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Opinion

EDITORIAL: No guts, no vote

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State senators on Tuesday delayed anew a vote on same-sex marriage.

Why, exactly, senators decided not to vote is unclear. The delay, after all, came in the usual way — after a closed-door caucus of the majority party.

Some senators suggested the delay was because the state's budget deficit is a greater priority.

Now, it's fair to say that senators would not be in Albany — called to a special session by Gov. David Paterson — if not for the pressing need to close the state's yawning budget gap.

Still, the senators offered no explanation as to how this sense of priorities informed their decision to devote their first day in special session to passing a resolution honoring veterans and then retiring for the day without further action on anything.

Not same-sex marriage. Not deficit reduction.

Nor did they elaborate on how this explanation squares with the Legislature's chronic unwillingness to take necessary action to deal with the state's fiscal crisis, which has been evident, growing and substantially unaddressed for more than a year and a half.

It appears the reason there was no action on same-sex marriage had little to do with priorities. Instead, the votes just weren't there for approval. In Albany World, lacking the votes for approval is seen as a perfectly good justification for avoiding a vote altogether. In this way, everybody — both pro and con — gets to avoid accountability for nothing more than a losing cause.

When it comes to representative government, that's a mighty strange way of looking at things.

As we have previously argued, requiring lawmakers to vote can be beneficial to the democratic process. It forces representatives to choose up sides and take a public stand.

We support same-sex marriage because it would extend to homosexual couples nothing more than the right to voluntarily enter a state-enforced contract merging their fortunes. As with their heterosexual brethren, what they then would do with that contractual relationship would be entirely up to them. That strikes us as a matter of simple equity for all of the state's citizens.

In the case of same-sex marriage, a public vote could force some lawmakers to search their consciences on an issue that touches on fundamental American issues of fairness and civil rights. Without reference to outcome, it's safe to say that nothing bad could come of that process.
