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# First Friday News & Views

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## GAY CIVIL EQUALITY COMES WITH A GUARANTEE

by Jonathan Wilson

I know the outcome of the debate over gay civil equality, including marriage. I know it for sure. We win and, in doing so, everyone wins. The rapidity with which we are approaching that outcome has thus far been remarkable, and the pace will only accelerate. There are several coalescing reasons.

First, unlike most other minority groups, gay men and lesbians have blood ties -- inseparable blood ties -- into the majority. I know; I know. I've heard the horror stories about parents rejecting their children over this issue. They are the distinct minority of parents; they are violating the laws of the Universe; and, in time, they too will come around (if they don't die first). The vast majority of parents embrace their LGBT children (once they know), as do the siblings, the aunts, the uncles, the cousins, the children, and in my case, the grandchildren. Those are powerful multiples; you do the political math. There is a threshold beyond which there's no turning back, and we've crossed it.

Second, gay and lesbian citizens who have served in the US armed forces from the beginning of the Republic, can now serve openly. The equal willingness to die, openly, for the protection of our rights and freedoms, makes a compelling case for those rights and freedoms being equal as well.

Third, virtually all the momentum is in the direction of equality. In the span of just forty years, I've seen us go from believing that homosexuality is a mental illness to learning that it isn't, and homophobia is. I've seen us go from same-gender intimacy being a crime in every state in the Union to its decriminalization in every state, bar none. I've seen state courts and state legislatures weigh in to legalize and/or recognize same-gender marriage. And I've seen the federal legislation saying otherwise challenged and a Justice Department -- for once, at least, true to its name -- refuse to defend the law. That's almost unprecedented, and it's truly telling.

Fourth, ours is *one nation*. We cannot have *one nation* and, at the same time, have multi-state businesses hamstrung by a patchwork of differing state laws when transferring employees for promotion or otherwise. Just ask the chambers of commerce or any such company. Such a patchwork adds potential reluctance to an employee's willingness to relocate. Beyond that, we cannot have *one nation* and, at the same time, tolerate individual rights and liberties fluctuating from fully equal to none-at-all during a single road trip across the country.

Fifth, we all know that money talks. It was recently reported in **The New York Times** (March 24, 2012), that extremely wealthy individuals -- gay, straight, Democrat, and Republican -- are raising BIG money to advance the cause. The momentum we've already seen will not be going underfunded. And it's paying off; support for gay marriage -- the ultimate test of civil equality and genuine separation of church and state -- has comfortably surpassed the 50% mark in nation-wide polling.

Sixth, as if five coalescing reasons weren't compelling enough, the fact is that individual freedom is irrepressible. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, the arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice. And I say, when it bends just a little bit further, it's going to make a rainbow.

Finally, the explosion of right-wing hate groups recently reported by the Southern Poverty Law Center, while distasteful, is actually a positive indicator on this topic. They read the same

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### CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, May 4, 2012, at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by May 2 to [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or 288-2500 by phone.

## Civil Equality (cont.)

writing on the wall that other observant people do. Folks afraid of water get agitated when they find themselves in the path of a rising tide. They then become vocal, but they don't change the tide. It may not be over, but the sound we're all hearing that accompanies the writing on the wall is the fat lady warming up. Thank God, and good reason(s).

You can read in history books the names of bigots like Governor George Wallace and Lester Maddox who, today, would almost certainly be embarrassed about things they said, positions they held, and things they did during the early years of the racial civil rights movement. By contrast, when it comes to the gay civil equality movement, you're going to be able to read such names in a current telephone book. Guaranteed.

## A New Vision for Iowa's Land Grant University

By Bruce Carr



Our guest speaker on Friday morning, April 6, was the new president of Iowa State University, Steven Leath, who began his tenure as the university's fifteenth CEO last January. After ascertaining that there were surely as many Cyclones as Hawkeyes in his audience, Leath outlined for us some of his plans:

"Iowa State is a great university but sometimes it's undersold because people have been very humble about it," he said. "We need to get our reputation up to the national and international level.... I think land grants -- more than any other university type in this country -- get their mission right. They're based on high-quality education, research to benefit society, and then translating that research to effective engagement. That fits me well, that's the kind of person I am."

Economic development is "dear to my heart," he said, and an area where ISU has traditionally done well. But he sees room for growth, especially when it comes to partnering with private companies to further scientific research, and to deliver the results of that research to society. "I think I can have a major impact on being the go-to university for these types of things. ...We want to be that one university that is the best place to do public-private partnerships." Forming these kinds of partnerships -- focusing on demand-driven service to the state -- means going outside of Ames, to Des Moines in particular, but also to the four corners. "So we listen," Leath said.

In Q&A following his talk, Leath mentioned in particular his appearing personally at the Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender Ally College Conference *The Rainbow Effect* in Ames last February -- against the counsel of some of his advisors although the event was sponsored by ISU's Division

of Student Affairs. (At the restaurant afterward, he and his wife felt severely underdressed when they encountered members of the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus who had just finished performing at the conference -- in their tuxedos.)

