

December 6, 2017

Dear Senator,

On behalf of Alliance for Justice, a nationwide association representing a broad array of groups committed to justice and civil rights, I write to oppose the nomination of Leonard Steven Grasz to a seat on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.

As has been widely reported, the American Bar Association gave Grasz a “Not Qualified” rating in a report that noted concerns about his ability to leave behind his personal beliefs and take on the duties of an impartial member of the federal bench. Grasz’s temperament was also called into question; he was described as “gratuitously rude.” These are serious concerns and should not be dismissed or overlooked.

Our own research has revealed that Grasz has dedicated himself to opposing rights for LGBTQ Americans as well as women’s reproductive rights. Grasz has fought for employers to be able to discriminate against LGBTQ workers. He fought against abortion funding that is required under federal law for women who are victims of rape and incest. Grasz has served as a director of an extreme right-wing group, the Nebraska Family Alliance, an organization that has applauded the mass closings of clinics that offer women’s reproductive services, condemned Supreme Court decisions that protect women’s rights, claimed that abortion rights put “women’s lives at risk,” and advocated for the dangerous practice of “conversion therapy” imposed on LGBTQ youth. While serving on an Omaha city government panel, Grasz pushed for a measure that would have allowed employers to discriminate against LGBTQ employees under the guise of religious liberty.

Grasz has taken many opportunities to fight against marriage equality for LGBTQ citizens. As Chief Deputy Attorney General of Nebraska, Grasz opposed the recognition in Nebraska of same-sex marriages contracted in other states. After Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), Grasz wrote an opinion suggesting that Nebraska pass legislation “expressly prohibiting or excluding recognition of same-sex marriages. Further, in 1999, Grasz represented Nebraska as amicus curiae in a suit regarding marriage licenses for same-sex couples in Vermont, in which Nebraska urged Vermont to deny marriage licenses and benefits to same-sex couples. Alarming, Grasz has written that the historic denial of civil rights to Native Americans and African Americans is comparable to the “denial” of civil rights to aborted fetuses. As Chief Deputy Attorney General of Nebraska, Grasz defended laws banning abortion procedures as well as laws prohibiting the use of public funds for state grants to organizations that provided abortion-related services.

Given all these concerns, and as detailed in our report on his nomination issued prior to his hearing, which can be found at the following link <https://www.afj.org/our-work/nominees/grasz>, we call on the Judiciary Committee to reject Leonard Steven Grasz as a candidate for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. We stand ready to answer any questions you may have about our conclusions regarding this nominee.

Sincerely,



Nan Aron