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Thursday, April 28, 2011 | return to: views, editorial

Editorial: Ban on circumcision is way over the line

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Looks like they made it.

Activists seeking to ban circumcision in San Francisco have apparently collected more than enough signatures to get their measure on the fall ballot. Once the Department of Elections certifies the petitions, most likely it's on to the Nov. 8 polls.

Jews and all people who believe in parental rights, religious freedom and the First Amendment must now unite to crush this odious initiative.

When word of the ballot measure first broke a few months ago, San Francisco once again became a laughingstock. Even Jon Stewart took a few potshots. But when forces line up to take away basic rights from citizens, it is no laughing matter.

Let us not discount the possibility that this thing could actually pass. Imagine if that happens: Jewish parents who undertake the ancient rite of brit milah in San Francisco would be subject to fines. Mohels could be sent to prison.

Odds are it won't ever get that far. We believe voters, even in progressive San Francisco, will see this measure as an obscene attempt at government overreach, a slam against religious freedom and, yes, arguably anti-Semitic.

Were it to pass, we would expect an immediate court fight, injunctions and ultimately a definitive ruling that any law that deprives parents of the right to circumcise their sons is unconstitutional.

Parents, including Jewish parents, are perfectly within their rights to reject circumcision for their children. Even though the evidence of long-term health benefits of circumcision is overwhelming, we have no problem with anti-circumcision activists making their case. It's part of the marketplace of ideas that defines American-styled freedom of expression.

Once activists cross over the line to some sort of dictatorial, government mandate, however, they have left that marketplace and entered into utterly unacceptable, un-American territory.

Recently in New Zealand and parts of Europe, efforts were launched, unsuccessfully, to ban kosher slaughter. Now, in our own backyard, we see this effort to turn parents, doctors and mohels into criminals. Proponents vehemently deny their actions are anti-Semitic, but we cannot help but suspect a deeper venality afoot when others attempt to erode religious freedoms.

We will no doubt follow this story all the way through to the November election. Between now and then, we are certain Jewish groups will help establish a coalition of the interfaith, legal and medical communities to fight the ban.

Comments

Being Modern

I think it's fair and modern to let children decide for themselves. The penis is a very important private part and people should decide for themselves. what gets cut off there. Not to mention that genital cutting is still genital cutting, I don't care what fancy word you have for it. Finally, the health benefits for the procedure are not

Posted by [LiamCornell](#)
04/28/2011 at 03:56 PM

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fully explained or proven, which is why American Pediatric Associations do not recommend it. BTW, This is a very important issue. Respect to human beings starts at day 1.

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Women, what if it was your vagina at stake?

Posted by [LiamCornell](#)
04/28/2011 at 03:57 PM

Sounds a little off, but seriously - what's the worst that will happen if you let a boy keep his penis as nature intended it. Most of Europe is uncircumcised, how come there is no AIDS epidemic there - in fact, there is more AIDS in the US. I think this is Jewish tribalism/ancientism (from a dual Israeli-American citizen, former Jew)

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Genital Cutting = Genital Cutting

Posted by [LiamCornell](#)
04/28/2011 at 04:03 PM

Think about it - it's still genital cutting - without expressed consent from the victim. Men are being repressed sexually and won't talk about it because in truth, their penises are too small and they don't enjoy sex...ladies, testify!

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Anti-Semitism/Children's Rights

Posted by [LiamCornell](#)
04/28/2011 at 04:05 PM

The Jews can be anti-semites too. Aren't Arabs semites? My parents were Israeli and I had never heard so much hatred in my life until they talked about Arabs - or Orthodox Jews. Also, why is anti-semitic to respect children's rights. NOT EVERYTHING IS ABOUT JEWS, other people mutilate genitals too.

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Email me for a debate

Posted by [LiamCornell](#)
04/28/2011 at 04:06 PM

If anyone would like to email me with their thoughts, feel free, LDB29@cornell.edu

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Did anyone think that Jon

Posted by [tommy124](#)
04/28/2011 at 04:17 PM

Did anyone think that Jon Stewart was going to be impartial on the subject? Where was everybody, when female circumcision was banned in 1997? If circumcision is really a religious right, where were you to defend Muslim religious freedom then?

