I thought people might like to read this - it made me feel better.
Barbary

----- Original Message -----
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Sent: Monday, July 24, 2000 8:17 PM
Subject: hate crimes speech

 [[worth reading to the end -- Rachel]]

 Georgia Representative, Donald Ponder, made this speech from the well
 of the Georgia House of Representatives.

 Remarks on SB390, Hate Crimes Legislation by Representative Dan
 Ponder, Thursday, March 16, 2000

 Thank you Mr. Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen of the House.

 I am probably the last person, the most unlikely person that you
 would expect to be speaking from the well about Hate Crime
 Legislation. And I am going to talk about it a little differently
 from a lot of the conversations that have gone on thus far. I want
 to talk about it a little more personally, about how I came to
 believe what I believe.

 About two weeks ago my family got together for my father's 70th
 birthday. It was the first time since my oldest daughter was born 19
 years ago that only the children and spouses got together, no
 grandchildren. We stayed up until 2 o'clock in the morning talking
 about hate crime legislation, this very bill. Even my family could
 not come to a resolution about this bill, but we did agree that how
 you were raised and who we are would likely influence how you would
 vote on this bill. So I want you to know a little bit about me, and
 how I came to believe what I believe.

 I am a White Republican, who lives in the very Southwest corner of
 the most ultraconservative part of this state. I grew up there. I
 have agricultural roots. I grew up hunting and fishing. I had guns
 when I was a kid. On my 12th birthday I was given that thing that
 so many southern boys receive, that shotgun from my dad that somehow
 marked me as a man. I was raised in a conservative Baptist church. I
 went to a large, mostly white Southern university. I lived in and
 was the President of the largest, totally white fraternity on that
 campus. I had 9 separate Great-Great-Great Grandfathers that fought
 for the Confederacy. I don't have a single ancestor on all of my
 family lines that lived north of the Mason-Dixon line going back to
 the Revolutionary War. And it is not something that I am terribly
 proud of, but it is just part of my heritage, that not one, but
 several of those lines actually owned slaves.

 So you would guess just by listening to my background that I am going
 to stand up here and talk against hate crime legislation. But you
 see, that's the problem when you start stereotyping people by who
 they are and where they came from, because I totally, totally
 support this bill.

 I come from a privileged background, but hate has no discrimination
 when it picks its victims. I have a Catholic brother-in-law. My
 sister could not be married in their church, and his priest refused
 to marry them because they were of different faiths. I have a Jewish
 brother-in-law. The difference in that religion has caused part of
 my family to be estranged from each other for over 25 years.

 I was the President of the largest fraternity at Auburn University,
 which won an award while I was there as the best chapter in the
 country. Out of over 100 members, 6 of those are now openly gay. But
 the "lasting bond of brotherhood" that we pledged ourselves to
 during those idealistic days apparently doesn't apply if you should
 later come out and declare yourself gay.

 Some of you know that my family had an exchange student from Kosovo
 that lived with us for six months, during the entire time of the
 fighting over there. When we last heard from her, her entire
 extended family of 26 members had not been heard from. Not one of
 them. They had all been killed or disappeared because of religious
 and ethnic differences that we cannot even begin to understand.

 My best friend in high school and college roommate's parents were
 raised in Denmark during the war. His grandfather was killed serving
 in the Resistance. For three years, that family survived because
 people left food on their doorstep during the middle of the night.
 They couldn't afford to openly give them food because they would
 then be killed themselves.

 And to Representative McKinney, we are probably as different as two
 people can be in this House based on our backgrounds. But I myself
 have also known fear, because I am a white man that was mugged and
 robbed in Chicago in a black neighborhood. And you are right. It is
 a terror that never goes away. It doesn't end when the wounds heal
 or the dollars are replaced in your wallet. It is something that you
 live with the rest of your life.

 But I want to tell you the real reason that I am standing here today.
 And this is personal, and in my five years in this House I have
 never abused my time in the well, and I only have 2 days before I
 leave this body, so I hope that you will just listen to this part
 for me.

 There was one woman in my life that made a huge difference and her
 name was Mary Ward. She began working for my family before I was
 born. She was a young black woman whose own grandmother raised my
 mother. Mary, or May-Mar as I called her, came every morning before
 I was awake to cook breakfast so it would be on the table. She
 cooked our lunch. She washed our clothes. But she was much more than
 that. She read books to me. When I was playing Little League she
 would go out and catch ball with me. She was never, ever afraid to
 discipline me or spank me. She expected the absolute best out of me,
 perhaps, and I am sure, even more than she did her own children. She
 would even travel with my family when we would go to our house in
 Florida during the summer, just as her own grandmother had done.

 One day, when I was about 12 or 13 I was leaving for school. As I was
 walking out the door she turned to kiss me good-bye. And for some
 reason, I turned my head. She stopped me and she looked into my eyes
 with a look that absolutely burns in my memory right now and she
 said, "You didn't kiss me because I am black." At that instant, I
 knew that she was right. I denied it. I made some lame excuse about
 it. But I was forced at that age to confront a small dark part of
 myself. I don't even know where it came from. This lady, who was
 devoting her whole life to me and my brother and sister, who loved me
 unconditionally, who had changed my diapers and fed me, and who was
 truly my second mother, that somehow she wasn't worthy of a
 good-bye kiss simply because of the color of her skin.

