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OPINION

State shouldn't punish worker for vehicle flag

The American Civil Liberties Union has it right. The Delaware Department of Transportation should not have punished a worker because of a Confederate flag on a license plate on his personal vehicle.

DeIDOT said the suspension was prompted by a complaint that the license plate was a "form of harassment." The harassment apparently came about because the worker parked his vehicle on a DeIDOT property. As a Tuesday news article reported, the decorative plate has been on his vehicle for 17 years. The plate features the words "Red Neck" with a Confederate flag in the background.

The ACLU has cited chapters and paragraphs of legal decisions to support its case. They make sense to us. Many signs on license plates offend some people, while they are inoffensive to others. For example, would DeIDOT suspend an employee for sporting a Washington Redskins license plate because the team's name is offensive to American Indians?

We live in a large and diverse society. Many of us are descendants of nations, ethnic groups and religions that have done horrible things to other people. Should all symbols connected with them be banned? Should the Japanese flag be banned because it offends World War II veterans? Or the Christian cross because Muslims may find it offensive? No. Our society is too large for such gestures.

And we wonder about the word "harassment." What does it mean? Does it mean actual intimidation or merely annoyance or disgust?

We suspect that had the employee done anything close to real harassment, DeIDOT would have said so. Otherwise, it would not have tried to get by with such a weak excuse.