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WASHINGTON -- Goldman Crusades for Victims' Rights Amendment

Marc Sandalow, Chronicle Washington Bureau
Tuesday, April 15, 1997

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(04-15) 04:00 PDT Washington -- Fred Goldman turned his anger over the slaying of his son into a political crusade yesterday, calling for a constitutional amendment to protect the rights of crime victims.

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Goldman traveled to the U.S. Capitol to endorse California Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein's Victims' Rights Amendment, which has become the cause celebre of crime victims and their families.

The amendment would guarantee crime victims the right to attend all court proceedings. They would also receive a notice when the assailant is released from custody.

"It should be the easiest piece of legislation that the House and Senate have ever been asked (to pass)," Goldman said.

"I, like every other family member of a crime victim, knows what it's like to be a second-class citizen in the courts of our nation," said Goldman, referring to the eight-month murder trial in which O.J. Simpson was acquitted of killing Goldman's son.

Until now, the proposal has received little public attention, but the presence of Goldman attracted long stares from tourists and congressional staffers, and a crowd of nearly 50 reporters at a press conference in the U.S. Capitol.

Goldman has quit his job as a salesman to become a full-time spokesman for the Washington, D.C.-based Safe Streets Alliance, which is reportedly paying him \$100,000 a year to advocate for victims' rights.

Feinstein and the measure's co-author, Senator Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., said they have 29 co-sponsors but lack sufficient support to pass the measure.

It requires a two-thirds vote of the Senate and House, as well as support from three-quarters of the state legislatures, to approve an amendment to the Constitution. However, supporters said the endorsement by Goldman and other well-known crime victims could make it difficult for politicians to oppose.

Goldman was joined at the news conference by Mark Klaas, whose daughter Polly was abducted from her Petaluma home and murdered in 1993, and by John Walsh, the host of the television show "America's Most Wanted."

Klaas expressed anger that the court paid for the family of Richard Allen Davis -- the man convicted of killing his daughter -- to travel to San Jose to be present at his sentencing, without making any such arrangements for him.

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Klaas, who was physically removed from the courtroom after being insulted by Davis during the sentencing, noted his satisfaction that Davis received the death penalty.

"I had a good experience, and it was (still) agonizing," he said.

Walsh, whose son was never seen again after being abducted during a visit to a department store in 1981, said it "broke my heart when that judge had Marc Klaas physically removed from that courtroom, when he should have had Richard Allen Davis dragged out by his hair."

It is not clear what relief the amendment would have afforded either Klaas or Goldman. California has a similar victims' rights clause in its constitution, as do 28 other states.

The measure has become an important piece of Feinstein's legislative agenda, and while she has won the support of the Clinton administration, only a few members of her own party are behind the amendment.

Opponents of the measure contend it is unnecessary because victims already have the power of the state -- as well as public opinion -- on their side.

FEINSTEIN-KYL AMENDMENT

The proposed measure would require that all victims of violent crime: -- Be informed of, and not excluded from, critical proceedings, including arraignments, preliminary hearings, trials, sentencings and parole hearings. -- Be informed of any release or escape of the offender. -- Be entitled to a trial "free from unreasonable delay." -- Receive restitution from the convicted offender.

This article appeared on page A - 3 of the San Francisco Chronicle

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