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Neil Gorsuch can't be an opponent of LGBT rights — he has gay friends.

That's what his colleagues argue in a New York Times profile of the Colorado appellate judge tapped by President Trump to fill Antonin Scalia's spot on the Supreme Court bench. During the 2016 presidential race, Trump vowed to replace the late justice with a candidate "very much in [his] mold." Given that Scalia was a virulent opponent of LGBT equality — who believed that homosexuality was on par with polygamy, murder and animal abuse — many have expressed concern that Gorsuch shares his forebear's views.

Former co-workers and longtime friends of Gorsuch, however, describe him as being supportive and accepting of LGBT people. Phil Berg, who met the 49-year-old during their time at Harvard Law, came out to Gorsuch in the early '90s, back when AIDS was still a death sentence for many gay men. "He didn't skip a beat," Berg recalls of his friend's reaction.

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As heartwarming as anecdotes like this may seem, they are utterly meaningless. There's no shortage of powerful conservatives who have actively worked against equal rights for LGBT people even while claiming to have gay friends. Ted Cruz, who made anti-transgender bathroom bills a central focus of his 2016 presidential run, held a fundraising event at the home of two gay men. Rick Warren, an evangelical pastor who likened same-sex marriage to incest and pedophilia, once waxed nostalgic about a "wonderful conversation" he had with lesbian singer Melissa Etheridge as proof of his LGBT equality bonafides.

Even Mike Huckabee, who has branded homosexuality "unnatural" and a "dangerous public health risk," once claimed that his circle of friends is open to the gays.

In fact, Republicans digging up just about any queer person they can to vouch for the fact that they're *totally OK* with the whole LGBT thing has become something of a meme over the past year. These days, it's hard to find a conservative who doesn't have a gay friend on speed dial.

When questions came up about the anti-LGBT past of Betsy DeVos, whose family has donated thousands of dollars to efforts to repeal equal rights legislation across the U.S., a profile in the Times approvingly noted that the recently appointed secretary of Education went to a gay wedding one time. Trump, who was applauded throughout the 2016 race for being less overtly hostile to LGBT rights than the other Republican candidates, himself attended a same-sex union without burning down the reception hall. In extremely on-brand fashion, the POTUS called the ceremony “beautiful.”

That didn’t stop the president, though, from pledging to sign the First Amendment Defense Act if it crosses his desk — a bill that would make anti-LGBT bias the law of the land.

The false notion that bigotry is magically cured by passing acquaintance with a member of a marginalized community is often referred to as the “friend argument.” Hypothetically, let’s say that a co-worker gets called out for having bigoted beliefs — like that Asians are bad drivers or that gay men are inherently promiscuous. After having his viewpoints criticized, the individual might claim, “I can’t be racist; I have Asian friends,” or “I’m not a bigot; my brother is gay!”

It’s a fallacy, but a surprisingly effective one: A 2016 study published in the Social Psychological and Personality Science journal showed that when a person is viewed as having a more diverse friend group, others are less likely to view their actions as motivated by bias toward minorities.

Psychologists call our ability to hold seemingly conflicting beliefs — such as liking a gay person while continuing to harbor anti-LGBT sentiments — cognitive dissonance, but it’s not as contradictory as it seems. While studies have shown that voters are less likely to cast a ballot against the rights of minority populations when they know a member of said community, that’s not always the case. If a bigot becomes friends with an LGBT individual, he might view them as “different” or “not like other gay people.” Instead of forcing him to confront his deep-seated homophobia, it may serve to reinforce it.

Countless surveys show that more Americans know an LGBT person than ever, including Republicans. If the “friend argument” were valid, that would mean conservative legislators would be passing fewer bills targeting queer and trans populations as they increasingly come into contact with these emerging communities.

The opposite is true: Last year, over 200 anti-LGBT bills were filed at the state level. Advocacy organizations like Lambda Legal and the American Civil Liberties Union have warned that even more pieces of legislation could be considered this year. Just six weeks into 2017, Texas has already introduced *nine*, including an anti-trans bathroom bill.

All the gay friends in the world won't stop legislators — and even seemingly supportive Supreme Court justices — from targeting our civil liberties. Even if Gorsuch isn't as outwardly intolerant as the man whose shoes he was tapped to fill, he and Scalia have one unfortunate trait in common: They're both "originalists." That means that Gorsuch believes the Constitution — which was written in 1787, a time when most Americans weren't aware gay people even existed — is set in stone rather than a document that can evolve as society changes.

Gorsuch's originalism has been key in determining how he adjudicates cases. In 2015, he ruled against a transgender woman who lobbied for access to hormones through the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. And despite alleged support for his LGBT colleagues, he also claimed in a 2005 article for National Review that court cases surrounding gay marriage are part of the liberal "social agenda." This was before Gorsuch became a judge, but it's far more telling than any personal anecdote.

As any queer person with an anti-gay family member knows from personal experience, having an LGBT friend or relative doesn't mean that you aren't homophobic. What makes you an ally of LGBT people is what you do, not who you know. Gorsuch can have as many gay friends as he likes, but it doesn't tell us a thing about how he will serve as a Supreme Court judge.