



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM WEEKLY
from
Americans for Freedom of Religion

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Heckler's Veto: Cancelling (Veto) of Free Speech Accomplished by Loud/ Intimidating/ Violent Hecklers

Apr. 18, 2024. In what is called a major win for free speech, a pro-life protestor was reading the Bible aloud, in a conversational tone, on the same street as an anti-Dobbs protest and a few days later at a Pride-Fest rally. In spite of police acting to stop him, his right to speak his views publicly and peaceably was upheld by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth District. *Meinecke v. City of Seattle* <https://tinyurl.com/53xrfzms>

Police had asked the protestor to stop reading and/or move to another location saying that he was causing a disruption to the ongoing events and there could be violence as a result of his reading. Some rally attendees tried to intimidate him, to drown out his reading, stole one of his Bibles, poured water on another Bible and knocked him down. Instead of arresting those who assaulted the protestor, police detained him and charged him with obstruction.

The Ninth Circuit judges found the man's 1st Amendment freedom of speech had been "burdened" by the police asking him to leave the area and then arresting him for "obstruction" even though he was on a public sidewalk peacefully expressing his views. The court stated that whether the listeners found his views offensive or even hateful did not negate the protestor's right to speak as he did.

Had the protestor complied with the police's request for him to stop reading or move to another space, the court said that would have constituted a "Heckler's Veto." We see Heckler's Vetoes often on college campuses when invited speakers are prevented from speaking by raucous, completely disruptive behavior and threats that stop any message of the invited speaker.

The judges concluded: "If speech provokes wrongful acts on the part of the hecklers, the government must deal with those wrongful acts directly; it may not avoid doing so by suppressing the speech." *Meinecke v. City of Seattle*; Page 4

More: <https://tinyurl.com/bdefkkk7> <https://tinyurl.com/ykcnhc37> <https://tinyurl.com/2rp6utaz>

"To the kindly influence of Christianity we owe that degree of civil freedom, and political and social happiness, which mankind now enjoys... Jedidiah Morse