

OUR VIEW

Fair housing law is win for community

Discrimination is wrong. The controversy engulfing the Kirksville City Council's vote to add sexual orientation to the city's fair housing ordinance (see story, page 1) has obscured the simple fact that you shouldn't be able to treat people differently because of how they look, where they're from, what they believe, whom they're attracted to or any other reason. As a result, the Index Editorial Board applauds the Council's vote to make Kirksville one of a small number of cities in Missouri — including St. Louis, Kansas City and Columbia — to offer protection against housing discrimination for gays and lesbians.

We realize some Kirksville residents are upset about the outcome of the vote because it doesn't reflect their values. If this were a different issue, they might have a point. Citizens elect councilmembers who they trust to represent their point of view. The Council isn't required to consult the public before making or changing city ordinances, but it can solicit advisory votes with regard to controversial issues. For example, after the majority of Kirksville residents voted in favor of the smoking ban, the Council unanimously voted to enact the ordinance, regardless of the councilmembers' personal opinions about the issue.

But unlike the smoking ban, which was a matter of individual preference with pros and cons that could be debated, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is a matter of civil rights. Homophobic renting practices, just like racist, sexist, xenophobic, religiously intolerant, anti-disability and other discriminatory practices, should not be tolerated.

This is not a matter of personal taste. Denying freedoms is a matter of right and wrong. If a group of people

opposed anti-theft legislation because stealing was part of their value system, should the government make stealing legal? Discrimination based on sexual orientation is an equally clear-cut issue. Let's be clear: the question of whether homosexuality is right or wrong, chosen or instilled at birth, isn't what we're addressing here. Regardless of anyone's religious values or personal views about homosexuality, no one should be deprived of a basic need like housing because of their sexual orientation.

Some Kirksville residents disagree with the Council's decision because they think landlords should have a choice about who they rent to. This argument bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the one made by people in the 1950s who opposed desegregation because they thought they should have a choice about who their children went to school with. In both cases, members of the privileged group failed to realize that they weren't really the ones being deprived of choice. Prior to *Brown v. the Board of Education*, it was black people who lacked the choice of where to attend school, and prior to the Council's housing ordinance decision, it was gays and lesbians who lacked the choice of where to live. Adding sexual orientation to the housing ordinance's nondiscrimination statement is just leveling the playing field.

The state of Missouri doesn't prohibit housing or workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation, but the cities of St. Louis, Kansas City and Columbia make both of these types of discrimination illegal. Kirksville should follow suit and ban discrimination against gays and lesbians in the workplace as well as in the housing market — it's simply the right thing to do.

CORRECTIONS

To submit corrections or to contact the editor, please e-mail index@truman.edu, call us at 660-785-4449, or send a letter to Index, 1200 Barnett Hall, Truman State University, Kirksville, Mo. 63501.

CARTOON

BY ERIN NEUMAN



Letters to the Editor

Castle doctrine can offer citizens needed protection

Molly Skyles was exactly right when she said the purpose of the castle doctrine was to give Missouri residents the right to defend themselves in their dwellings, but she stretched the meaning of the law when she said the castle doctrine gave people the right to murder others in their home. There absolutely is no exception for murder under the castle doctrine, and Skyles admitted it later in the column when she mentioned that the occupants must be defending themselves against the possibility of serious bodily harm. This means you can't shoot intruders while they're walking away with your TV or other valuables. They have to threaten you or your family with aggressive behavior before you can take action to prevent being hurt or killed. If the evidence proves otherwise, you will go to jail for unlawfully killing another person.

The law does take out the duty to retreat, which according to *State v. Gardner* was based on English common law dating back to the medieval period, before guns were widely used. As Skyles writes, the castle doctrine came into effect during the 1700s after gun ownership was more widespread. As those in the 18th century realized, running from a sword or fist fight is much different than running from a person with a gun because you can get injured or killed while you attempt to

retreat from an intruder. Requiring occupants to retreat from their own homes is dangerous and opens them to criminal and civil consequences for simply defending themselves from an intruder. The castle doctrine is necessary to give law-abiding citizens the right to protect themselves and their families from intruders when the police cannot, and focuses on protecting victims instead of expanding rights for criminals. If extreme anti-gun activists had their way and the castle doctrine was overturned, it would be less risky for criminals to break into homes, and it would endanger Missouri residents. It's easy for Skyles to say that the life of an intruder outweighs the property of a homeowner, but the castle doctrine doesn't protect your plasma TV — it protects all of us from criminals without regard for our well-being, and that is a worthy law.

Justin Logan
Junior

Study abroad programs need serious overhaul

Dana Bruxvoort's article in the March 5 issue of the Index deserves endorsement, so that in some utopian day ahead we will see a million U.S. students traveling abroad instead of the pathetically low mere 250,000 presently, with barely 11 percent, it might be added, even in possession of passports.

Yet this obscures two points that ought to merit debate: the undue isolationist problem particularly plaguing U.S. higher education and the poor relations with we foreign nationals at Truman along with others who travelers soon encounter.

Senator Durbin would have an easier time getting his colleagues to fork out overseas aid study monies. If in the first place he and his colleagues in both parties took their fiduciary duties seriously when it comes to higher education. While they travel abroad and thus encounter the finer, more broad-minded overseas state TV, Durbin and company do nothing for their constituents to challenge the four-commercial private TV monopolies that do little if anything to screen overseas news or drama.

All our senators have to dare to do is recall under U.S. law that airwaves are supposed to be free and publicly owned.

Lastly on the home front, Truman only has attempted to endorse Durbin's plans half-heartedly. The trouble with Truman programs is that for the expensive prices students are paying, they often aren't attending the best universities abroad. There should be a restructuring of the study abroad program so that division heads and individual professors take part in the program's tailoring.

Larry Iles
Kirksville Resident

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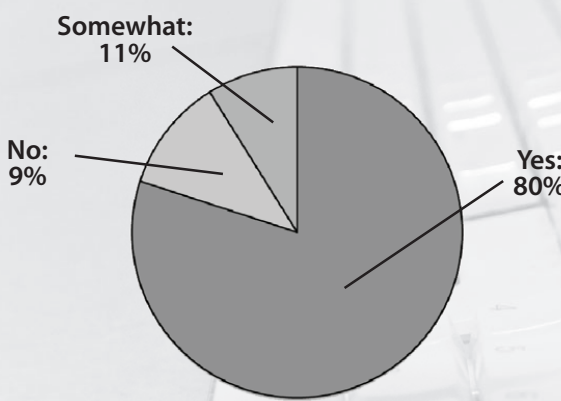
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WEB POLL

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What was going on in the

INDEX?

17 years ago – March 12, 1992

A fire destroyed a storage barn used by Sigma Phi Epsilon near its fraternity house. Arson was the cause of the blaze.