

# ✓ Anti-bias Law Santa Cruz: Wild, wacky media sensation

## National press responds to proposed anti-discrimination ordinance

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SANTA CRUZ — As Kermit the Frog says, it's not easy being green — even by Santa Cruz standards.

In the wake of an anti-discrimination ordinance proposed to protect fat people and skinny people, regardless of their sexual preference or appearance, Santa Cruz has been lampooned in the national press and radio talk shows as a wild and wacky haven for Deadheads with purple hair and pierced noses.

"I got a call here from Denver. I've got a call from San Diego. I just talked yesterday to Washington, D.C.," quipped Councilman John Mahaney, a critic of the ordinance, as he flipped through his phone messages Wednesday afternoon.

Up to now, the city's diverse population of punks, surfers and aging hippies has been tolerated, but never specifically protected.

But under Councilman Neal Coonerty's proposed ordinance — apparently the nation's broadest in terms of protections it would afford — it would be illegal for employers or landlords to discriminate based on appearance or sexual orientation.

Someone denied a job or housing on the basis of looks and sexual preference could challenge their rejection through a city-designated mediator. If no solution were reached, the person claiming bias could sue for damages or other redress.

Apparently, it was the perfect "Only in Santa Cruz" story. Like Mahaney, Coonerty had a stack of unanswered media phone calls yesterday, the Wall Street Journal included. The long-time Santa Cruz business owner had already been a guest on radio talk shows across the nation.

Coonerty said the media spotlight illustrated the stereotype that dogs California, and espe-

cially Santa Cruz, as a haven for kooks and weirdos.

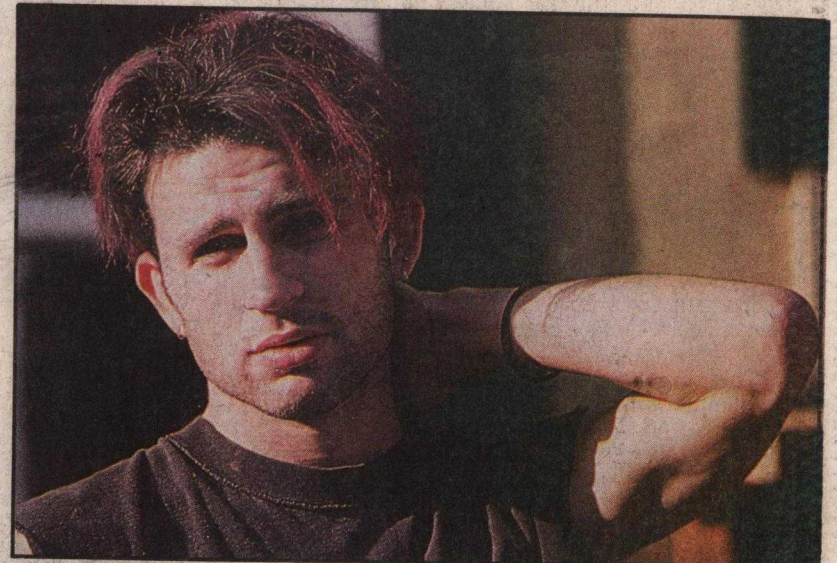
Ironically, it's stereotyping of people which his proposed ordinance addresses, said Coonerty.

Coonerty said the details of the protections he has proposed are of less importance to interviewers than the "sound bites" of "saleable" copy.

Newspaper wire services, including Reuters and The Associated Press, moved the "looks law" story for Wednesday morning papers.

By afternoon, Cooper Hazen, 22, whose pierced tongue and five-holed ears were part of The Associated Press story, had become a radio talk show guest for stations in Cincinnati, Boston and San Diego. Hazen, whose tongue spike cost him his job as a psychiatric aide seven months ago, has been an example of how a person's fuchsia colored hair and pierced

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Cooper Hazen says a pierced tongue cost him his job.

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tongue would be protected.

"I just hope the coverage will help get this thing passed," said Hazen, whose hair has been 27 colors — except orange.

In the Washington Times, the ordinance was demeaned as "lookism," said Coonerty.

Radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh hooted that what he wanted was an ordinance prohibiting ugly people from walking on city streets during daylight. Coonerty retorted that Limbaugh is an "institution to ignorance."

San Francisco Chronicle columnist Art Hoppe used Coonerty's attempt to create a "level playing field" as the basis of his spoof. Hoppe advanced the cause of "intellectually disadvantaged" who have been passed over for promotion by teachers and banned from universities without football teams.

"Not one of our numbers has ever won a Nobel Prize and the highest office in the land we can aspire to is the vice presidency," Hoppe lamented.

Making the national wire is nothing new for Santa

Cruz, a city whose political history has more wiggles and turns than a rattlesnake moving across the desert and more character parts than General Hospital.

In the early 1980s, John Laird's selection as the first openly gay mayor was national newspaper copy. The city had earlier hit the wires when self-avowed socialist and feminist Michael Rotkin was named mayor.

The city garnered national headlines again in 1985 when the Miss California Pageant moved lock, stock and tiara to San Diego, dogged by Myth California demonstrations in which protest organizer Ann Simonon dressed herself in slices of meat.

Nevertheless, the renewed media attention this week did little to cheer Councilman Louis Rittenhouse.

"Well, all I'm seeing is that the majority of the world is having a pretty good chuckle," said Rittenhouse, who said he feared it would hurt Santa Cruz's ability to attract major retailers.

"I've gotten used to traveling and having people snicker at me when I tell them where I'm from," Rittenhouse said. "The biggest laughs are when I'm in Montana."