

The Washington Post

Equal rights? Not quite . . .

Friday, October 30, 2009

The Oct. 28 editorial "[A civil rights advance](#)," applauding President Obama's imminent signing of "hate crimes" legislation, ignored the legislation's plain violation of the 14th Amendment's "equal protection of the laws." As a result of this law, those convicted of serious bodily harm against protected classes of Americans -- based on their gender or transgender identity, sexual orientation, disability, race, color, religion or national origin -- could get longer prison sentences than persons convicted of bodily harm against victims outside protected classes. Perpetrators of a violent act not designated a "hate crime" -- for example, against a homeless person on the street, or a police officer, or a former employer -- could receive lesser prison terms.

Furthermore, the Fifth Amendment states: "Nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb." This "hate crimes" statute gives federal prosecutors the authority to try a defendant a second time for an alleged hate crime after prosecution in a state court.

Nat Hentoff, New York

The writer is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute.

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Regarding the Oct. 27 [article](#) "Same-sex marriage foes vow court fight":

Carolyn Steptoe said that the District has "a city council who has made it clear their goal is to put this issue before themselves, not the community, not the taxpayers, not the citizens." And Kathryn Pearson-West proclaimed that she was "just outraged at this hearing. I think it's a joke. This is a mockery for democracy."

I can't help but think how fortunate it is that such wisdom didn't rule in the South 40 years ago, or the civil rights movement would have died with a referendum vote.

Lisa Snyder, Owings Mills

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