

# OPINION

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503-288-0033 • FAX 503-288-0015 • EMAIL: news@portlandobserver.com subscription@portlandobserver.com ads@portlandobserver.com

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## Civil Unions are Not Enough

### Full citizenship must convey right to marry

BY MAYOR VERA KATZ

I am someone who, throughout my public career, has championed the dignity of all people, including gay men and lesbian women.

Human dignity requires that we be who we are, and that we be accepted for who we are. All of us should have the right to live in the

*The right to marry conveys full citizenship. At the federal level alone, there are more than one thousand benefits that married couples enjoy, which those in a civil union could not access.*

— Mayor Vera Katz



light of day.

We know that throughout history there have been gay and lesbian couples. This is not something new.

What is new is that over the past 50 years, we have become more enlightened as a society. Old barriers around the issues of race, ethnicity, or gender have crumbled. It was only in 1967, for example, that the Supreme Court struck down laws that prohibited interracial marriage. It is now time that the barrier to the right of two consenting adults to marry also comes down.

Surveys show most Americans support the concept of civil unions. Even President Bush implied recently that states should be free to sanction civil unions.

It is now a widely held belief that every adult ought to have the right to determine who is the beneficiary of their insurance, who has the right to visit them in a hospital, or who should be in the position to make end-of-life decisions.

But civil unions are not enough. It still implies second-class citizenship.

The right to marry conveys full citizenship. At the federal level alone, there are more than one thousand benefits that married couples enjoy, which those in a civil union could not access.

But to talk only of financial ben-

efits and rights misses a larger point. Marriage is far more than a business arrangement. It is a covenant of love, the promise of two people who pledge to remain faithful to each other for a lifetime.

Marriage is the place where we create a home for children - and gay men and lesbian women have children and throughout history have had children. Those children have the right to be raised within the loving confines of a marriage, not within an ambiguously named civil union.

In a world where we worry that promiscuity is rampant, why would we not embrace those who are pledging fidelity?

In a world racked with instability, why would we not embrace those who seek permanence?

In a world where we worry about a lack of commitment, why would we not embrace those building a lifetime of devotion?

The action taken by Multnomah County commissioners puts a human face - the face of our sons and daughters, our friends and neighbors - on the issue of same-gender marriage.

These faces, beaming as they promise to love, honor and cherish the one person they have chosen to spend their lives with, show that we have nothing to fear from this expansion of marriage. Rather, there is much to love.

Vera Katz is the mayor of Portland and a long-time activist social justice and civil rights.



BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

## Gun Makers Run for Cover

### We must be vigilant in fighting for gun accountability

After years of exercising a chokehold on Washington D.C. and state capitals throughout the country, gun makers and The National Rifle Association who do their bidding, experienced a rare loss recently.

The U.S. Senate was forced to abandon efforts to pass legislation which would have protected gun manufacturers from lawsuits by crime victims. They were forced to retreat after 12 Republican Senators decided to join Democrats in calling for an extension on the assault weapons ban and background checks on gun purchasers at gun shows, as a condition of passing the gun maker protection bill.

Instead of compromising, the gun lobbyists decided to withdraw and reload, perhaps for next year. Rest assure they have not given up on their effort to protect gun makers. Indeed this is just the latest effort to protect gun manufacturers from being sued by victims of gun violence, cities and organizations who want manufacturers to be held liable when they negligently distribute guns into the wrong hands.

The NAACP, Chicago, and other cities have sued gun manufacturers because of the death and carnage that assault weapons and handguns have caused in

America's inner cities. Certainly, if tobacco companies can be held liable for diseases and deaths caused by smoking, gun makers should be liable for the negligent distribution of guns.

Why then are some elected officials fighting to protect gun makers instead of fighting to protect the lives of the citizens they represent? Well, like most legislation in Washington, the lobbyists and corporations who spend the most time and money in Washington usually get what they ask for. That's why the defeat of the legislation is such a great victory, albeit temporary.

We must be as vigilant in fighting for gun accountability as the NRA and the gun manufacturers are in protecting the sale of assault weapons. AK47 rifles and MAC 10 machine guns continue to kill thousands of inner city youth each year. These guns have no place in society. You can't even hunt animals with them because the bullets would shred the kill. We must call and write our Federal elected officials and let them know we expect them to protect voters and not gun makers.

Judge Greg Mathis is chairman of the Rainbow PUSH-Excel Board and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

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