

State senator to push for tougher hate crime laws

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — State Sen. Pete Suazo says he is ready to fight for tougher hate crime legislation for Utah during the 1999 legislative session.

"This will send a clear message that hate crimes will not be tolerated in the state of Utah," said Jeanetta Williams, head of the Salt Lake Branch of the NAACP.

"Because people are living here in Utah, they are under the assumption that we have this nice community,

that no one is doing that. Now people should see it differently."

Most hate crime laws, Suazo said, definitively establish protected classes of people, saying an offender faces enhanced penalties if the victim is targeted due to race, ethnic origin, color, religious affiliation or sexual orientation.

But the Salt Lake Democrat said prosecutors have told him Utah's hate crime law — which went into



JEANETTA WILLIAMS

effect in 1992 — is too vague and lacks teeth because it does not define categories of protected people.

Utah's law allows for enhanced penalties on misdemeanor offenses if the criminal intends to intimidate or terrorize someone and deprive them of their constitutional rights.

Suazo said that requires prosecutors to guess what is in the offender's mind.

"I don't think you should have to prove intent," he said.

"It is difficult to work with the way it reads."

Suazo said legislative analysts have been reviewing the law to determine what adjustments could be made. He said he anticipates a fight on Capitol Hill.

Still, minority leaders like Williams say a more definitive law is needed.

She pointed to several local examples of hate crimes, including a cross burning in Salt Lake City that prompted federal charges and the filing

of charges against a West Jordan man for hurling racial slurs at a black woman.

Suazo agreed, saying people can no longer afford to ignore hate crimes.

"We have to face realities. There are hate groups out there targeting people for their ethnic background, color or lifestyle. We need to face that fact."

He said the reality is that Utah has crimes being perpetrated against groups of people. "We can't duck that."

Smallest of Houston-born octuplets dies over weekend

HOUSTON (AP) — The fragile condition of their littlest octuplet was on the minds of Nkem Chukwu and Iyke Louis Udobi even when they named her.

The baby's full name, Chijindu Chidera Louis, literally means "God has my life" in her parents' Nigerian tongue. Nicknamed Odera, the week-old infant who weighed less than a can of soda at birth died early Sunday of heart and lung failure.

"We are very saddened by the passing of our beloved baby Odera," the parents said in a statement. "She is now safe with God in heaven and we remain most grateful to him for having blessed our

lives with hers."

The first baby was born naturally Dec. 8, followed by the seven others delivered by Caesarean section 12 days later. They had been the world's only living octuplets.

Odera's condition deteriorated significantly Saturday when doctors moved her from a conventional ventilator to an oscillator to improve her blood oxygenation.

Her oxygen levels remained poor and her heart began to fail.

Chukwu, 27, with her husband and mother, visited all eight babies for the first time Saturday night as Odera's condition worsened. Pediatrician Dr. Patti Savrick

said the couple lingered beside each baby.

"They spent an especially long time at Baby Odera's bedside because they knew she was sicker and may not make it through the night," Savrick said.

The other seven babies remained in critical condition Sunday. The youngest, Gorom, was recovering from abdominal surgery Saturday to repair an intestinal perforation. Two more — Ebuka and Ikem — also remained on ventilators, but four others — Chidi, Echerem, Chima and Jioke — were breathing on their own.

The mother was in stable condition, according to St.

Luke's Episcopal Hospital. Doctors say she could be released early this week.

Few babies as small as Odera — who was born at just 10.3 ounces — survive more than a few hours after birth, experts say. After doing well for the first few days after her birth, Odera's breathing became more labored at week's end and Savrick said she was "literally on minute-to-minute care" by Saturday afternoon.

A doctor not directly involved in Odera's care said the baby would likely have had significant problems had she lived.

"I think in the end, from the baby's perspective, this may have been the best outcome for her," said Dr. Timothy Cooper, a neonatologist and assistant professor of pediatrics and ethics at Baylor College of Medicine.

The octuplets renewed the debate over fertility drugs, which Chukwu used. They sometimes lead to multiple births that often result in sickly, premature babies that cost millions of dollars to treat.

Dr. Leonard Weisman, chief of neonatology at Texas Children's, estimated it

would cost \$250,000 to nurse each of the babies to health over the next few months. The figure didn't count the costs incurred by Chukwu, hospitalized since Oct. 1, or medical needs once the babies leave the hospital.

On Sunday, the parents thanked the doctors and hospitals for trying to help Odera against "overwhelming" obstacles.

"We also want to thank people all over the world for their prayers for our family in this special time in which we are so blessed by our eight babies, but so sad for the loss of little Odera."

Minority officers erect list of proposals

By Seth Heltena

BALTIMORE (AP) — Police Commissioner Thomas Frazier denied that his department retaliated against black officers who complained about racial discrimination, a charge leveled by federal investigators.

Mayor Kurt Schmoke, meanwhile, told Frazier to correct the problem immediately.

"Neither I nor the citizens of Baltimore will tolerate retaliatory treatment against police officers who are exercising their legitimate right to fight racial discrimination," the mayor said last week.

Also last week, a group representing black officers called for a federal review of cases involving black officers stripped of their badges this decade.

"We are not looking for revenge — just justice," said former Sgt. Louis Hopson Jr., an 18-year department veteran terminated in May.

Hopson's complaint — that the department ignored his complaints of racial harassment by fellow officers

— sparked a two-year investigation by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Baltimore office.

The EEOC findings, disclosed last Tuesday, found that black officers who complained about discrimination were targeted for retaliation by the department's Internal Investigation Division in violation of federal civil rights law.

The department also has a "centralized practice" of disciplining black officers more harshly than white

officers, creating a pattern of race discrimination, the EEOC found after a two-year inquiry.

The agency will try to mediate an agreement. If that fails, the agency will recommend the case to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Frazier, who took over the 3,200-officer department in 1994, has acknowledged and taken steps to address what spokesman Robert Weinholt Jr. called the department's decades-old "historical pattern of inequity."

"The department looks (See Proposals, Page 5)

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