Are the Russian Jews any less Jewish, because they don't circumcise? God bless the Bris Shalom. It's a much more humane way to bring a child into the world.

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is circumcision, or child genital cutting over the line?

Posted by [tommy124](#)
04/28/2011 at 04:22 PM

Did anyone think that Jon Stewart was going to be impartial on the subject? Where was everybody, when female circumcision was banned in 1997? If circumcision is really a religious right, where were you to defend Muslim religious freedom then?

Are the Russian Jews any less Jewish, because they don't circumcise? For some of us, child genital cutting is far more 'over the line' than circumcision. God bless the Bris Shalom. It's a much more humane way to bring a child into the world. Judaism changes over time. Otherwise, menstruating women would still be outside the tent.

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Whole Jews

Posted by [Kelev](#)
04/28/2011 at 07:12 PM

I am a Jewish parent who kept my sons whole. There is actually a growing movement of Jews, secular and religious, orthodox and liberal, choosing to not to circumcise our children. It is simply not ethical to permanently alter the body of a child as part of a religious ceremony that they have no say in. Not only is doing that unethical, it is actually entirely in keeping with Jewish ethics to allow a child the freedom of choice to make this decision for themselves when they are an adult. And as more and more Jews decide not to circumcise their sons, as more and more Jewish boys decide to remain intact, Judaism will grow, adapt, and change for the better, just like it has, just like we have on other issues like women rabbis, homosexuality etc. etc. This will not be easy for many Jews, but it is better for the boys

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involved and it really is the only moral stance at this time in history. It is wrong to cut children's genitals in the name of "god" and culture. Period.

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Equality

*Posted by MisterEquality
04/28/2011 at 08:21 PM*

How can ensuring the equal rights of both male and female children be anti-semitic? The First Amendment not only provides the freedom of religion and expression, but it also protects people FROM religion, such as others forcing their religion on them. The First Amendment, as well as the right to security and bodily integrity are supposed to be universal rights, that are equally applied to all. The 14th amendment provides equal protection under the law, and the fact that we even HAVE a female genital cutting bill is flat out unconstitutional. If circumcision is such an important part of your son's life when he becomes an adult, he will be more accepting of his rite of passage, rather than having it forced upon him at the request of his parents. Everybody in this country is protected and is allowed to freely express their religion, and having someone else's religious beliefs forced upon them in the form of genital surgery violates their right to freedom of religion. The female genital cutting bill can be considered anti islamic, but the congress ruled that protecting anyone under the age of 18 from unnecessary bodily surgery is not in violation of the first amendment. If we truly are a land of equality, under the 14th amendment, Jewish boys can also choose be circumcised if he so chooses. How is preserving your son's own choice in his own religion and faith being anti-semetic?

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Chutzpah Award for anti-Semites

*Posted by jerry pritikin
04/28/2011 at 08:28 PM*

What's next, a ban on religious training for kids? It's bad enough that governments get into our bedrooms, and now our private parts. Beware, this is just the beginning of bad laws to follow. What will they do to Parents who have their son's circumcised... arrest them?

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Bad law?

*Posted by MisterEquality
04/28/2011 at 08:39 PM*

They made a similar law to this, it's called the FGM Bill of 1996. Nobody here screamed for Islamic rights, nor did they object. If anyone circumcises their daughter, regardless of their religion, yes, they would be thrown in jail. In fact, a man was sentenced to 10 years for doing that, and in some states you have to register as a sex offender. If the girl died, he would have been charged with murder.

Now, over 100 boys die in our country every year due to complications from circumcision, and are his parents charged with murder? No, of course not. It's a parent's choice to cut off part of their child if it's a boy, but a federal offense if it's a girl. Really, you're just being hypocritical by yelling about "your religion" and "your rights" when you're infringing upon your son's religion and rights, not to mention, his body.

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Pro-Jewish

*Posted by Kelev
04/28/2011 at 09:33 PM*

This measure to ban child circumcision is not "anti-Semitic." Many of the supporters of the ban are ourselves Jewish, and we are working on behalf of Jewish boys to remain whole, to choose for themselves the nature and shape of their bodies and their religious practice.

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