

HJR 6 Speech by Representative Senfronia Thompson

I have been a member of this august body for three decades, and today is one of the all-time low points. We are going in the wrong direction, in the direction of hate and fear and discrimination. Members, we all know what this is about, this is the politics of divisiveness at its worst, a wedge issue that is meant to divide.

Members, this issue is a distraction from the real things we need to be working on. At the end of this session, this Legislature, this Leadership will not be able to deliver the people of Texas, fundamental and fair answers to the pressing issues of our day.

Let's look at what this amendment does not do: It does not give one Texas citizen meaningful tax relief. It does not reform or fully fund our education system. It does not restore one child to CHIP, who was cut from health insurance last session. It does not put one dime into raising Texas' Third World access to health care. It does not do one thing to care for or protect one elderly person or one child in this state. In fact, it does not even do anything to protect one marriage.

Members, this bill is about hate and fear and discrimination. I know something about hate and fear and discrimination. When I was a small girl, white folks used to talk about "protecting the institution of marriage" as well. What they meant was if people of my color tried to marry people of Mr. Chisum's color, you'd often find the people of my color hanging from a tree. That's what the white folks did back then to "protect marriage." Fifty years ago, white folks thought inter-racial marriages were a "threat to the institution of marriage."

Members, I'm a Christian and a proud Christian. I read the good book, and do my best to live by it. I have never read the verse where it says, "gay people can't marry." I have never read the verse where it says, "though shalt discriminate against those not like me." I have never read the verse where it says, "let's base our public policy on hate and fear and discrimination." Christianity to me is love and hope and faith and forgiveness-not hate and discrimination.

I have served in this body a lot of years-and I have seen a lot of promises broken. I should be up here demanding my 40 acres and a mule because that's another promise you broke. You used a wealthy white minister cloaked in the cloth to ease the stench of that form of discrimination.

So, now that blacks and women can vote, and now that blacks and women have equal rights-you turn your hatred to homosexuals- and you still use your misguided reading of the Bible to justify your hatred. You want to pass this ridiculous amendment so you can go home and brag? brag about what? Declare that you saved the people of Texas from what? Persons of the same sex cannot get married in this State now. Texas does not now recognize same-sex marriages, civil unions, religious unions, domestic partnerships, contractual arrangements or Christian blessings entered into in this State- or anywhere else on this planet Earth.

If you want to make your hateful political statements then that is one thing- the Chisum amendment does real harm. It repeals the contracts that many single people have paid thousands of dollars to purchase to obtain medical powers of attorney, powers of attorney, hospital visitation, joint ownership and support agreements. You have lost your way- this is obscene.

Today, you are playing to the lowest common denominator- you are putting aside the real issues of substance that we need to address so that you can instead play on the public's fears and prejudices to deceive and manipulate voters into thinking that we have done something important.

I realize that gay rights are not the same as civil rights-but I can guarantee you we are going in the wrong direction. I can not hide my skin color. In fact, in most of the South, people as pink as Rep. Wayne Smith were

still Black by law if they had a great grandparent who was African. I was unable to attend an integrated and equally funded school until I got my Master of Laws degree. There were separate and unequal facilities for nearly everything.

I got second-hand textbooks even worse than the kind you're trying to pass off on every public school student next year. I had to ride to school on the back of the bus. I had to quench my thirst from filthy coloreds-only drinking fountains. I had to enter restaurants from the kitchen door. I was banned from entering most public accommodations, even from serving on a jury.

I had to live with the fear that getting too uppity could get you killed --- or worse. I know what third-class citizenship feels like. In my first term, one of my colleagues walked up and down this aisle muttering about how Nigras should be back in the field picking cotton instead of picking out committees.

So, I have to wonder about Rep. Chisum's 3/5 of a person amendment. Some of you folks hid behind your Bible then, too, to justify your cultural prejudices, your denial of liberty, and your gunpoint robbery of human dignity.

We have worked hard at putting our prejudices against homosexuals in law. We have denied them basic job protections. We have denied them and their children freedom from bullying and harassment at school. We have tried to criminalize their very existence.

But, we have also absolved them of all family duties and responsibilities: to care for and support their spouses and children, to count their family's assets in determining public assistance, to obtain health insurance for dependents, to make end-of-life or necessary medical decisions for their life partners---sometimes even to visit in the hospital, even to defend our own country. And then, we can stand on our two hind legs and proclaim, "See, I told you homosexual families are unstable." And nearly every one of you on this Floor has a homosexual in their extended families.

Some of you have shunned and isolated these family members. Some of you, even some of the joint coauthors, have embraced them within your own family for the essence of Christianity is love. Yet, you are now poised to constitutionalize discrimination against a particular class of people.

I thought we would be debating real issues: education, health care for kids, teacher's health insurance, health care for the elderly, protecting survivors of sexual assault, protecting the pensions of seniors in nursing homes. I thought we would be debating economic development, property tax relief, protecting seniors pensions and stem cell research, to save lives of Texans who are waiting for a more abundant life. Instead we are wasting this body's time with this political stunt that is nothing more than constitutionalizing discrimination. The prejudices exhibited by members of this body disgust me.

Last week, Republicans used a political wedge issue to pull kids-sweet little vulnerable kids- out of the homes of loving parents and put them back in a state orphanage just because those parents are gay. That's disgusting. Today, we are telling homosexuals that just like people of my ilk, when I was a small child, they too are second class citizens. I have listened to all the arguments. I have listened to all of the crap.

Mr. Chisum, is a person who I consider my good friend and revere. But, I want you to know that this amendment are blowing smoke to fuel the hell-fire flames of bigotry. You are trying to protect your constituents from danger. This amendment is a CYB amendment for you to go home and talk about.

Senfronia Thompson is a Texas House Representative for District 141. You can read more about her at:

<http://www.house.state.tx.us/members/dist141/thompson.htm>

<http://www.senfroniathompson.org/>