

A time out for same-sex vows

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By Jon Carroll

A few months ago I said that I thought, what with the oceans dying and the ice caps melting and Iraq in flames and 10 million kids in Africa starving, that gay marriage maybe wasn't worth quite as much energy as it was getting. We do need to do issue triage because we can't be everywhere. Sometimes it seems as if we can't be anywhere.

Now comes a statement from 260 current and former leaders of such gay rights organizations as the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** and the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation that also suggests reducing the concentration on gay marriage. Their reasons are different from mine, although they're not mutually exclusive.

The statement says that there are all sorts of family units that require honoring, that require legal protection, that require attention. Merely to broaden the class of privileged citizens does not deal with the underlying problem. The state should have nothing to say about how parents raise children, unless the children are being abused. Abuse is orthogonal to family structure. The government has enough to worry about without arranging its citizens into couples it approves of.

(The current system, please note, rewards loveless marriages of convenience between men and women, and punishes loving relationships within, say, an extended family. Anytime we're outlawing succor, we're on the wrong path.)

According to Wyatt Buchanan of this very newspaper, the statement listed relationships and households that would not benefit from the legalization of gay marriage, including senior citizens living together, people in polyamorous relationships, single-parent families, extended families and gay or lesbian parents who raise children with other couples.

It seems to me that marriage has two attractions, one practical, one symbolic. The practical stuff, like insurance benefits and inheritance rights and custody arrangements, can be handled by specific pieces of legislation that do not contain the hot-button word "marriage." As for the symbolic issue -- things are a little tense right now to be fighting symbolic battles. Real young American men and women are dying in a pointless war; our secretary of state is saying that a cease-fire in Lebanon would be "meaningless" (tell that to the people who would not be bombed) and our vigorous efforts toward killing the planet continue unabated.

And just by the way, marriage in modern America is a somewhat debased institution. One out of two marriages fail. Are you sure this is a club you want to join? In the real world, life seems to be moving beyond 19th century categories pretty quickly; why join the forces of reaction?

One reason to continue the fight for gay marriage -- not a good one, perhaps, but still real -- is how annoying the forces of opposition have become. It could be just be their ridiculous death throes, but, you know, maybe not. For instance: The Supreme Court of the state of Washington ruled last week that marriage was, just as the Washington Legislature had said, solely a union between a man and a woman. Justice Barbara Madsen opined that the state's marriage law was enacted to "promote procreation and to encourage stable families."

"The legislature was entitled to believe that limiting marriage to opposite-sex couples furthers the State's

legitimate interests in procreation and the well-being of children," she wrote.

Are we having a procreation crisis? Has gay marriage so frightened the other citizens that they are unable to perform adequately in bed? Are the little sperm disconsolately hiding in soft tissue rather than madly beating their way upstream? Are we suffering from a people shortage? (We must be -- we're importing them from Mexico. OK, bad joke.)

And, I'm sorry, but what exactly is the state's interest in procreation? Sure, if thermonuclear war took out the entire planet and there were only 31 people left, including Beyoncé, Jennifer Love Hewitt, Lance Bass and me -- I can see that the state (which would also be composed of 31 people) would want to encourage procreation. We'd need more people to fight the mutant dinosaurs.

But actually, and correct me if I'm wrong here, the planet is suffering from an overabundance of people. Many people believe overpopulation is the underlying reason for any number of economic and environmental problems. Indeed, looked at that way, the state has a legitimate interest in discouraging procreation. Let's pay those legendary homosexual recruiters, I say, and maybe we can revive, I dunno, the cod industry.

Meantime, of course, gays and lesbians are going to continue to live together, continue to raise children together, continue to act like human beings. They can be responsible or negligent, smart or stupid, loving or selfish. The only thing they can't be is married. Does this make any sense at all? OK, let's just all agree it doesn't, and move on.