

NEWS



Libertarian Party

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Should politicians make it a crime to not shovel your sidewalk after a storm?

Bill in Montgomery County, MD, will make being “unneighborly” a crime

WASHINGTON, DC — A proposed bill in Montgomery County, Maryland that would make it a crime to not shovel your sidewalk within 24 hours of a snowstorm is not only ridiculous — it’s another example of the rampant “criminalization” of our society, the Libertarian Party charged today.

“Not shoveling your sidewalk may be unneighborly and inconsiderate, but it shouldn’t be a criminal offense,” said the party’s national director, Steve Dasbach. “Do we really want the Snow Police imposing fines — and perhaps one day arresting people — because of snowflakes on a sidewalk?”

Last week, three Democrats introduced the Pedestrian Winter Safety Act of 2001 in the Montgomery County Council. The bill would require homeowners to shovel all sidewalks on or adjacent to their property within 24 hours of a snowstorm, or face a \$50 fine.

Current Montgomery County law requires commercial establishments and apartment buildings to clear snow from sidewalks; this bill would extend that mandate to single-family homes. Similar laws are already in effect in Prince George’s County and Baltimore County, Maryland, and in the District of Columbia.

Supporters of the law say it’s needed to guarantee easy passage on sidewalks for the elderly, the handicapped, and school children.

But all the bill does is add to the blizzard of laws that have piled up like a legislative snowbank all across America, said Dasbach.

“There was a joke in the former communist countries that everything that is not prohibited is mandatory. We seem to be reaching that point in the United States,” he said.

“Everyone would agree that shoveling your sidewalk is the neighborly and considerate thing to do. The question is: Do we really want to turn people into criminals because they are not neighborly enough? Or not considerate enough? And if we do, where will the criminalization of America end?”

Although the bill itself is a minor matter, it showcases an important difference between Libertarians and typical Democratic or Republican politicians, said Dasbach.

“Libertarians understand that not every problem needs to be solved by a new law, or by making more people into criminals, or by adding to the power of government to harass, fine, or imprison people,” he said. “The fact is, in a more reasonable nation, this bill wouldn’t have a snowball’s chance in, well, Montgomery County of becoming law.”

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