

Pink triangle pressures ASUN members to vote pro-gay

'No domestic benefits' policy treats gays, straight people equally



Straight Policy

"No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States ... nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

So says the 14th Amendment. Let's extend that to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. "UNL shall not make any policy which shall abridge the privileges of its students or employees ..."

People of a homosexual orientation, we can assume, merit equal treatment and laws.

policy? Point to the triangle and stare?

Toss the offending member out? Though Schafer is in favor of the designation, what if the offending members were future presidents? Would they be impeached? Their privileges revoked?

Not likely. More likely is another scenario.

In this one, there's a bill – for example, the domestic partner benefits bill, an idea I support. Of course, the most ASUN can do is lend its support to the bill, but the scenario in which the senate would not support domestic partner benefits must be explored.

What does a safe space symbol become the very moment the senate disagrees with gay campus leaders? Or the very moment the senate does not pass pro-gay legislation?

You'd hope the symbol stays the same. Certainly UNL's gay leaders would understand such a vote. But it's also very possible that ASUN could be considered hypocritical for its actions, that the symbol no longer applies.

ASUN could be accused of consisting of people who say one thing and do another – namely, promote intolerance and an unsafe space for gays. For if ASUN is a safe space, one could argue, how can it not support a bill that further advances the tolerance of gay rights, which every gay-related legislation is intended to do?

A symbol, then, becomes a silent edict of sorts – a subtle and invisible push in the direction of pro-gay legislation. Because the last thing ASUN wants to be considered hypocritical and discriminatory. It only makes sense that some members might be internally saying to vote in another direction just to avoid such a moniker.

Granted, only in a governmental utopia, where decisions are made with a pragmatic vacuum using a clear-eyed, objective weighing of pros and cons, does such a threat not exist. Certainly, conscience figures heavily into any representative's voting record.

But under no circumstances should the safe space designation be used as leverage by anyone, anytime. Even if it wasn't used in such fashion, a bad perception would still persist.

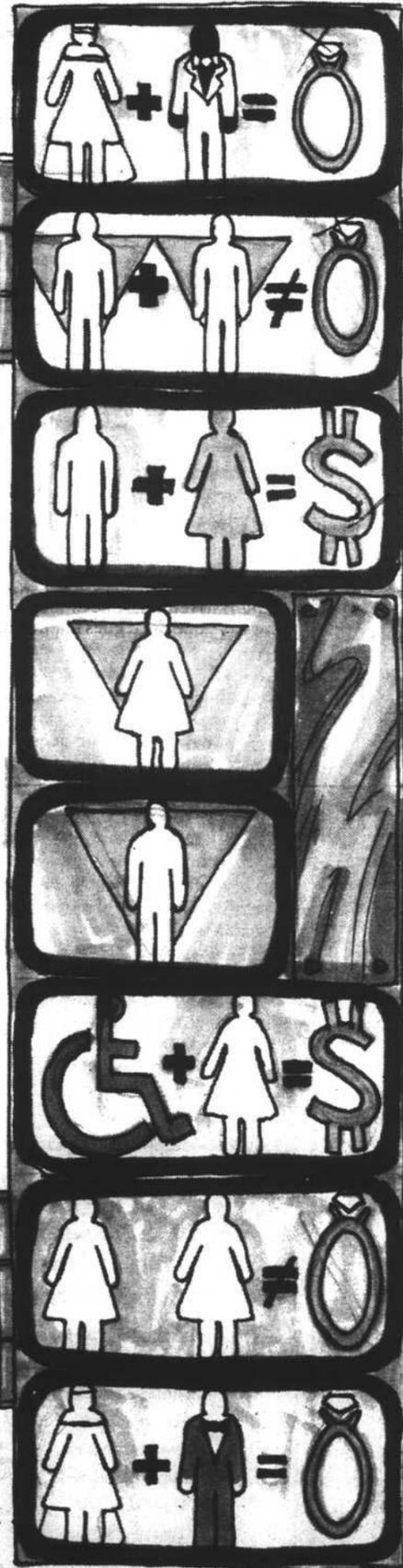
Try as it might, ASUN cannot escape scrutiny from those who believe the symbol guarantees the slanted agenda described. Those individuals, like the students who felt slighted in the fetal tissue debate earlier this year, see themselves as alienated from the student government because of what they interpret as bad morals.

While I can't agree with their moral judgments of ASUN senators or gay students on campus, I do join them in finding our leaders guilty of bad form.

The easy thing to do is accuse these angered, largely conservative students of being intolerant and foolish and expediently banish their views to the bin of forgotten ideas.

Certainly, it sends a positive message to the UNL's gay community, which seems to be the impetus behind supporting safe space legislation. It's also engaging in ideological and lifestyle discrimination. In other words, the very thing pink triangles, Allies and ASUN are supposed to stand against.

The ASUN office is not a place of worship, but a structure of parliamentary procedure, supposedly open to all ideas, even



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those that would squelch gay rights legislation. It's a place where intolerance and tolerance could theoretically meet and hash out their differences.

By hashing out these differences on its own, ASUN has lost respect with some and set itself up for a possible Catch-22. Symbolism, unfortunately, has come at the expense of others, along with the perception of independence and objectivity so fundamental to good student government.

What is a symbol worth?

