

“America, America...”

Our national songs extol the virtues of our country, with such lyrics as “America, America, God shed His grace on thee”, and “My country tis of Thee, sweet land of liberty....” While there have always been disenfranchised people in the United States of America, I believe in my heart that our founding fathers had a vision for a country that would work toward inclusion.

Two recent articles, one in the Washington Post and one in the New York Post, attack what our Congress is trying to do with International Megan’s Law Legislation in terms of keeping one group of Americans disenfranchised. The Washington Post article uses the author’s experience as a young Jewish boy in the days of the holocaust to clarify the harm that labeling people does to their lives, both present and future. He asks his father how Hitler’s regime knew who the Jews were, and his father tells him that their birth certificates and other government documents such as passports and identification, were labeled with identifying information!

The New York Post article, via the incredible story-telling of Lenore Skenazy, makes it clear that the Law’s expressed intent in labeling passports is to try to stop sex-trafficking between countries, and that despite an honorable intent, the Legislature chose the wrong avenue to solve this problem, going after people in America labeled as “sex offenders”. Skenazy points out that ¼ of the people on the sex offender registry in our country were convicted as juveniles after having consensual sex with another teenager. Others on the registry committed their offense years ago, and have long since paid their debt to society and to their victim, and find that being subjected to these kinds of laws makes it incredibly difficult to get on with healthy, pro-social and productive lives. They can’t rent housing, can’t find jobs, and in addition, as these articles point out, can’t travel! Well, they may be able to travel in some instances, but may be sent immediately back to America because their passport clearly displays that they at one time, were convicted of a sexual offense in our country.

Politicians support popular causes that make them look like heroes, especially during election years. My observation is, after working at the Colorado Legislature for many years, fighting for decent treatment for those who have committed a sexual offense, that there is an unforgiveable lack of knowledge on the part of many legislators when it comes to issues like this one. Piles and piles of educational materials stack up on their desks, and their aides attempt to give them snippets of information from those piles or from brief meetings with constituents, but in reality, they frequently only hear the side of the story with which they are already most familiar. There are some notable exceptions!

Can you imagine the cost if passports of everyone who had committed a murder, a drug offense, a burglary, a drunk driving offense, perhaps killing someone, were also labeled to identify them, making it difficult if not impossible for them to travel? It’s like America has picked the “outstanding sinner”, and wants to make sure that anyone who committed a sexual offense wears the label for the rest of their life! As a victim recently wrote to me in an e-mail, “who cares if some of them commit suicide?”

If you would like to read these two amazing articles, here are the links:

<http://nypost.com/2016/01/06/labeling-sex-offenders-passports-is-overkill/>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2016/01/06/the-yellow-star->