

the U.S. Senate with stories from the men and women whose lives were affected. Christy turned this program into an invaluable resource for Senate employees experiencing obstacles and struggles in their professional and personal lives. Her innovative methods for implementing training and programs made her a vital asset to the Senate and a devoted leader to her staff. It is our hope that the irony is not lost, that through the auspices of her professionalism, confidentiality, morality and ethics, we are prevented from hearing many such stories; only those who Christy helped know the true value of her service. Christy is a valued leader within the Sergeant at Arms and a trusted confidant to the Senate family. I thank her for her dedicated service, her unbridled patriotism and unwavering support.

STUDENT NON-DISCRIMINATION ACT

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I support the Student Non-Discrimination Act, a bill first introduced in the 111th Congress and reintroduced again now in the 114th Congress. This bill represents a critical step forward in protecting the rights of our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth to receive an education free from bullying and harassment on account of who they are and who they love. I thank Senator FRANKEN for his leadership on this issue, and I am proud to be an original cosponsor of this important civil rights legislation.

Education is the cornerstone of our democracy. In order for our system of government to thrive we must promote the education of our citizenry. It is what allows voters to make informed decisions on who they think is best fit to serve as their Representative, Senator, or President. It is a critical element of public debate and the free flow of ideas and it is what drives our economy forward and makes our country strong.

Given the importance of education, no student should be harassed in school. We must do all we can to make education accessible to all. We must ensure that schools are safe and welcoming to all children so that students can enter the classroom ready and able to learn.

Bullying touches the lives of countless young people. Each school year, LGBT students in New Jersey, and across America, are harassed, bullied, and even assaulted based on their perceived or known status as LGBT. Occasionally, these youth even experience bullying from teachers and administrators. The very people that are supposed to educate and protect these children at times serve as the root cause of the problem. Bullying a student for any reason—but especially for simply being themselves—is simply unacceptable.

The consequences of bullying can be devastating and potentially life threatening. Studies show that discrimina-

tion at schools is a major contributor to dropouts, absenteeism, and academic underachievement. LGBT youth are twice as likely as their peers to experience verbal harassment, assault, and exclusion. Suicide rates are disproportionately high among children and young adults that identify as LGBT. In fact, LGBT youth are four times more likely to commit suicide than their peers. Most alarmingly, we have seen bullying and harassment tragically lead to suicides in school districts across the country.

Allowing discrimination of LGBT to go unchecked in our schools deprives our youth from the equal access to education that they deserve. Whether that discrimination is in the form harassment or assault, we cannot stand idly by and watch our children's lives be torn apart.

The Student Non-Discrimination Act is a critical civil rights bill that would ban discrimination against any student on the basis of his or her actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

The legislation expands the Federal definition of harassment to protect the rights of LGBT students. The bill defines harassment to include severe, persistent, or pervasive conduct that would limit a student's ability to participate in a program or activity at a public school.

The bill prohibits harassment of LGBT students as a form of discrimination that is Federally protected.

All of these provisions provide the Federal Government with critical new tools to prevent the scourge of persistent and offensive bullying of youth simply because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

I am proud to be an original cosponsor of the Student Non-Discrimination Act. I urge my fellow Senators to support this bill and promptly pass it through the Senate.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

REMEMBERING WIL SMITH

• Mr. KING. Mr. President, I rise today on a sad occasion. Yesterday, Bowdoin College—indeed, the entire State of Maine—lost a truly great man. Wil Smith, who was a good friend to countless people in Maine, passed away yesterday at the age of 46 following a courageous 3-year battle with cancer.

It is difficult to encapsulate in words the remarkable depth and breadth of someone like Wil. He grew up in Jacksonville, FL, the youngest of 10 children. His mother, Mildred, passed away when he was 15 years old. After high school, Wil briefly attended Florida A&M University before enlisting in the U.S. Navy and becoming an aviation electronics technician. He served in the first gulf war and was later transferred to the Naval Air Station in Brunswick, ME.

While stationed in Brunswick, Wil began coaching football at Brunswick

Middle School. It wasn't long after that when the coach of the Bowdoin College men's basketball team spotted him and was impressed by his talent and natural ability to work with kids. He asked Wil if he had ever thought about attending college. After some convincing, Wil applied to and was accepted at Bowdoin.

It was also during this time that Wil became a father—and only months before his first semester began, he was granted full custody of his 11-month-old daughter Olivia. To say the least, he was a nontraditional student in almost every sense. Matriculating at age 28, he was a decade older than most of his freshmen classmates. He was one of just three African-American students in his class. And he was the first single father in Bowdoin's history to attend the college.

He worked tirelessly—carrying Olivia to class and then to basketball practice, taking evening shifts at the local Staples store, and volunteering at area high schools. He faced challenges unfathomable to most of his classmates at Bowdoin—struggling to balance a commitment to his daughter and his rigorous coursework. But Wil persevered—and he did so with a strength of conviction and determination that would come to define the influence he would have on students who would follow in his footsteps at Bowdoin.

Following graduation, Wil continued to devote his time and energy to his community, and in particular, to young people of nontraditional or underrepresented backgrounds. He continued to serve in the U.S. Navy Reserves, and joined the staff of Bowdoin College, serving as director of multicultural student programs. Driven to continue his education, he then enrolled in the University of Maine School of Law, where 3 years later, he would graduate with a law degree and once again return to Bowdoin.

At Bowdoin, Wil served as a beacon of light to so many students—many of whom, like him, toiled with the challenges of the transition to college. But as a gifted mentor and as someone who had the rare ability to genuinely connect with people, to understand them, and to relate to them, Wil inspired a newfound sense of hope in countless students, and his advice, unfailing support, and encouragement turned around the lives of hundreds and perhaps thousands of people.

And while students were away from Bowdoin during the summer, Wil dedicated his time to the Seeds of Peace International Camp in Otisfield, ME. It was an endeavor that he joined in the summer of 1999, before he graduated from Bowdoin, and it was one he carried on until last summer. At the camp, he mentored children from across the world, and challenged them to look at and judge their peers not by their race, ethnicity, or differences, but by their thoughts and their merit. Wil was truly a team player in this