

ADL Jews Withdraw Fearing Exposure

No Place for Hate Withdraws from Hamilton Town Meeting Warrant

By NOELLE DINANT – News staff

HAMILTON – The No Place for Hate campaign withdrew its request for a town wide endorsement last night, fearing it might spark dissension in town.

Local debate on the statewide program, which promotes tolerance and anti-violence, has drawn national media attention and two visits by a white supremacist group in the past month.



The program, which was opposed by selectmen who didn't want to endorse an ideology, was slated for a vote at the annual Town Meeting on May 6.

No Place for Hate members, however, presented a petition to the Board of Selectmen requesting the endorsement vote be removed from the Town Meeting warrant.

"It (the endorsement vote) could become a forum for outsiders ... or a debate about the role of government, which is a valuable debate but not what the program is about,"

Jerry Schwartz, a member of the group, said. "None of us wants to see citizens not feel welcome."

The group intends to "take a step back" to re-examine its makeup and mission, Schwartz said.

The group, which has about 20 members in Hamilton and Wenham, will meet for the next six months to draft its goals, then will report back to the selectmen in both towns, he said.

"It (the campaign) took a direction that a lot of people were a little uncomfortable with," said Peggy Stedman, a former Hamilton selectman, who is assisting the group. "Hopefully, we're going to move ahead in a stronger direction."

State Sen. Bruce Tarr, R-Gloucester, who is also helping the group, served as a facilitator of sorts last night.

"The idea is, we all have the same laudable goal," he said, referring to promoting tolerance. "We intend to address that in the most inclusive way possible. This is a serious enough issue that it involves that amount of time (six months of planning) and that amount of commitment."

Established in 1999 by the Anti-Defamation League and the Massachusetts Municipal Association, No Place for Hate is a statewide program designed "to promote respect for the individual and group differences, while speaking out against hate and intolerance," according to literature.

The program, which provides educational materials and forum ideas to participating communities, has been adopted by more than 50 cities and towns.

Hamilton eighth-grader Hannah Hoy got involved with the program as part of a school project.

She, in turn, asked for support from a violence prevention task force that is part of the Hamilton-Wenham Health Advisory Council.

Hoy, members of the task force and other citizens then brought the ADL No Place for Hate program to town leaders. To be designated as a No Place for Hate community, the town must endorse the program.

Hamilton's leaders balked, saying it's not the role of government to endorse private ideologies or initiatives.

The debate drew the attention of "The Today Show," which interviewed Hoy and her father. It also attracted a white supremacist group, which dropped leaflets and held signs in town.

Selectmen Chairman John Serafini Jr. reiterated his position last night, asking if the local group will remain affiliated with the ADL.

The final composition of the group hasn't been determined, but it may be a coalition of a number of public and private groups, such as police, schools and the ADL, Tarr said.

"It is not a committee solely advancing the ADL mission," he said.

Hoy could not be reached for comment last night.