

BLOOMBERG, SIKHS, MUSLIMS AND CATHOLICS

Mayor Bloomberg recently signed into law the “Workplace Religious Freedom Act,” a bill designed to award new rights to Sikhs and Muslims. But when it came to showing sensitivity to Catholics in regards to the 9/11 ceremonies, the mayor showed nothing but contempt.

Until Bloomberg signed the law, employers were required to make “reasonable accommodations” for the religious observances of their employees, a condition that could be overridden if the exceptions imposed minimal difficulties in the workplace, or added expenses. The new law raises the bar, mandating that employers prove that such accommodations would constitute a “significant difficulty or expense.”

What prompted the new law was pressure from Sikh and Muslim workers employed by the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA): they are required, like everyone else, to display an MTA logo on their headgear, which in their case means it must be shown on their religious headwear. Also, Sikhs complained that they cannot work for the New York Police Department unless they remove their turbans. The new law makes it easier for Sikhs and Muslims to sue the City of New York, claiming religious discrimination.

What is astounding about all of this is the blatant disparity in treatment: when it comes to Catholics—who comprised the vast majority of First Responders—they were told that there was no room for them at the 9/11 memorial ceremonies. And when it came to priests, as well as the clergy of all faiths, they were also told to take a hike.

We had but one request for Mayor Bloomberg: start treating Catholics the way he does Sikhs and Muslims. He could have

started by repealing the 9/11 gag rule.