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BRET FURTWANGLER | GRAPHICS EDITOR

■ In my opinion

Marriage legislation — protection or *discrimination*?

The issue of marriage, as seen in the debate over Ballot Measure 36, as well as similar petitions in 11 other states, has prompted much discussion involving both the protection and inclusiveness of this institution. However, one group of Americans is working to shed a different light on marriage: That it is discriminatory not just toward homosexual couples but to single people as well.

The American Association for Single People (AASP) began in 1999, and is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization which claims in its mission statement to be an educator and advocate for the estimated 86 million unmarried citizens residing in the United States. The AASP strives in many ways to promote equal rights, although some of its arguments may seem pretentious. It claims that single people are discriminated against because they pay the same social security taxes as married couples, but statistically do not live as long as, and therefore receive a smaller percentage of these benefits. This seems akin to claiming that people with a genetic predisposition toward addictive personalities should pay less taxes than everyone else, because of the chance that they might become addicted to cigarettes and alcohol, and therefore not live to reap as many benefits as the rest of the nation. Surely, tax policy cannot be based around statistical maybes.

However, some of the AASP's arguments ring valid. For instance, a spouse can file jointly with his or her partner and save in taxes, whereas an unmarried citizen usually cannot file with either a domestic partner or blood relative, even if living expens-



AILEE SLATER
FURTHER FROM PERFECTION

es are shared between them. This is unfair not only to gay couples prohibited by law from marrying, but also to couples engaged in non-marital, long term relationships or cohabitation. Also, a spouse is allowed to claim insurance benefits from his or her partner's job on the assumption that the spouse is keeping house or taking care of children. When a family has a structure other than husband, wife and children, isn't fair to punish nontraditional arrangements. A divorced, single mother living with her sister and sharing responsibilities should surely be just as eligible for insurance coverage as the homemaker and wife of a CEO. Another problem is that if a person in a gay or unmarried couple dies without leaving a will, the partner has almost no legal claims to joint assets purchased under the dead party's name.

These are only a few examples of the legal difficulties that unmarried citizens face and it certainly appears that the AASP actually has a reasonable case for the idea that single people are experiencing nationwide mistreatment. The question then becomes: Why does this unequal treatment exist? I think many would agree that it is indicative of a government pushing for the heterosexual in-

stitution of marriage. More important than simply fighting for the rights of unmarried citizens, there is a greater need to let go of this conservative view of partnership all together.

According to most right-wing politicians, the main reason for their rabid promotion of heterosexual marriage is that children cannot thrive properly without a mother and father. Yet, there is no conclusive evidence to back this up. Indeed, it seems more logical that a child being reared in a nontraditional manner would actually turn out to be more flexible and diverse than the child of a nuclear family. Census studies show that more than a third of U.S. children are being raised in families not made up of a married, biological mother and father; so, perhaps more thought should be put into education for single, or potentially single, parents and people who are interested in living and raising their children in a cooperative housing setting.

Instead of simply taking a stand for the traditional family structure, perhaps our nation should instead accept the evolution of the family and promote legal arrangements to ensure that every person still has the best access possible to health care, fair tax benefits and so on. Conventional marriage is already a dying structure. With discriminatory marriage definitions now on the books in more than half of the states, the time could be approaching when our society will say good-bye to this institution altogether. And, perhaps, it is valid to ask if maybe that is for the best.

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■ Editorial

Oregon 'dreamers' abandon progress

Once upon a time Oregon was nationally recognized as a progressive western oasis: We had "Little Beirut" and black-clad anarchists, and we gladly branded ourselves "dreamers," a term almost as pejorative as the word liberal these days.

Sadly, Oregon seems to have lost its unique identity. The defeat of Measure 33 means we are no longer on the cutting edge of the medical marijuana issue, and we voted to ban gay marriage, joining 10 other progressive powerhouses like Arkansas, Kentucky, Montana, Utah and Oklahoma.

Only two Oregon counties — Benton and Multnomah — came out against Measure 36. In Lane County the results were almost dead even, with supporters edging out opponents by less than 1,000 votes. Soon Oregon will be just like every other state in the union, known more for our failing schools and proximity to an active volcano than for our visionary politics. We might as well amend our state motto to say: "Oregon loves dreamers, as long as they aren't dreaming about gay sex."

As disappointed as we are about the passage of Measure 36, it is only one (largely symbolic) defeat in what promises to be a long war. The Oregon Supreme Court will hear arguments on the constitutionality of denying gay and lesbian couples the right to marry — the ACLU claims that Measure 36 is ambiguous enough to allow for civil unions. And the Oregon Legislature still has the opportunity to make a real difference for same-sex families by extending to them the exact same benefits afforded to married couples.

We aren't there yet, but we will be. The most important thing now is that we focus on giving gay and lesbian couples access to the over 1,000 state and federal benefits, which help to keep families stable and children safe. If Oregonians can move quickly and decisively to extend partnership benefits to same-sex unions, then maybe we can once again regain our reputation as the place with all those wacky progressives at the end of the Oregon Trail. We can only dream.

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ONLINE POLL

THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

Now that the election is over, and George W. Bush has been elected to a second term, what are you planning to do?
Visit www.dailyemerald.com to vote.

1. I'm happy Bush won. I plan to sit back and enjoy four more years of Bush's leadership.
2. I can't believe Kerry didn't win. I'm moving to Canada.
3. I'm happy that Bush won, but this is not time to rest on laurels — the next four years are the time to step up my political activism.
4. I can't believe Kerry didn't win, but this is not the time to run away — the next four years are the time to step up my political activism.
5. Election? What election? Politics are not for me.

OREGON DAILY EMERALD LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged, and should be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com or submitted at the Oregon Daily Emerald office, EMU Suite 300. Electronic submissions are preferred. Letters are limited to 250 words, and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submissions should include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style. Guest submissions are published at the discretion of the Emerald.