



First Friday News & Views

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The Monthly Newsletter
of the First Friday
Breakfast Club, Inc.

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▼ The next FFBC Meeting is 7:00am,
Friday, October 3, 2014, at Hoyt
Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland,
Des Moines, IA

▼ RSVP by October 1 to
JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com,
or phone 515-288-2500

The Meaning of Words

By Jonathan Wilson

I fancy myself a bit of a linguist. I have a decent vocabulary and, thanks to spell check, I can turn out words in writing that are correctly spelled, except for the occasional homonym -- a word pronounced like another but having a different spelling and meaning. I like words and have had some experience personally and professionally using words to convey my thoughts.

For obvious reasons I've given some thought to the word "marriage" and the intense controversy over giving gay citizens equal access to it. There are those who have resisted this advance in civil rights for their law-abiding fellow citizens and the change in the meaning of marriage that it entails. They are reluctant to share this word for both heterosexual unions and homosexual unions. I get it. They faithfully believe that the former unions are sacred (whether they've treated them that way or not), and the latter unions are a perversion. As a matter of religious doctrine they believe that the former unions are, by definition, marriages and, therefore, that the latter simply can't be. Being definitional, there's no arguing with them because they *start* with their conclusion. It's like someone believing as a matter of faith that a conifer is synonymous with and the only synonym for the word "tree." If one starts with that definitional conclusion, there's no way for an oak, walnut, apple, or cherry to make the grade as a "tree." They'd have to settle for being plants I guess.

I get it. It's like the word "friend." It has a powerful meaning to me when I use it to refer to someone close to me personally. But when a fund-raising politician addresses me as "Dear Friend," which happens frequently, the word takes on a more hollow meaning. It's cheapened. When used on Facebook, the word "friend" ceases to have any meaningful meaning at all.

That's not the only example. Take the word "neighbor." The term once simply meant the person living next door, until Jesus gave it a new, expanded definition by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jews of that time hated Samaritans and the parable is about such a person giving comfort to a Jewish victim of robbery. When Jesus asked his questioners who in the parable was the "neighbor," the answer came, "The one who showed mercy" (he couldn't even say "the Samaritan," they were so much hated). I suspect, if Jesus were asked the question today, the story would become known as the Good Homosexual.

That aside, the fact is that globalization of our human interactions has expanded the meaning of "neighbor" even *Continued on p. 2*

more as we are increasingly made aware of the sad plight of our fellow human beings around the world. If you think about it, modern day Christians put their souls in peril when such atrocities are known and ignored. And all because Jesus changed the meaning of the word “neighbor” and that meaning has continued to change as the circle of known victims grows ever larger. How frustrating that must be for thoughtful Christians.

Despite claims to the contrary, the meaning of marriage has also changed over time. It once was a polygamous institution. It became a nominally monogamous property transaction -- the women were the property. It “progressed” to being an occasional political event, binding whole nations together. Everyone knows it used to occur exclusively among those of the same religion and race -- and that has, thankfully, changed. There are those today who probably feel that such changes in its meaning watered it down. Denigrated it. Certainly, with each of those historic changes, the meaning of “marriage” undeniably did change. Some cling religiously to one meaning ascribed to the word at a particular moment in time. That’s a function of their freedom of religion. They can cling

as well to what they think baptism means, what salvation means, what being born again means, what is or isn’t sainthood, what is or isn’t sin, what is or isn’t a tree. You name it. Clinging to such fixed, definitional beliefs about the meaning of terms has divided religions and denominations for centuries.

What those folks don’t get to have is the endorsement of their fixed definitions by a secular, constitutionally grounded government. The Constitution prohibits the theocracy that they crave -- craved because it’s so much easier to dictate than persuade; to mandate than to convert.

That Constitution, by the way, was adopted by the proverbial “We the People.” Its terms also change over time. It makes the President, for example, Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy. But clearly, today, the President is also Commander-in-Chief of the United States Air Force without the need for a Constitutional amendment to redefine the term.

Judges have not been making it up when they are called upon to read the Constitution and conclude that equal should mean equal. In mathematics, the meaning of the word equal probably doesn’t change, but in the arena of civil rights, it does. And that change has made “equal” one of my favorite words today.

Of pigs and Senator Rand Paul

By Jonathan Wilson

In the grand tradition that even a blind hog finds an acorn now and then, Senator Rand Paul got one half-right. He wrote a compelling article in *Time* magazine decrying the militarization of police forces throughout the country as exemplified by the tragedy in Ferguson, Missouri.

