



opinions

ST. LOUIS JEWISH LIGHT

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314-743-3600 • Fax: 314-743-3690
E-mail: msherwin@thejewishlight.com
Address for payments:
P.O. Box 955519
St. Louis, Mo. 63195-5519

General Correspondence:
6 Millstone Campus Drive, Suite 3010
St. Louis, Mo. 63146

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The Hate State

★ Jewish Light Editorial

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 punishing kids who bully gays.
- Prevent large swaths of Missourians from voting without a state ID, despite citing no statistically 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 legislation
- 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 drastic, discriminatory 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 Religious Swath of the Straight White Male Population.

If you think as a Jew you're either immune or on the "safe" side of this attack, you are thinking wrong.

At virtually every intersection in history when minority populations have been attacked and Jews were resident in the countries in question, the moral headhunters eventually have come after us. We trust there's sufficient precedent here we don't need to cite chapter and verse, so to speak.

Some have, in our opinion, been misled by seeing some of the legislation both here and in other states—particularly the religious issues surrounding health care legislation—as preserving the constitutional separation of church and state.

While we don't normally like painting with a broad brush, in this case it's merited. Those issues are fraudulent concoctions designed to promulgate a particular religious view, not religious liberty for all. If the latter were the case, then the so-called "moral conscience" bills 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 take to task those legislators who support Israel. That to us is a particularly weak argument, unless you would sacrifice 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 a highly dangerous one. Taken to its logical conclusion, it enables a legislator or other leader to avoid condemnation 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 eviscerate human 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, immigrants and particular religious views from the dialogue. To do so is to create a chasm that it will be very hard, if not impossible, to bridge in the future.

To those who are willing to ignore the lessons of history or who minimize the importance of these issues, we say to you: We've seen this movie many times before, and there's never been a time that it ends well, either for Jews or the world.

Submit letters to the editor to Managing Editor Mike Sherwin at msherwin@thejewishlight.com. Letters may be edited for grammar, length and clarity. Letters should be no more than 250 words. Please include your name, municipality and a daytime telephone number. The *Light* will publish only one letter from an individual writer during a 60-day period. Anonymous letters will generally not be considered for publication.



By Olle Johansson, Sweden/ Cagle Cartoons

Misplaced priorities

The Missouri Senate is about to put Missouri last in the country when it comes to supporting working parents' need for child care. Why? So we can continue to let corporations and private citizens get away with not paying their taxes.

Instead of enacting a tax amnesty program that would recover more than \$70 million in back taxes, the Senate is cutting child-care assistance for low-income working parents, and services for kids who have been abused or neglected. The cuts to child care assistance will impact 6,190 children in Missouri.

Favoring tax deadbeats over vulnerable children is irresponsible. Instead of slashing services for Missouri's kids, the Senate should make sure corporations and private citizens are current on their taxes.

Terry Bloomberg
Frontenac

Preserving the theme of Passover seders

Regarding your April 4 story, "Local seders explore social justice themes, identity," I would like to offer a note to the JCRC, JCPA and other sponsors of "alternative" Passover seders that emphasize local hunger, social justice and other subjects. My answer to the question, "Why is this night different than any other night?" is: "This is the *one* night a year when anyone concerned about Jewish

★ Letters to the editor

continuity should put aside "current 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 keeping the singular focus of Passover seders on each generation teaching the next about the specifically Jewish experience of "going out of Egypt" has helped keep our people together in many lands and under many difficult circumstances. May it, and we, long continue!

Richard H. Senturia
Director, Citizens for 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 providing 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

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