

With marriage amendment, no one wins

State is in for 17 months of pain

Welcome to a 17-month war nobody will win.

That's my take on the Minnesota Legislature's decision to put on the 2012 ballot a constitutional amendment that bans gay marriage.

Yes, I know. Technically, one side will win. Barring the need for a recount, on Nov. 7, 2012, either Minnesota will have beaten the odds and rejected this ban, or our state will join dozens of others in telling two gay, consenting adults that they are not entitled to the same legal status as two straight, consenting adults.

For the record, I oppose the amendment. From a *government perspective*



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(which is the reason for our state constitution), I see marriage as a contract between two consenting adults. Beyond that, let your religion (if any) define it for you; don't use *your* religion to define it for everyone else.

But that's not why I'm writing today. I'm writing because I see nothing but bitterness, pain and even hate arising in the next 17 months — and not going

away for a long, long time. I say that because I've seen that happen across all walks of Minnesota life regarding this issue.

Reader mail

Just at look at submissions on these Times Opinion Pages. After more than 10 years of reading Times mail, I contend that no other issue — not even abortion — has inspired as much personal judgment and infliction of religious views.

Yet given that people and faiths see homosexuality differently, the views expressed are varied. Intended or not, many of them — regardless of view — come off as harshly judgmental.

And that doesn't even count the anonymous on-

line conversations they start — and over which this editor has no control.

Talk about inflicting pain. For what and at whose expense?

At church

As an ELCA Lutheran, I remember a few years ago when the ELCA began its debate about whether to accept gay clergy in committed relationships. My pastor at the time warned of how nothing but pain and division would come of this effort.

Boy, was he right. Shortly after the ELCA adopted that policy, I noticed some friendly faces disappear from the pews. When I asked why, I was told that decision drove them away.

Since then, I've learned my church is not alone.

Many others — included some in our area — saw members and even pastors quit to start or join churches for the same reason. Now the Presbyterian denomination faces a similar challenge.

While I do admire these folks for their commitment to their beliefs, I respectfully ask two questions. How is their decision not a judgment on the people with whom they had worshipped? And what did they gain by leaving?

Social circles

Finally, it is naïve to believe this amendment battle — and the judgment it yields — won't rock almost every Minnesotan's social circles.

From family to friends, from workplace to neigh-

borhoods, I'm pretty sure every Minnesota voter who is not gay knows voters who are. Now, thanks to the Legislature, these relationships take center stage.

How so? Minnesota adults will be asked to determine whether their government should treat another adult differently based on something that both voters know is none of the other's business, much less the business of the government.

Wars have started over less. And no one will win this one, not even come Nov. 7, 2012.

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