

Hate Crimes – Real and Mostly Imagined

☒ Every now and then a story comes along that has you checking the calendar to make sure it's not April Fools Day. You say to yourself, "This just can't be right. It's got to be a joke." Except, it isn't.

Such a story popped up in the news recently. This is how the Washington Post covered it:

BERKELEY, Ill. – Safoorah Khan had taught middle school math for only nine months in this tiny Chicago suburb when she made an unusual request. She wanted three weeks off for a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The school district, faced with losing its only math lab instructor during the critical end-of-semester marking period, said no. Khan, a devout Muslim, resigned and made the trip anyway.

That was in 2008. So you might think that's how the story ends. A teacher asks for time off right in the middle of the school year; school officials says no; she quits. Think again. Here's what has now happened, as the Washington Post reports:

Justice Department lawyers examined the same set of facts and reached a different conclusion: that the school district's decision amounted to outright discrimination against Khan. They filed an unusual lawsuit, accusing the district of violating her civil rights by forcing her to choose between her job and her faith.

Never mind that Ms. Khan's religion allows her to make the pilgrimage any time in her entire life. And since she's only 29 years old, odds are she probably would have plenty of time

to go, when it wouldn't interfere with her job.

But, as the Washington Post reports, "she longed to make the hajj[pilgrimage], one of the five pillars of the Islamic faith, which Muslims are obligated to do once."

The next time the hajj falls on her summer break is nine years down the road. Too long a wait for Ms. Khan. Her lawyer told the Post, "This was the first year she was financially able to do it. It's her religious belief that a Muslim must go for hajj quickly ... that it's a sin to delay."

But Michael Esposito, the town's former mayor, said, "The school district just wanted a teacher in the room for those three weeks. They didn't care if she was a Martian, a Muslim or a Catholic. How come we bow down to certain religious groups? Why don't we go out of our way for the Baptists or the Jehovah's Witnesses?"

Perhaps because they're not special and Muslims are – at least as far as the Obama Administration is concerned. Anti-Muslim hate is "the civil rights issue of our time," according to U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder.

In fact, it apparently is such a big problem that just a few weeks after the House Homeland Security Committee hearing on radicalization in the Muslim community in America, Senator Dick Durbin, a liberal Democrat from Ms. Kahn's home state of Illinois, announced that he will hold a hearing in the Senate – but not on the problem of radicalization. Durbin's hearings will be about anti-Muslim bigotry in the United States.

So just how serious a problem is anti-Muslim bigotry? One incident of hate is one too many, of course, but William Bennett and Seth Leibsohn – the authors of the *The Fight of Our Lives: Knowing the Enemy, Speaking the Truth, and Choosing to Win the War Against Radical Islam*, provide us with some interesting statistics:

It turns out that 8.4 percent of religious hate crimes in America were anti Muslim in 2009, the most recent year on record. That same year nearly 72 percent of religious hate crimes in this country were anti-Jewish. That translates to 107 hate crimes against Muslims in all of 2009; 931 against Jews.

“Of course each and every hate crime is horrific, and we wish there were zero hate crimes in America,” Bennett and Seibsohn write, “but the larger point is important for context. If a radio host or some cable commentator or U.S. senator said, ‘The United States discriminates against Jews’ or ‘Jews have a particularly hard time in the United States’ or, ‘There is a lot of anti-Jewish bigotry in America,’ it would simply not comport with most people’s – or most Jewish Americans’ – understandings of 21st century America. And yet, we accept at face value the storyline of wholesale anti-Muslim bigotry in America.”

Ms. Khan’s case is working its way through federal court in Chicago. There won’t be a decision by April first of this year. But maybe by April Fools Day 2012. Except there’s nothing funny about our President’s pandering to Muslims – especially when there is no evidence that they are being targeted as a group for hate crimes.

As for the children who would have to endure a substitute teacher for three weeks while Ms. Khan was away in Mecca. As they say on the playground: tough noogies for you, kid.