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Libel protection law

NY shouldn't enforce dubious judgments

April 4, 2008

New York gladly welcomes foreign tourists and their money, but now the state is ready to turn away those who come shopping for a place to enforce dubious libel judgments won abroad against journalists and publishers.

Under the guidance of Sen. Dean Skelos (R-Rockville Centre) and Assemb. Rory Lancman (D-Fresh Meadows) the "Libel Terrorism Protection Act" was unanimously passed by the State Legislature last month. Gov. David Paterson should waste no time signing it.

The law's title stems from a case involving Rachel Ehrenfeld, a Manhattan author who investigates terrorist networks. Her book, "Funding Evil: How Terrorism is Financed and How to Stop It," named Khalid bin Mahfouz, former banker to the Saudi royal family, as a financier to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida. Mahfouz, who vehemently denies funding terrorists, sued Ehrenfeld in London, winning a \$225,000 judgment against her.

International plaintiffs choose British courts because it's easy to win a libel judgment there. Ehrenfeld's book wasn't even published in England, but Mahfouz won because 23 copies purchased over the Internet were shipped there.

The Skelos-Lancman bill would prohibit New York courts from enforcing any defamation judgment obtained in a foreign jurisdiction that did not provide the considerable free speech and free press protections provided in the United States by the federal and state constitutions. Now that's having a day in court.

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