

# OPINION PACKAGES

## OUR VIEW

### Intolerable Senate bowed out on same-sex vote

With the disposition of a sick child in a hospital waiting room or a football fan in church on Super Bowl Sunday, Congress has put on its "I'd rather be fishing" hat.

Fishing for votes, of course.

Its actions this week are evidence of that.

With Tuesday's passage of the "Defense of Marriage Act" and the rejection of a bill that would have banned discrimination against homosexuals in the workplace, the Senate has bowed to election-year posturing.

That the Senate would give its stamp of approval to legislation denying homosexuals the same rights and benefits as married heterosexual couples is wrong.

But that it refused the anti-discrimination bill — saying that discrimination is, in fact, justified in some instances — is unconscionable.

Sen. Edward Kennedy, a chief sponsor of the anti-discrimination measure, said the bill was in line with civil rights legislation that has protected women, minorities and the disabled from prejudice in the workplace.

Such rights should be available to all Americans, regardless of sexual orientation.

"We have a really important opportunity to turn our back on bigotry, to turn our back on intolerance and to turn our back on discrimination," Kennedy said.

Indeed, the Senate had such an opportunity, but for whatever reason, it squandered the chance to stand up for the rights of all Americans.

Some said the anti-discrimination bill represented a "massive increase in federal power."

If saying no to discrimination in any form constitutes "big government," then let government grow larger.

Some said the bill would endorse a "homosexual lifestyle."

If standing up for civil rights is an endorsement of any "lifestyle," let it be one of equality.

Some said the bill would elevate homosexuals to a "special protective status by the federal government."

If creating an equal playing field in the workplace provides protective status to anyone, let it apply to all.

In this election year, same-sex marriage and gay rights have become "hot button" topics. America's leaders in Washington have successfully capitalized on that.

It's a shame they did so at the expense of a group of citizens who seek only the same rights every other American already has.

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*If standing up for civil rights is an endorsement of any 'lifestyle,' let it be one of equality”*

## MEHSLING'S VIEW



## GUEST VIEW

### Don't cast aside your right to vote

**Editor's Note:** This guest column was written by Congressman Cleo Fields, D-La., and submitted for publication by the College Democrats of America.

In 1988 I was the youngest state senator in Louisiana. I was so young that on my first day in the chambers, one of the senior senators, mistaking me for a page, asked me to get him a cup of coffee. "You're a page, aren't you?" he asked me. "No," I said, "but if you find one, get me some coffee too." So you know I know what it's like to have people disrespect you because of your age.

I ran for Congress in 1992 and won. I will complete my second term this fall. As one of the youngest members of the 103rd and 104th Congress, I have found my two terms in the House of Representatives to be both exciting and challenging. Today, however, I'm speaking to you in a new capacity. I will not run for reelection this November. Instead, I will be working with the Democratic Party as a National Youth Coordinator. I will be advising the Clinton/Gore '96 campaign on youth issues and the most effective ways to communicate with young people.

So that you understand why the youth vote is so important to me, I need to tell you a little about my background. I attended Southern University, a historically black college in Baton Rouge, La., where I served as student government president during my senior year.

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*Throughout my two terms in Congress, I've never forgotten the people who put me in office. I've never forgotten the importance of the student vote.”*

After graduating from Southern, I decided to run for state senator at age 24. During that election, I went to my alma mater to ask for the students' support — and they gave it to me. I registered 7,000 out of 10,000 total students, and with the help of those students, I won by a close margin of just 215 votes.

Throughout my two terms in Congress, I've never forgotten the people who put me in office. I've never forgotten the importance of the student vote. I wouldn't be where I am today without student organizing, and I'm going to make it my focus this fall. So as the election ap-

proaches, I will be reaching out to students at colleges and universities all over the country, encouraging them to fulfill their civic responsibility and vote in the November

elections. I want to ensure that young people have a voice in our government, and I am devoting the next two months to achieve this goal.

I think some students have the feeling that the government and what it does has little to do with them. Well let me tell you — and I've been there — it matters who you send to the nation's capital to represent you. It matters a lot. The issues that will be debated in the election and then in the Capitol building and in the White House will affect you personally — I guarantee it.

President Clinton and Vice President Gore will be talking about education, the environment, reproductive rights, the economy, jobs, crime and violence — all of the issues that affect you on your campus. It's time to pay attention.

The youth vote will be crucial in the upcoming election. The candidates know it, and you should too. Don't squander this opportunity to make your voice heard. As election day approaches, I want you to think about the issues that you care about. It's up to you to choose the candidate who you think will serve you best. And then get out there and cast your vote.

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