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FLOOR DEBATE

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LB 270

this bill is one of those that it took awhile for me to come around and support. It had been offered several times before 1997, but I had not been convinced that the bill was necessary and I was not going to support it, as alluring as it was, without the conviction within my own mind that it was necessary. I had spoken against it in committee. I had fought to keep it from being enacted into law. But as I began to develop a much greater awareness of the types of crimes that are committed against various members of this society, based not on something they did, but based on the way they are born or the particular religion, which is a completely voluntary activity, I didn't think the society is well-served by ignoring a very serious problem which is documented almost on a daily basis somewhere in this country. Not only have there been vicious murders of people, especially based on sexual orientation, but groups have gone to cemeteries where burials were occurring and demonstrated, carried signs, shouted insults, epithets at the mourners because of the person who was being buried, his or her sexual orientation. I thought that was the cruelest, most vicious thing in the world that could be done. Obviously, not everybody agrees with that position, because there are people who were doing such things. So different groups and organizations who keep track of crimes committed on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and whatever else is on that list, compiled statistics that justify this bill, not only here but in states around the country, would justify it in Congress. But the main thing that those statistics did, as far as I'm concerned, is to show the deep-seated pathology in the mentality of some of the people of this country. It is not enough to simply leave people alone. It is not enough even to condemn them and express hateful thoughts and ideas, all of which would be protected by the U.S. Constitution as long as threats and terroristic language would not be included. They have to go a step further and inflict horrific violence on people, which rises to the level of murder. There was a young man in Wyoming who was so viciously and brutally dealt with that when his corpse was seen wired to a fence and it had been beaten bloody, people who saw it thought it was a scarecrow or some type of effigy because they could not envision a human being having been treated in that manner. It became clear, obviously, that it was a human being, t'e remains