Trained as a plant scientist, Steven Leath served at three universities in teaching, research, and economic development posts en route to the ISU presidency. At North Carolina State University, Raleigh, Leath held several positions, including director of the NC Agricultural Research Service (ARS), associate dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, professor, and research leader and plant pathologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's ARS. He began his academic career at the University of Illinois, Urbana, as an extension plant pathologist. His academic degrees include a BS from Penn State, an MS in plant science from the University of Delaware, and a Ph.D. in plant pathology from the University of Illinois.

## Helping Good Schools Become Great Schools

By Senator Matt McCoy

Iowa's local schools aim to provide a world-class education that opens doors to a better tomorrow. That requires on-going efforts to improve. To help, the Iowa Senate has approved comprehensive education reform. Debate highlights can be seen at [www.youtube.com/iowasenate](http://www.youtube.com/iowasenate).

In recent years, we've taken the advice of parents, teachers, and students, as well as state and national experts. Together, we have improved Iowa education by establishing a statewide public/private partnership to improve preschools, expanding efforts to help children learn to read, raising standards, and establishing consistent graduation requirements.

We've made schools safer for all children by outlawing bullying and smoking on school grounds. And we've taken steps to keep the best teachers working in Iowa classrooms and to provide more opportunities for teachers to improve their skills.

This year's education reform, [Senate File 2284](#), builds on those successes by:

- Focusing on learning to read and small class sizes in the younger grades so struggling students can catch up.
- Helping students learn at their own pace to master the basics and then advance more quickly in the subjects they love most.
- Expanding the core curriculum to include arts, music, and technology.
- Improving instruction through teacher-to-teacher collaboration and coaching.
- Using online learning to enhance and extend—but not replace—offerings in our local schools.
- Creating pilot projects to extend the school year and school day to measure the impact on student achievement.
- Strengthening connections between schools and families with struggling students.

I hope the House will quickly approve [SF 2284](#) and send it to the Governor for his signature so that we can continue building on Iowa's tradition of educational excellence.

We also need to continue investing in higher education. I am concerned that state support for our universities has fallen sharply

## From the Pastor's Pen:

By Rev. Jonathan Page

Two years ago I sat, rather uncomfortably, in the upper room of Harvard's Memorial Church. The discomfort was due to overstuffed leather chairs with no lumbar support that passed for stylish in that corner of Harvard Yard. Random old oil paintings from Harvard's collections stared down at the fifty of us gathered there to hear a lecture by renowned Christian ethicist Mark Jordan. Mark's topic for the evening: gay marriage. The lecture was riveting and surprising.

"My job," Mark said, "as a Christian ethicist is to examine where God is present in people's lives, and then to reflect on it. The topic of gay marriage presents as intriguing a subject as any other." Mark began by laying out the history of Christian marriage. Contrary to what many right wing Christians claim, marriage does not have a long history within Christianity. The Church Fathers lauded celibacy. Only in the Middle Ages do we find marriages happening in a Christian liturgical setting. Even then, marriage was more about property rights and security than love. Much of the modern day marriage ceremony is derived from that rite in spite of the fact that we conveniently ignore its origins. Consider the white, virginal wedding gown and the tradition of a father giving away his daughter.

At its core, Mark argued, Christian marriage should be about seeking God's blessing. If a couple wants the legal contractual recognition of their relationship, they should go to a town hall and get married. If they want God's blessing, they should go to a church or other religious setting. Once you separate the civil part of marriage from the religious, you can reexamine the institution unencumbered by the current debates over the place of same-sex civil marriage in our society.

Mark spent several years interviewing gay couples from around the country who chose to get married in a Christian setting. What intrigued him was that, despite the church's broad opposition to gay marriage, gays had been getting married in churches for decades. What would prompt a couple to have their relationship blessed by God? What implications might their relationships and ceremonies have for rethinking concepts of marriage more broadly?

As Mark looked carefully at the subject, he realized that some of the gay couples he interviewed presented challenges for how marriages are perceived. "Marriage in most Christian liturgies," Mark noted, "assumes a monogamous relationship that lasts 'until we are parted by death.' What if a couple honestly considered their situation and realized that they wanted God's blessing but could not commit for life? In the straight world that means divorce, but does it have to?" By this point in Mark's lecture, all of us were leaning forward in our chairs. By making marriage about God's blessing and not about some supposedly hallowed and set-in-stone rite, he was leading us places we had never gone.

Mark continued, "Other gay couples have poly-amorous relationships where three or more people have a long-term committed relationship. Could God bless those relationships?" Silence prevailed in the room. "It happens in straight couples all the time," he pointed out, "and we use the term 'mistress.' Of course, in those relationships the mistress has no rights, and

the gender balance usually places the man in a position of power. Are not gay poly-amorous relationships more honest? There are also plenty of gay couples that have open relationships. The straight parlance is 'cheating' or 'adultery.' Are not open relationships more honest? Is there a way that God might bless them?"