I say half-right because, while he does an excellent job of rehearsing the problem, he makes no meaningful suggestion about what should be done about it. He concludes by saying, “Let us continue to pray for Michael Brown’s family, the people of Ferguson, police, and citizens alike.”

Hog wash; almost anyone can recognize and restate an obvious problem. Real leadership would give us practical

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Briefs & Shorts

Be sure to RSVP for the October 3 meeting no later than October 1. Contact Jonathan at 288-2500 or email him at JonathanWilson@DavisBrownLaw.com. Our scheduled speaker will be Representative Bruce Braley.

Thanks to Scott Kuknyo for his introduction of our September speaker, Michael B. Keegan, President of *People for the American Way*.

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

Consider a tax deductible contribution to the FFBC scholarship fund, or a tax exempt testamentary gift, or both.



PFAW: On Point for Progress

By Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday morning, September 5, was Michael B. Keegan, president for the last five years of People for the American Way (PFAW). Formerly based in southern California, and now in

Washington DC, Keegan expressed his delight at finally getting to visit Iowa -- seemingly an unlikely leader, he noted (from the parochial bicoastal perspective) in the campaign for marriage equality. (People for the American Way was the first non-gay political organization to publicly support marriage equality, starting in the mid-nineties.)

Keegan outlined the history and projects of his organization: it was founded in 1981 by TV producer Norman Lear to counter the divisive rhetoric of influential televangelists such as Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. Co-founders included Texas Congresswoman Barbara Jordan; ex-CEO of Time, Inc., Andrew Heiskell; and other leaders from the political, religious, business, and entertainment communities. "Our operational mission is to promote the American Way and defend it from attack," reads PFAW's Mission and Vision, "to build and nurture communities of support for our values, and to equip those communities to promote progressive policies, elect progressive candidates, and hold public officials accountable."

PFAW works toward these goals, Keegan noted, by monitoring right-wing activities, conducting rapid response, political lobbying, and volunteer mobilization. In addition, the organization's affiliated foundation runs programs designed for voter education and politically progressive infrastructure building. PFAW Foundation programs include Young People For, which identifies, trains, and supports future progressive leaders; the Young Elected Officials

Network, which identifies and supports progressive elected officials from around the country who are under the age of 35; African American Religious Affairs, which mobilizes and supports progressive activism in African American congregations and communities; and legislation around the separation of church and state.

The primary fear that motivates all the disparate right-wing groups is currently homophobia, Keegan said. He highlighted PFAW's "Right-Wing Watch," a project dedicated to ongoing publicizing of these organizations and their communications (e-mails, television and internet broadcasts, blogs, websites). It keeps track of and presents many of the embarrassing, vitriolic, or bigoted things that are said by them on a variety of topics, including LGBT rights, Islam, and reproductive rights.

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Michael Keegan has extensive experience as a business executive, philanthropist, and longtime board member of both People For the American Way and People For the American Way Foundation, beginning his tenure with the organizations in 1994. Michael has a rich background in progressive activism, particularly in the area of LGBT equality. He is a founding national board member of The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD); he also serves on the board of the Los Angeles Public Library and as a trustee of the Muriel Pollia Foundation.

Keegan received his BA in American Studies from Vanderbilt University, where he was president of the student body, and his MBA in International Business and Entertainment Management from Columbia University. He has worked in various capacities in the media and entertainment industries, at companies such as Columbia Pictures and Act III Communications, where he served as President of the 500-screen Act III Theatres Circuit. He can be reached through PFAW's Web site, <http://www.pfaw.org>.



Of pigs ... Continued, from p. 2

recommendations for what to do about the problem. Praying to God for those immersed in the Ferguson debacle, while a nice sentiment, is just that -- sentiment. Not substance. God has no hands but our hands. If Senator Paul were worthy of the access to media attention that he enjoys, he'd offer some direction about what God's hands should be doing at this point to address the problem. We shouldn't have to wait until pigs fly.





TAX RELIEF FOR IOWANS AND BUSINESSES

Iowa's fiscal responsibility has allowed us to cut taxes and still end the fiscal year with a budget surplus. [Senate File 295](#), approved in 2013, included the largest property tax cut in Iowa history. Iowa homeowners, farmers and businesses will save nearly \$3.9 billion in property taxes over the next 10 years. A key goal of the bipartisan legislation is encouraging new jobs and business growth by reducing taxes on commercial properties, which have been taxed at about twice the rate of residential properties.

