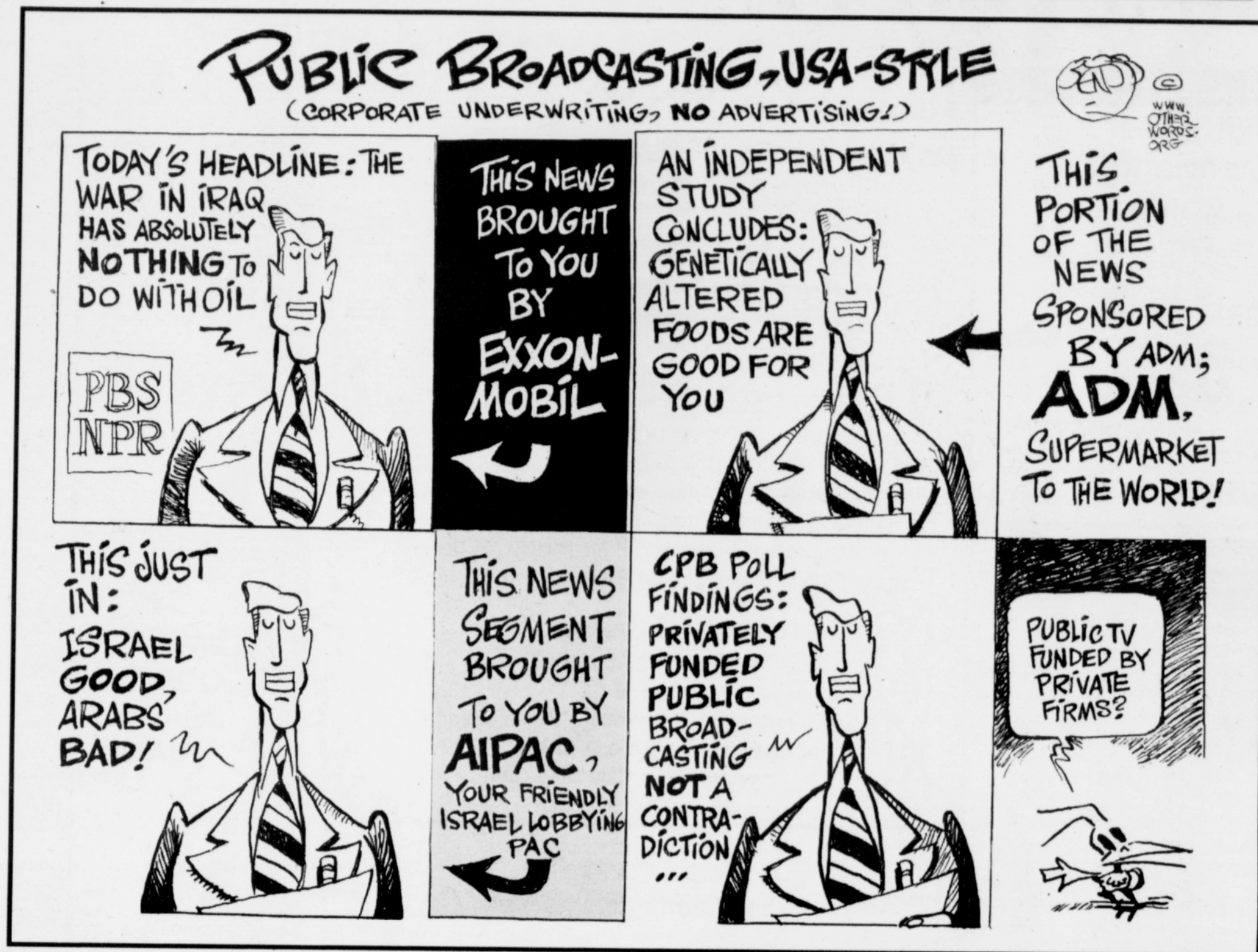


# OPINION



## Gay Rights are Civil Rights

Standing against discrimination

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

The United States is suffering from an identity crisis when it comes to the rights and safety of homosexuals and lesbians. On the one hand, the government says it respects the rights of gays to live as domestic partners, to be free from violence and to work in whatever field they choose, even the military. Yet, the government seems to do very little – and even contradicts itself – when it comes to making these ideas reality.

Recently, a federal court lifted the controversial “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy that prohibited gays in



the military from openly declaring their homosexuality. Anyone caught doing so, under the law, could be immediately discharged

from service. President Obama has often stated that he wanted to bring an end to the policy during his presidency. However, as soon as the ruling came down, his Justice Department began working on an appeal that would keep the ban in place...at least temporarily. And they won.

The President still maintains that he wants “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” to die, but he says he wants Congress to bring an end to it. It’s highly unlikely that the President will get his wish with such strong opposition from Republicans in Congress. Why, then, didn’t his administra-

tion let the ruling stand? Your guess is as good as any.

The confusion doesn’t end there. In recent weeks, we’ve been sobered with stories of young gay men across the country who committed suicide because they were tired of being bullied by their peers. Research shows that gay and lesbian teens are four times more likely to commit suicide than their heterosexual counterparts.

There is currently a national campaign aimed at young homosexuals, designed to lift their spirits, encourage them to get help and let them know that things will get better for them. In the midst of all this support, one thing is missing: a government stance on bullying, specifically bullying of gay students. Where is the national policy that cracks down hard

on bullies and charges any young person who bullies a gay teen (or a black or Latino or Asian one) with a hate crime? There isn’t one.

Gay rights are civil rights and we must protect them. Any American, regardless of race, gender, religion or sexual orientation should be free to live life openly and safely. America, as open as it is in other areas, is not at that place yet and it should be.

Let’s force our elected officials to take a stand for the rights of all citizens by standing up for gay rights. We should only support those who fall on the side of justice, fairness and equality for everyone.

Greg Mathis is a retired Michigan District Court judge and current syndicated television show judge.

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