 Hate is all around us. It takes shape and form in ways that are
 somehow so small that we don't even recognize them to begin with,
 until they somehow become acceptable to us. It is up to us, as
 parents and leaders in our communities, to take a stand and to say
 loudly and clearly that this is just not acceptable.

 I have lived with the shame and memory of my betrayal of Mary Ward's
 love for me. I pledged to myself then and I re-pledged to myself the
 day I buried her that never, ever again would I look in the mirror
 and know that I had kept silent, and let hate or prejudice or
 indifference negatively impact a person's life; even if I didn't
 know them.

 Likewise, my wife and I promised to each other on the day that our
 oldest daughter was born that we would raise our children to be
 tolerant. That we would raise them to accept diversity and to
 celebrate it. In our home, someone's difference would never be a
 reason for injustice.

 When we take a stand, it can slowly make a difference. When I was a
 child, my father's plants had a lot of whites and a lot of blacks
 working in them. We had separate water fountains. We had separate
 tables that we ate at. Now my daughter is completing her first year
 at Agnes Scott College. She informed me last week that she and her
 roommate, who happens to be black, they were thrown together just
 randomly last year as first year students, had decided that they
 were going to room together again next year. I asked her the reasons
 that they had decided to live together again. She said, "Well, we
 just get along so well together." She mentioned a couple of other
 reasons, but do you know what was absent? Color. She just didn't
 think about it.

 You can make progress when you take a stand. Our exchange student,
 who grew up in a country where your differences absolutely defined
 everything about you, now lives in Dallas where a whole community of
 different races has embraced her and is teaching her how to accept
 people who are different from her and who love her.

 To those that would say that this bill is creating a special class of
 citizen, I would say...

 Who would choose to be a class of citizen or who would choose to
 be gay and risk the alienation of your own family and friends and
 coworkers?

 Who would choose to be Jewish, so that they could endure the kind
 of hatred over the years that led to the Holocaust and the near
 extinction of the Jewish people on an entire continent?

 Who would choose to be black simply so that their places of
 worship could be burned down or so that they could spend all their
 days at the back of the line?

 We are who we are because God alone chose to make us that way. The
 burdens that we bear and the problems that we are trying to correct
 with this legislation are the result of man's inhumanity to man.
 That is hardly trying to create a special class of people.

 To those that would say that we already have laws to take care of
 these crimes, I would say watch the repeats of yesterday's debate on
 the Lawmakers. We made passionate pleas on behalf of animal rights.
 We talked with revulsion about cats being wired together with barbed
 wire. Surely, surely, Matthew Sheppard's being beaten and hung up on
 a barbed wire fence and left to die is no less revolting. Surely our
 fellow man deserves no less than our pets.

 Hate crimes are different. When I was a teenager, on more than one
 water tank, I painted "Sr's of '72". Surely no one in here is going
 to tell me that the words that are painted on walls that say "Kill
 the Jews" or a swastika or "Fags must die" or "Move the Niggers" are
 somehow the same as "Sr's of '72". Even today, those very words make
 us feel uncomfortable and they should. Surely we are not going to
 equate a barroom brawl or a crime of passion with a group that
 decides, with purpose, to get in a car and go beat up blacks or gays
 or Jews without even knowing who they are.

 Hate crimes are about sending a message. The cross that was burned in
 a black person's yard not so many years ago was a message to black
 people. The gay person that is bashed walking down the sidewalk in
 midtown is a message to gay people. And the Jews that have endured
 thousands of years of persecution were all being sent messages over
 and over again.

 I would say to you that now is our turn to send a message. I am not a
 lawyer, I don't know how difficult it would be to prosecute this or
 even care. I don't really care that anyone is ever prosecuted under
 this bill. But, I do care that we take this moment in time, in
 history, to say that we are going to send a message.

 The pope is now sending a message of reconciliation to Jews and
 people throughout this world. Some of those crimes occurred 2,000
 years ago. My wife and I have sent a message to our children that we
 are all God's children and that hate is unacceptable in our home.

 I believe that we must send a message to people that are filled with
 hate in this world, that Georgia has no room for hatred within its
 borders. It is a message that we can send to the people of this
 state, but it is also a message that you have to send to yourself.

 I ask you to look within yourself and do what you think is right. I
 ask you to vote YES on this bill and NO to hate.

 Hon. Dan E. Ponder, Jr.

 FOOTNOTE: "A white, married, Republican from what he calls an
 'ultraconservative' rural district, Ponder, 45, rose to speak
 moments after the Georgia House voted 83-82 to SHELVE a proposal to
 make crimes carry tougher penalties when they are motivated by
 hatred." Then, Rep. Ponder gave the speech you just read above.
 Republicans and Democrats alike gave Ponder two standing ovations,
 then outlawed all hate crimes by a vote of 116-49. Georgia Governor
 Roy Barnes signed the new law at a synagogue scarred by
 swastika-painting vandals.

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 If you would like to let Rep. Ponder know what you think about his
 speech, you can e-mail him at: HYPERLINK "mailto:dponder@legis.state.ga.us" dponder@legis.state.ga.us or mail him
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