



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Craig M. Johnson

Senator Johnson's Discriminatory Language Bill Passes Senate

CRAIG M. JOHNSON July 19, 2009

A measure sponsored by Senator Craig M. Johnson (D-Nassau) that would eliminate the insensitive, outdated and derogatory use of “oriental” in state documents passed the State Senate last week.

“This is about basic decency,” said Senator Johnson, whose sister is of Korean decent. “The codification of hateful language in official state documents is obviously wrong, and frankly, should have been eliminated long before now. I am proud to have partnered with Assemblywoman Grace Meng to ensure that this legislation has passed both houses of the Legislature.”

The Johnson-Meng bill would eliminate the word "oriental" under the category of "Race" in all state documents. According to Merriam-Webster's New World College Dictionary, when the word “oriental” is used to describe a person, it is regarded as a term of disparagement.

“Derogatory and insensitive language, like that Craig and I are addressing with our legislation, should not be allowed to linger on official state forms,” said Assemblywoman Meng (D-Flushing.) “What is on a state form is a reflection of our shared values and priorities. For adults faced with such language it’s a sad reminder of a time when even casual insults of Asian-Americans were accepted and encouraged. For younger New Yorkers it’s alien,

insulting and confusing. There is nothing good about this relic and it needs to be removed from our official discourse.”

The measure passed the Senate and the Assembly unanimously. It is awaiting consideration by the Governor.