



Coffee Break JERRY COFFEE

Gay Marriage And Majority Opinion

A misleading headline in one of last Wednesday's (March 7) local dailies had me doing a double take: "House reconsiders same-sex benefits." I had thought for sure the same sex union bill giving same-sex couples the same rights as married couples was dead for this year. As it turns out, apparently it is. The headline should have said: "House reconsiders Reciprocal Benefits (RB) bill." But at the beginning of the article by Treena Shapiro, she says, "Passage could further Hawaii's recognition of same-sex relationships," further muddying the waters.

Apparently I wasn't alone, because the Hawaii Family Forum (HFF) was quick to clarify the issue on its Web site. The RB bill is designed to provide state workers the same benefits enjoyed by private sector workers, i.e. reciprocal health benefits for two people living together, elderly siblings as one example. The bill has nothing to do with the sexual orientation of the couple. State Rep. Sylvia Luke said the RB issue should not have been mixed in with the proposed civil union legislation, hence, the confusion.

But could the RB issue still be

morphed into another civil union bill when it reaches the Senate? According to HFF, Clayton Hee, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, says "no." The House bill is too narrowly defined, and the Senate will not consider a civil union bill unless it comes from the House.

HFF actually supports the RB legislation, but says, perhaps ironically, gay activists are against the bill and call it "low class" and a "slap in the face to gay people." HFF goes on: "For these activists, nothing will satisfy them short of state recognition that their relationships are just like marriage."

This does indeed seem to be the case, and given the fact that the people of Hawaii voted overwhelmingly (more than 70 percent) to amend the state Constitution to define marriage as between one man and one woman, who among our state representatives consistently introduces legislation contrary to the obvious will of the people they're supposed to represent?

When I ran for the House myself in 2004 to represent the values and priorities of the people of House District 33, Halawa, Aiea and Waimalu, the overwhelmingly conservative values of his con-

stituents weren't being represented by my opponent, Blake Oshiro, their young, ultra-liberal (by his own admission) incumbent House "representative." And he continues to be one of the strongest advocates for the equal recognition of same-sex partnerships.

As voters, we need to constantly ask ourselves, "Is my representative truly representing my values and priorities as I elected her/him to do, or the opposite values of a tiny minority which may

or may not even emanate from my district? Or even more pointedly, is she/he putting their personal agenda over their promise to represent mine and my neighbors'?"

The annual proposal of legislation to equalize same-sex unions with marriage is a good case in point. This is the context in which we must make our electoral choices. I know, the next election is many months away, but now is the time to be paying attention.

What legislation is my representative initiating, and how is

she/he voting? Does it represent my values and priorities?

Don't be misled by the daily papers' election-season, boiler-plate endorsements. Don't let the smoke screen of your representative's quarterly newsletter — superficial photo ops, weekend cleanups and money that would come to your schools anyway — cloud your discernment.

Ask, on the truly important issues, is my representative representing me?

CoffeePage@aol.com

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