

UNITED SPINAL^{NOW}

Bigotry And Business As Usual

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This summer we witnessed ugly displays of racism, anti-Semitism, violence and hatred as bigots marched on Charlottesville, VA, the idyllic southern university town that decided to remove a Civil War statue. The statue was a symbol of slavery and had to go, the democratically elected local government decided.

Compared to the violence in Charlottesville, discrimination on the basis of disability is somewhat softer and easier to stomach. The disability community should support minority communities under attack and, of course, those communities should support people with disabilities, as well.

The biggest Disability Pride Parade in New York City history took place a few weeks ago.

Mayor de Blasio and Taxi and Limousine Commissioner Meera Joshi are to be congratulated for finally wrangling the for-hire vehicle industry and proposing a regulation that would require 25 percent of all rides provided to be made in accessible vehicles, be their passengers wheelchair users or not.

This will ensure that accessible vehicles are on the street and available without great inconvenience to wheelchair users. The proposal will greatly reduce Access-A-Ride and Medicaid transportation budgets, if implemented, and will apply to companies large and small – Uber, Carmel and smaller operators. Various components of the for-hire vehicle industry have united to oppose this access requirement and insist they can come up with a better solution.

At the same time NYC's for-hire vehicle industry unashamedly opposes access, actually stating that "The industry is committed to a real solution. We agree that the industry must have a WAV (wheelchair accessible vehicle) solution that works for drivers and passengers.

"To that end, we support a reliable dispatch solution and we stand ready to work with the TLC to establish it. We believe that this 'passenger-first' model would more effectively and efficiently enhance accessibility." This from those who have consistently battled the disability community in its long struggle to gain access to taxi and livery services in NYC.

Meanwhile in Washington, D.C, a coalition of retail, business and hotel owner associations are pushing for passage of H.R. 620, the ADA Education and Reform Act of 2017. Those groups actually sent out an announcement celebrating the 27th anniversary of the ADA while calling for more time to comply with this decades' old law regarding barrier removal in existing commercial establishments.

The bill would not require barrier removal until an aggrieved disabled person notifies the business in writing of the ADA violation. Then, the owner would have 180 days to remove the barrier, despite already having had 27 years to accomplish the task.

Celebrate the passage of the ADA by limiting the rights of people with disabilities; propose providing wheelchair using "passenger-first" policies, while failing repeatedly to provide accessible service despite years of meetings, hearings and requests, to say nothing of open opposition, and not worry about the consequences.

After all, these softer forms of discrimination do not involve helmeted, neo-Nazi sympathizers chanting anti-Semitic and racial slurs while engaging counter protestors in the street with fists, pepper spray and speeding vehicles.

For people with disabilities, who are rarely beaten for their beliefs, the slights cut deeply, but for the businesses perpetuating discrimination on the basis of disability, it is just business as usual.