As Mark finished his talk, everyone shifted uneasily in his or her chair. The undergraduate sitting next to me seemed particularly unnerved. He had this starry-eyed vision of being married by age twenty-three with a white picket fence and two-point-two children. Mark had not so conveniently shaken his dreams of the traditional marriage and all it was supposed to mean. What about the rest of us? Is there a place for the rethinking of marriage in a Christian context? Maybe Mark is right. Maybe gays can teach straights a thing or two.

*FFBC member Jonathan Page is senior pastor of the Ames United Church of Christ, 217 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Ames, Iowa. Sunday service at 10:45. He can be reached at [jon@Amesucc.org](mailto:jon@Amesucc.org).*

## Schools... (cont.)

in recent years, which has resulted in higher tuition. That's why Iowa student debt is among the highest in the nation. Students from UNI and ISU and the U of I are our future leaders in education, bio-sciences, engineering, physics, business, and other areas. In addition, our state universities help Iowa businesses of all sizes through direct technical assistance and technology transfers.

There are lots of good reasons to invest in our universities. Students from Iowa's three state universities have started a new grassroots effort to spread that word in hopes of keeping a high-quality college education affordable for all Iowa families. Learn more about this effort and what our state universities do for all of us at [www.facebook.com/Universitiesforabetteriowa](http://www.facebook.com/Universitiesforabetteriowa).

## BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the May 4 meeting no later than May 2. E-mail [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Matthew Russell, Drake University agronomist who is gay and who, with his husband, has an organic farming operation in central Iowa .

Thanks to Matthew Ellingwood for his introduction of our April speaker, Dr. Steven Leath, President of Iowa State University.

Outnetworking meets the second Wednesday of every month at 5:30 p.m. at the Kirkwood Lounge (the new home of The Des Moines Social Club), 400 Walnut Street. It is a social, business, and philanthropic networking organization for anyone who is gay, bisexual, transgendered, questioning, or supportive .

Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. Book donations are always welcome. Thanks to **Fred Mount** and **Barry McGriff** for coordinating the book exchange.

# FFBC

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Des Moines, Iowa*

*MAY 2012*

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## My M.O. (Monthly Observations)

### The Second Time Around

By Steve Person

“A room without books is like a body without a soul,” goes the saying attributed to the Roman poet Cicero. I couldn’t agree more. Recently I performed the pleasant task of sorting through all my books and “weeding” them as any responsible librarian would do. I came across a number of volumes I hadn’t read in years and decided to re-read some of them. Of note was the 1987 book by Katharine Hepburn entitled **The Making of the African Queen—or—How I went to Africa with Bogart, Bacall and Huston and almost lost my mind**. I got so much more out the second reading than I did the first so many years ago. In part, I believe this is the result of growing older and having a greater appreciation of events that only age can provide.

Hepburn wrote her book in stream of consciousness, a “narrative technique ...intended to render the flow of myriad impressions—visual, auditory, physical, associative, and subliminal—that together with rational thought impinge on the consciousness of an individual.” I never really appreciated that when I was younger. As I re-read the book, I understood what Hepburn was trying to say and her interpretation of events in Hollywood, London, the Belgian Congo, and Uganda where the movie was filmed.

One of the discoveries I made during the re-reading of the book was the wonderful word “titivate” on page 51. Such a rare and revealing word. So rare, in fact, that the spell checker on the computer had no idea it even existed. Thank god hard-copy dictionaries still exist! It means, “to make decorative additions to; spruce up.”

At their makeshift sleeping quarters in the Belgian Congo, which by the way, had no modern toilets, Hepburn made a telling observation about John Huston. “John lived down near the office—he had a noisy spot, but a shower connected with his hut. I never did see him go to the outhouse. Maybe he never did. Wouldn’t surprise me a bit. Would explain a great deal.”

In addition to explaining her observations about the making of that classic film, there were “Hepburn-isms” galore. Some of my favorites: “Live dangerously. There’s a lot to be said for sinning;” “If you obey all the rules you miss all the fun;” and “Please yourself and at least someone is pleased.”

Many of my friends have taken to reading books on electronic readers. What a pity! I like the feel of a book in my hands—the cover, the feel of the paper, turning the pages. While I know these electronic gadgets is where the reading of books is headed, I cannot help but feel sorry for the folks who use them. I like to write in my books—immediately underlining or writing in the margins if something strikes me as worth remembering. Most of the books I read wouldn’t be available on them anyway. And what would become of the coffee table books? I’d love to see an electronic version. I doubt Planned Parenthood will be having its annual sale any time soon featuring electronic readers.

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*Constitutional democracy is a compromise between unaccountable dictatorship and an unaccountable lynch mob. At the core of both is the thirst for, and arrogance of, power. Without an independent judiciary actively committed to upholding the constitution, the moving pendulum of daily political decisions will swing unaccountably and unchecked toward one or the other.*

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