

REGRESSIVES II

I want to amplify upon last week's letter (4/7) on "Regressive Politics" from my fellow *Springfield News* columnist, Todd Huffman. The Bush administration is fully out of the closet. There's no denying or minimizing it. They want to reverse the New Deal. But they don't stop there in regressive ambition. They even aspire to reverse the Enlightenment.

Democracy is undermined by vote fraud. Government accountability is ignored. Machiavelli is resurrected to counsel rulers in control and manipulation of the people.

Empiricism is trumped by irrational ideology. Global warming data is suppressed while polar ice caps melt. Embryonic stem cell research is prohibited with indifference to thousands suffering terrible afflictions such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and spinal cord injuries. A simplistic two-word phrase, "intelligent design," is given equal weight with the massive evidence of evolution painstakingly assembled over 170 years from multiple scientific disciplines. Sex education is limited to "abstinence only" preaching despite overwhelming evidence of its failure, including increased incidence of HIV/AIDS. In February 2004, some 60 prominent scientists including 20 Nobel laureates signed a complaint charging administration interference in the scientific review process and deliberate misrepresentation of scientific findings.

Their "culture of life" pretensions are similarly medieval. Like the Grand Inquisitor's highly selective recognition of the right to life, Bush's war has inflicted an

Iraqi mortality figure conservatively estimated at 100,000 by a peer-reviewed, Johns Hopkins-led study published in *The Lancet*, Britain's leading medical journal. Iraqi victims have been mostly women and children, killed largely by coalition bombing. Meanwhile, press attention has remained obsessively absorbed with one long-comatose American woman, preceded by a relentless series of other diversionary topics, while the real right-to-life story — an Iraqi death count from Bush's war some 30 times the number of Americans killed in 9/11 — has gone unmentioned. Among regressives, the sacred right to life applies only to Americans.

I enthusiastically support Huffman's recommendation that we adopt this term — although I privately apply a term to them less printable.

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WOMEN'S ROLE

As this year marks the 35th anniversary of the celebration of Earth Day, we continue to focus on the grave dangers that face our world in terms of the environmental destruction and degradation wrecked upon the planet in order to feed, water, house, clothe and manufacture things for all of humankind. The current levels of population and poverty lead to unbearable pressure on the Earth's resources, which leads us to deplete them at rates that cannot be replenished. What will we leave our children from our world so stripped and polluted?

Slowing global population growth would both reduce the demand on resources and



lead to fewer women of reproductive age. This can be accomplished if women around the world who want to control when and if they have children have access to family planning and education. The U.N. estimates that worldwide, 350 million couples who want to use contraceptives lack access to a full range of family planning services. Unfortunately, President Bush ignored the causes and consequences of increased population growth when he reinstated the "global gag rule" that limits access to international

family planning, and again, canceled the scheduled annual \$34 million U.S. contribution to the United Nations Population Fund that could have prevented nearly two million unwanted pregnancies and approximately 800,000 abortions.

Our Earth cannot sustain continued population growth. In order to improve the health and well being of children, women and the planet, we must make sure that every woman can freely decide the size and spacing of her family through access to safe and effective

viewpoint BY GRETCHEN MILLER

Legal Strangers Now
But the momentum of history is on our side.

We're not members of the country club after all. I was not really sure that I even wanted to join, but when they offered applications I jumped at the chance. Now I'm back outside. I'm still trying to sort out how I feel about it.

It hurts to be excluded. We all learn that early in life, when a clique won't let outsiders play with them. Sometime we respond with tears, sometimes with anger, sometimes we say we didn't really want to play their stupid game anyhow. I feel a little of all three responses right now.

Sarah and I obtained our marriage license from Multnomah County in March 2004 and were married here in Eugene, by our minister, along with a committed male couple, before 50 or so members of our church and dozens of other friends, supporters, members of our community. It was a glorious event. Being a mostly "in my head" sort of person, I was surprised by my deep feelings of relationship and belonging. The public affirmation of our commitment felt exhilarating, liberating, and loving. Many people, old and new friends and acquaintances, took the occasion to express their support for our family. The outpouring of support and affirmation has continued for a full year, up to and including the celebration last month of our 25th and first anniversary.

I have been awed, humbled, and continue to be deeply appreciative of all the support we have received. It has far exceeded what would have been my wildest dreams, if I had even had time to dream during the two days we had to plan our wedding. It is humbling to realize that we are only one of thousands of same-sex couples sharing the experience, commitment and affirmation of marriage.

We have been privileged to live through an amazing, indescribable event, one that overtook us like a force of nature and carried us along on an immense tide of goodwill. No court can take any of this away. My feelings include enormous gratitude for what the community has given us.

But my feelings go beyond gratitude and are more complex. I can't forget the historical, patriarchal nature of marriage as an oppressive institution, which would give anyone second and third thoughts about joining it. But I also am well aware of the legal benefits of marriage that, at this time, are available in no other way.

Sarah and I have raised three terrific boys. The youngest, and only one still at home, is finishing his junior year in high school. We used to be concerned about the



lack of legal recognition for our family and tried to complete legal documents to substitute for the simplicity of a legally recognized marriage: wills, powers of attorney, health care directives, guardianship, legal custody, adoption. Our boys and the dozen or so other young people who have lived with us over the years know that we are a family. Nothing a court does can change that reality, but we were always concerned

whether others would see it in case of urgent need. Our children are older and those concerns wane. I am still concerned for the thousands of other families that face those perils now, but I am thinking about new legal problems for us. When our children leave home and we have just each other, who will recognize that reality?

The law has a strong presumption that next of kin can make medical decisions and make all arrangements after death. Can our wills, medical directives, powers of attorney, and health care powers of attorney stand up to the socially and legally recognized onslaught of that legally recognized family? Perhaps, if we need medical attention at home, we will be well enough known to the providers that they will recognize our partnership. What if disaster falls somewhere else? With no legally recognized marriage, would unknown ER doctors and nurses or EMTs in a strange locale consider us family, or strangers? At least we now have a marriage certificate to carry with us, to take out and demonstrate what we have done to assure that our family is recognized, but once again, Sarah and I are legal strangers to each other.

The struggle is never over. The Supreme Court opinion in the *Li* case did not touch the fundamental question, whether the Oregon Bill of Rights prohibits discrimination based on marital status in the recognition of legal benefits. Another lawsuit will be brought to raise that issue. Senate Bill 1000 was introduced in the Legislature this week to create civil unions in Oregon, so we could have the legal benefits of marriage without offending the religious beliefs of some of our neighbors. Eugene is again considering amending the human rights ordinance to include protection for transgendered people. All of these efforts need our support. The work continues.

The atmosphere in which we live and struggle is much changed. We are far more "out" and more accepted than would have been possible a few decades ago. I continue to have faith that the course of social change is arduous but the momentum of history is on our side. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

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