

## Is Gay Marriage wrong?



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## Advocates push for equal rights for unmarried couples

Submitted by SHNS on Fri, 09/26/2008 - 12:12. [By DAVID OLSON, The Press-Enterprise national](#)

Michael Imel wants to put his girlfriend on his health-insurance policy. But the Bermuda Dunes, Calif. man's employer declined his request because the couple is not married.

To Thomas Coleman, Imel's case exemplifies how unmarried people face pervasive discrimination under federal, state and local laws.

The group that Coleman heads, Glendale-Calif. based Unmarried America, sponsors Unmarried and Single Americans Week, which began Sunday.

More than 40 percent of adult Americans -- about 93 million people -- are not married, according to 2007 U.S. Census estimate.

There are more than 1,100 federal benefits and protections that are only open to married people, Coleman said. Single people's social-security benefits stop when they die and cannot be passed on to a close friend or family member, while a married person's benefits go to the surviving spouse. Joint tax filings for married couples can lead to lower taxes. Some insurance companies offer lower rates to married people.

"I don't think benefits in society should be based upon personal decisions, like if you get married," Coleman said.

Maggie Gallagher, president of the Virginia-based Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, which supports measures to strengthen marriage, said that, in many cases, people lose benefits when they get married. For example, someone may be dropped from Medicaid or food stamp coverage after getting married, because the couple would be treated as a single financial unit.

Gallagher said marriage is a legally binding commitment to be financially and personally interdependent.

"It doesn't make sense to me to say I want the rights of marriage if I don't want the responsibilities," she said.

Imel and girlfriend Vickie Hicks, both 43, said their partnership is just as important as a married couple's relationship. Hicks said she does not want to get married because of a bad second marriage.

"I'm committed to her and she's committed to me," Imel said. "We're physically, emotionally and financially

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interdependent and everything else. We just don't have a marriage certificate."

Imel asked his employer -- a hospital -- whether he could declare Hicks his domestic partner so he could put her on his health-insurance policy. But the hospital said it recognizes only state-authorized domestic partnerships, which are limited to same-sex couples and a relationship in which at least one partner is 62 or older.

The state domestic partnership law was enacted in 1999, primarily to give marriage-like benefits to same-sex couples, who at the time could not marry. In May, the California Supreme Court recognized same-sex couples' right to marry.

Imel said he supports same-sex marriage rights but believes it is unfair that same-sex couples can now choose between domestic partnership and marriage but he and Hicks cannot.

Hicks said health insurance coverage would be of great help to her. She suffered a severe ankle fracture three years ago and has a fourth ankle operation scheduled for next month. She relies on a \$644 monthly state disability check.

Hicks receives Riverside County medical coverage, but the county doesn't cover all rehabilitation costs. And for the procedures and prescriptions it does cover, Hicks must travel 120 miles round-trip from Bermuda Dunes to the county hospital in Moreno Valley, where she sometimes waits for several hours.

Of the six states that have domestic-partnership laws, four allow both opposite-sex and same-sex couples to register, said Jennifer Chrisler, executive director of the Family Equality Council, a Boston-based group that advocates for same-sex families and monitors domestic-partnership laws.

Chrisler said unmarried couples, whether straight or gay, should not be denied benefits.

"They need things like access to health care, access to tax benefits and other benefits that keep families strong and healthy," she said.

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