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EDITORIAL: In same-sex marriage, government has no stake

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— People who oppose same-sex marriage generally do so on moral or religious grounds, neither of which can be legislated. The issue of same-sex marriage is so personal that the government would be wisest to stay right out of it. In other words, government shouldn't go around banning things just because they don't match up with some people's moral or religious notions.

Assemblywoman Janet Duprey has it right. Same-sex marriage is a civil-rights issue, and on that, the government has only one choice: to come down heavily in favor of the civil rights of everyone.

Maybe your religion frowns on homosexuality. That might certainly affect how you and your fellow worshippers feel about the issue. But it wouldn't be any of the government's concern.

Maybe your personal morality says marriage should be only between a man and a woman. That would surely dictate that you personally oppose homosexual marriage. But it shouldn't propel the government into making a law against it.

Possibly, you oppose homosexual marriages because benefits such as tax breaks would accrue to more people at your expense as a taxpayer. There, perhaps the government has some soul-searching to do. But if it's going to be fair about things, why should sexual inclination be the litmus test for who gets benefits and who doesn't?

Homosexuals are only recently beginning to be treated as full-fledged human beings, in many circles. In others, they haven't yet achieved that status. By any equitable standard, they (and every other minority group) don't deserve to be shunned in any fashion, especially for something over which they have so little control. People refer to sexual "preference," as if the eventuality of whom to spend the rest of one's life with were like choosing a laundry detergent.

It is inconceivable at this juncture of human history that so many people remain so adamant against allowing two individuals to seek happiness together in the privacy of their own homes. How are the lives of those nay-sayers so denigrated by another couple's merger? How are they affected at all, in fact?

Would they be so agitated over the marriage of representatives of any other two groups of humans? Not so long ago, few dared to cross religious lines to wed. Only recently have racial bounds been popularly erased. In the not-very-distant future, people will wonder what was so egregious about same-sex marriage that individuals' rights to happiness were so blatantly violated.

It's too bad this has to be an issue at all, but if human history has shown us anything, it is that biases die hard and slowly. This one will not die any more quickly whether government acts or not.

But the undeniable fact, as we see it, is that who gets married to whom is none of the government's business.

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