

OPINION

Put Aside the Politics and Celebrate

Obama is right on gay marriage

BY MICHAEL NEUROTH

President Obama sent the media and public "a-twitter" with his public support for gay marriage earlier this month. Newspapers, blogs and social networking sites have been buzzing with opinions and articles regarding the implications of this announcement.

In his interview on ABC news on May 9, Obama stated unequivocally, "I've just concluded that—for me personally, it is important for me to go ahead and affirm that—I think same-sex couples should be able to get married."

Many United Church of Christ friends celebrated this moment on Facebook and the UCC's General Minister and President, Rev. Geoffrey Black, issued a powerful affirmation of Obama's statement attesting to the "countless testimonies" of same gender couples in the UCC who live the "vocation of marriage" as well as anyone.

As a member of Hope United Church of Christ, an Open and Affirming UCC church with several same gender couples, I experience this truth as well.

Not surprisingly, though, not everyone is celebrating this moment. As I found

...polls have shown that despite a slim 51 percent public support for Obama's position, those states expected to be close in the presidential election have laws or constitutional provisions that prohibit same-sex marriage.

on my own Facebook wall, many of my friends are divided on the issue.

Amidst a flurry of comments celebrating this moment, one friend dismissively suggested that it was "just politics." Really? He dismissed this as a historic moment for civil rights because of his belief that the President's statement was politically motivated. I removed this comment knowing that it did

not reflect my opinion and it might be hurtful to those for whom this moment is one of deep celebration. This comment, though, caused me to think and wrestle with this question the past few days.

No doubt whatever a President does

chances in the election. And he did this for pure political gain?

I'd like to think that Obama's "evolution" on the topic of gay marriage had something to do with the fact that he spent over 20 years in a United Church of Christ congregation. The United Church of Christ has a long history of affirming and working for equal rights for LGBTQ persons.

I know for me, my own perspective was shaped through experiencing the genuine love I saw in same-gender relationships of my friends and colleagues in seminary. Whatever Obama's motivation to declare his support for same-sex marriage, there are moments when we must put aside politics and celebrate.

This is one of those moments. Let's celebrate this historic point for our country. And even more importantly, let's celebrate this profound moment for the millions of same gender loving couples in our churches and communities.

Michael Neuroth is a policy advocate for international issues in the United Church of Christ.

Look What Law and Order Has Wrought

BY WILLIAM REED

Don't you think that it's time to reform America's criminal justice system? It's an unfair, racist and dishonest system in need of abandonment.

In the last 40-years an insidious prison industrial complex has developed to the detriment of African-American males. It appears that politicians of all stripes are more interested in sending African Americans to prison than to college. It's time to sound the alarm on the harm the country's prison industrial complex is causing.

How is it that African Ameri-



cans are so dismissive of the mass incarceration of our male population? It's time to publicly scrutinize the disproportionate prison population numbers. Going to prison represents lifelong exclusion from "proper society" including job discrimination, elimination from juries and voter rolls, and disqualification from access to food stamps, public housing and student loans. Black leaders need to address the devastating effect of the war on drugs on our communities.

The American justice system is racist, outmoded and deserving of public scorn. Today, black males are the country's most

socially disenfranchised group. It should be of major concern that 10.4 percent of the African-American male population ages 25 to 29 is incarcerated. We all know someone "in trouble."

More than 3 million black

The true racial problems in this country involve drug law enforcement. The drug war is out of control ... and undermines our civil liberties. It magnifies our problems on the borders.

— Ron Paul, presidential candidate

households have a close relative currently or previously on parole or probation. The numbers have grown to the point that more African-American men are in jail than in college. Since the "War on Drugs" was launched, the U.S. has spent more than a trillion dollars incarcerating millions of young people on drug charges. The "War on Drugs" has created a marginalized underclass that's denied equal access to jobs and educational opportunities.

Isn't it time to take elected

officials to task for the laws they helped to design, write and legislate? To allow these laws and lawmakers to remain in office is a crime.

Blacks receive little of the \$321.6 billion the global drug trade

generates, but suffer the most in law enforcement and the legal system. Approximately 13 million Americans buy or sell, cocaine, Ecstasy or weed on a regular basis. Whether it's for recreational use or for profit, they're not the ones who go to jail for drug crimes. American drug sales and their huge profits exist outside Black communities. It's estimated that \$10 to \$30 billion in drug profits goes south to Colombia and Mexico each year. The real beneficiaries of the American drug trade

are wealthy bankers who launder money, land owners who grow and export product, and Wall Street investors and business folk who profit from designing, building, supplying and managing prisons.

Candidate Ron Paul is the only one willing to say: "The true racial problems in this country involve drug law enforcement. The drug war is out of control ... and undermines our civil liberties. It magnifies our problems on the borders. We spent, over the last 40 years, \$1 trillion on this war ... It just hasn't worked. It has to do with enforcing the drug laws."

We must take more aggressive political positions to rid our people of this criminal justice and prison system. Stop the genocide. People of conscience must let our elected officials know that we want to decriminalize cocaine, heroin and marijuana in order to close the doors on diabolical prisons and policies.

William Reed is publisher of Who's Who in Black Corporate America.

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