The commercial property tax cut will have its first impact by reducing property tax bills this month. Every business gets a tax break, with a bottom-up approach that targets help to our small and Main Street businesses because they are Iowa's biggest job creators. When fully phased in, two-thirds of Iowa commercial properties will have their taxes reduced to the same rate as residential properties.

Local businesses will see big savings. Local businesses will see big savings. In Polk County, 6,485 business owners will see a total cut of \$5,961,308 in their property taxes, and in Warren County, 624 business owners will get a total cut of \$507,555.

This commercial property tax cut helps Iowa's small businesses more than giant, out-of-state corporations. In addition, we made sure local services wouldn't suffer by having the state reimburse local governments for the entire amount of the commercial property tax cut.

To receive this tax credit, businesses must file a one-time application. More information is available through your [local assessor](#) or the Iowa Department of Revenue at www.tax.iowa.gov/2013-property-tax-reform.

Our fiscally responsible approach to the state budget is also putting money back into the pockets of Iowans through a tax credit for all who have a state income tax liability starting this year.

The Iowa Taxpayers Trust Fund was created in 2013 to return some of the state's surplus to those who likely contributed to the surplus in the previous tax year. The Taxpayers Trust Fund provides a nonrefundable individual income tax credit that is applied to your net state income tax liability after accounting for all other tax credits.

It's good to see constituents are taking advantage of it. More than 75 percent of Polk County and Warren County income tax returns for 2013 have claimed the Taxpayer Trust Fund credit.

Read more about the first year of the Taxpayer Trust Fund initiative at www.tax.iowa.gov/sites/files/idr/PrelimTY13taxCreditReport.pdf.

Additional information

This is a legislative update from Senator Matt McCoy, representing west part of Des Moines, portions of West Des Moines and Cumming in northwest Warren County. For newsletters, photos and further information, go to www.senate.iowa.gov/senator/mccoy.

To contact Senator McCoy during the week, call the Senate Switchboard at 515-281-3371. Otherwise he can be reached at home at 515-274-0561. E-mail him at matt.mccoy@legis.iowa.gov.

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Senator McCoy is an Assistant Senate Majority Leader, chair of the Commerce Committee and chair of the Transportation & Infrastructure Budget Subcommittee. He also serves on the Appropriations, State Government, Transportation and Ways & Means committees.

David Alan Vitiritto: A Community Remembers

By Gary Moore

On August 15, 2014, Des Moines lost one its leaders in the LGBT community as well as the HIV/AIDS community. David Alan Vitiritto passed away at the age of 62.

Always proud of his Italian heritage, David became a pasta-making master and would share his love of cooking with both communities. Whether for a Thanksgiving or Christmas meal for clients of the AIDS Project of Central Iowa, at a Stars Party to raise funds for The Project, or at any number of bars and restaurants that he owned over the years, this love of cooking would earn him the nick name, “Mama V,” used affectionately by those he helped in friendship and in charity.

In addition to David’s talent of cooking, he developed his other passion, a passion for music, into a successful career in audio engineering. This proved very useful in the ownership of three LGBT nightclubs over the years, as well as perfecting the audio systems for such famous Des Moines night spots as City Disco and the Menagerie 2 (M-2). He was involved with The Question Mark on 3rd Street where Kamoto Dragon Bar now resides, the 508 Restaurant and Bar on Indianola Ave., which is now home to Le Boi, and was a business partner with Rusty Jones at La Delicatelyzza on East 6th Street.

In each of these business endeavors, the number of lives David touched is immeasurable. He was a man of many hats – a teacher, a social worker, a businessman, a bartender, and a theatre director, just to name a few. With his charity work at The Project, David was destined to touch many more countless lives.

David’s love of audio engineering naturally led him into mastering computer programming and repair, and digital technology, as the age of information technology developed. During this time, the AIDS crisis was greatly affecting the gay community, and many of his closest friends and acquaintances lost their lives. It was a difficult time in his life. Without a second thought, David selflessly volunteered his charitable devotion to the crisis by becoming one of the founding members – and a long-serving director – of the All Iowa AIDS Benefit, as well as helping to establish the AIDS Project of Central Iowa that would be the crucial backbone of HIV services for Central Iowa for the next 30 years.

