

Transit worker fired for burning Quran sues state

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November 5, 2010

TRENTON, N.J. (RNS) On the ninth anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks, Derek Fenton stole headlines by burning pages from the Quran in lower Manhattan to protest a planned Islamic community center there. Two days later, he lost his job at New Jersey Transit for breaching the agency's code of ethics.

The American Civil Liberties Union says Fenton should get his job back. The group filed suit Friday (Nov. 5) in U.S. District Court, saying Fenton was unconstitutionally fired for exercising his free speech rights.

"If you allow governments to censor one kind of speech, you open the door to censorship of all kinds of speech," said Deborah Jacobs, executive director of the ACLU of New Jersey. "Our individual right to free speech depends on everybody having it."

A spokeswoman for NJ Transit declined to comment on Thursday. When Fenton was fired, the agency released a statement saying it had "concluded that Mr. Fenton violated his trust as a state employee and therefore was dismissed."

Two months ago Fenton waded into a roiling international debate over free speech, religious freedom and Islam's place in America.

Terry Jones, a pastor from Florida, had already announced plans to burn the Koran on Sept. 11. Fueled by round-the-clock media coverage, it quickly became one of the world's most inflammatory topics. Jones eventually decided not to burn the Koran.