exclude gays, minorities, immi- grants and particular religious views from the dialogue. To do so is to create a chasm that it will be very hard, if not impos- sible, to bridge in the future.

To those who want to ignore the lessons of history or ignore the consequences of the religious right’s battle-based rhetoric, we say to you:

“This is the one night a year when everyone concerned about Jewish continuity should put aside “cur- rent events” and spend (imagine) one entire evening celebrating the “specialness” of the Jewish people, and to pass on that sense of specialness to our children and grandchildren. The 3,000-year-old universal Jewish practice of keep- ing the singular focus of Passover seders on each generation teach- ing the next about the specifically Jewish experience of “going out of Egypt” has helped keep our peo- ple together in many lands and under many difficult circum- stances. May it, and we, long continue!

Richard H. Senturia
Director, Cities of a Just and Lasting Peace in the Middle East

Questionable calendar choice

How low can you go? Strange things are happening when the venerable Jewish Light starts pro- viding a forum for the “St. Louis Palestine Solidarity Committee.”

Your ChaiLights calendar of April 11 promoting a talk by Michael Berg at the University City Library hits the Jewish community below the belt. This group’s talk does not deserve a forum in our paper.

I’m more than upset.

Jerry Koenig
Chesterfield