With his work for the All Iowa AIDS Benefit, David guided community volunteers as they established an ongoing 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to raise funds for those living with HIV and AIDS. Over \$1,000,000 would be raised through the years. In the early days of this program, it was not easy to watch Des Moines’ young gay men become infected and die alongside friends in the straight community, and to watch them fight the discrimination, stigma, and fear that client patients underwent. It was also difficult to realize the extent of the lack of awareness and knowledge of the disease. Under the guidance of Kirk Bragg, David would help raise HIV/AIDS education and awareness to the people of the community by lending his charity, passion, and business skills to the development of the AIDS Project of Central Iowa.

The AIDS Project soon became a lifetime dedication for David. He used all of his talents – audio engineering, computer programming and systems installation, organizing skills, multiple community connections, and innate intellect, along with his big heart, to fight the spread of discrimination against those affected by this devastating epidemic. Whether climbing into the ceilings to network additional staff computers as The Project grew, to setting up projection screens and audio systems needed to outfit a ballroom for the All Iowa AIDS Benefit, to installing and monitoring financial accounting systems for The Project, or even helping to guide The Project with the elimination of his own job, David Vitiritto earned the respect and love of a wide spectrum of people.

Friends, co-workers, acquaintances, and those he has helped, will be honoring David’s memory on Saturday, September 20, during a gathering at The Garden Nightclub from 5-7 p.m. Fond memories will be shared during this fundraising celebration to honor David Alan Vitiritto’s incredible life. A scholarship fund established in his name, *The David Vitiritto Memorial Scholarship*, will be created in conjunction with the First Friday Breakfast Club Scholarship Program. All are invited to share and donate to this Memorial Scholarship. Memories and pictures may be posted on the Facebook site “In Memory of David Vitiritto.” Checks and/or donations sent with memo for David Vitiritto to:

Jonathan Wilson, FFBC President
c/o DavisBrown Law Firm
215 10th St, Suite 1300
Des Moines, Iowa 50309



FFBC

First Friday
News & Views

Des Moines, Iowa

October 2014

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Breakfast Club

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MADE ON A  MAC

MY M.O. (MONTHLY OBSERVATIONS)

by Steve Person

I Know, Juneau

I recently returned from a cruise to Alaska. Shore excursions are a big part of cruises and, in Juneau, I managed to get to indulge in one of my favorite pastimes—no, it's not what you're thinking. I love to visit state capitols.

The capitol in Juneau is a rather non-descript U.S. Government structure built in the late 1920s when Alaska was still a U.S. Territory. It is a fine example of function over form. Still, some amazing stories of equality have emanated from this lackluster structure.

In 1926, the Territory of Alaska wanted to advance its cause to statehood. Pursuant to that objective, a contest was held among the public school children of Alaska to design an Alaska flag. Public school children at that time included only white Alaskans. Native tribal children had no input in this process—EXCEPT—a thirteen-year-old Alaska Native submitted the winning design. He was allowed to participate in the competition because he was an orphan who lived in a state-sponsored orphanage and school.

Many designs for the Alaska flag were submitted, and among those were designs of mountains and polar bears. The eventual winner was a seventh grade student named Benny Benson. How's that for a Native name?!!! Benny's design was simple and symbolic. The stark blue background emphasized Alaska's sky and waters. Seven of the eight stars represented the constellation Ursa Major (a bear), and the biggest star near the top was the Pole Star, showing that Alaska was the northernmost territory in the United States. It just goes to show that there are always ways to circumvent discrimination.

And discrimination continued unabated until 1945. It was at that time that an Alaska white woman made an appointment at a hair salon and was turned away because the proprietor thought she was a Native. When a Tlingit Native by the name of Elizabeth Peratrovich became aware of the story, she went into action.

The Alaska Territorial Legislature was notoriously racist at the time, but the governor of the territory wanted a more inclusive society. An anti-discrimination bill was introduced into the territorial legislature but faced an uphill battle. Then Elizabeth Peratrovich had her turn to address the state senate. "I would not have expected that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind gentlemen with five thousand years of recorded civilization behind them of our Bill of Rights....There are three kinds of persons who practice discrimination. First, the politician who wants to maintain an inferior minority group so that he can always promise them something. Second, the Mr. and Mrs. Jones who aren't quite sure of their social position and who are nice to you on one occasion and can't see you on others, depending on who they are with. Third, the great superman who believes in the superiority of the white race."

When finished with her remarks, the majority of the senators and the gallery burst into applause, and the bill passed by a vote of 11-5. A bronze plaque to Mrs. Peratrovich graces the halls of the Alaska Capitol to this day.

Never underestimate the power of a woman with a mission!