According to the UNL chapter of Allies, a nationwide organization promoting the advancement of gay rights, the pink triangle that designates the ASUN office as a safe space means plenty. It means, among other things, acceptance and friendship, a willingness to share ideas.

Most importantly, it means tolerance – the ability for those within the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska to admit gay students into their office and ensure their safety.

On April 5, by a 21-4 vote, the ASUN senate passed the bill assigning safe-space designation to its offices for a second straight year.

It was deemed necessary by President Joel Schafer, along with Allies, that some important entity on campus stand up and be counted as a place where gays can be accepted.

The bill actually refers to accepting "any variation from the mainstream," whatever that means. Most variants don't look for a geometric shape to denote their safety. Allies has the pink triangle.

This pink triangle can be found on the window of Schafer's office. It's a symbol, mind you, nothing more, and like all symbols, you can read as little or as much as you want to into it.

Naturally, it means more to gays than it does me, as I am not a victim of nor frequent witness to the blatant discrimination they must face on a daily basis.

The pink triangle spreads an importance message of tolerance. It should have a place in our businesses and our homes.

But its existence in the ASUN office is a shaky proposition at best.

When I read into the symbol and the ASUN vote that supports its existence within the governmental confines, conflicts arise.

The pink triangle, at least in this case, represents a questionable precedent – a handcuff of sorts – that could force senators and executive candidates into difficult situations when gay-related bills come across their desks.

From a philosophical standpoint, I have problems any time a governmental organization openly embraces any specific mantra, good intentioned or not.

I see problems with the U.S. dollar bill having "In God We Trust" on it, for example. Similarly, that ASUN wants a safe space designation for the office smells of a political ideology rather than a means of rubbing out a discriminatory world.

The bill itself acknowledges such concerns by stating: "Denoting a place as a Safe Space or an association as an Ally Organization is not intended to reflect a personal, political or religious position on sexual orientation or on the sexual orientation of the people creating the Safe Space, but simply meant to define an environment of personal safety, commitment to diversity and mutual respect."

I do not see it as that simple.

Realistically, there is no way the office can ensure a safe space, as surely there will be ASUN senatorial members who not only disagree with a gay lifestyle, but feel none too comfortable being around gay people.

Now consider the many members of the student body who will walk in and out of the office. Their personal beliefs will go much further to determining the general tolerance of the room than any symbol could.

How would the office enforce such a

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Discriminating against them because of their orientation would be inconsistent with the above premise. The same goes for heterosexually oriented people.

Domestic partner benefits are not necessary for equal treatment of homosexuals and heterosexuals. Without them, both groups receive equal benefit treatment.

Neither a homosexual nor a heterosexual can receive benefits by having a domestic partner.

Whether someone is a woman or a man, black or white, tall or short, it makes no difference. If he or she is living at home with a person of the same sex (which is basically what domestic partner means), that person receives no partner benefits. There's no discrimination.

Because there's no discrimination based on sexual orientation, the ideal of promoting the sanctity of marriage can be compatible with just treatment for homosexuals.

Discrimination based on marital status isn't the same. Equal protection under the laws is provided. There are laws about marriage, and those laws apply to all equally.

UNL has a policy of no discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. As demonstrated, the policy on domestic partners (or rather, lack of policy) is consistent with this broader anti-discrimination principle.

I've many times observed people trying to draw a correlation between sexual orientation issues and racial issues. So, let's compare.

Laws segregating marriage were once the vogue. On the surface, we may feel that such laws are similar to laws prohibiting same-sex marriage.

A black man could not marry a white woman, no matter how much they loved each other. They could not marry because of their skin colors. Terrible? Yes. A legitimate comparison to domestic partner or marriage benefits for homosexuals? No.

Inequality was involved in the previous example. Not so here. There, a black person could not marry a white person of the opposite sex. A white person could. Each group received unequal treatment. Here, anyone may marry a person of the opposite sex and enjoy whatever financial ramifications may ensue.

"But couldn't one use the racial analogy to say all people, of whatever race, were once able to marry only someone of the same race?" you say, "This would be a valid comparison with all people, of whatever orientation, being able to marry only someone of the opposite sex. And both are unjust." This is a game attempt at logic, but it fails to hold up.

Black people were excluded from doing something white people could do. Homosexual people are not excluded from doing anything that heterosexual people can do. Any man may marry any one woman. Any woman may marry any one man.

If someone is homosexual, that person may choose not to marry, but if that person did choose to marry, nothing could prevent it. A homosexual man could even marry a homosexual woman.

I've heard people say, "Gays can't get married, so they need to have domestic partner benefits available."

As we've just seen, that statement is absolute drivel. Homosexual people can indeed get married. There's no "straightness test" you have to pass.

If we flip things around, perhaps things will become even clearer. Let's say a couple straight men are roommates, and they decide to get "married" to receive financial benefits.

They go apply for a marriage license. But they won't get one! Even if they say they are heterosexual, they will not be allowed to get married. That's because homosexual and heterosexual people are indeed treated equally under the law.

It would not be fun to want to get married to someone of the same sex and not be able to. I'm glad I don't have to face that challenge in my life.

Of course homosexuals don't want to marry people of the opposite sex. They want to marry people of the same sex. I'm not addressing all the difficulties that come up when discussing how to treat homosexuals with justice. I'm simply asserting that whatever is required for justice, domestic partner benefits need not be included.

Sexual orientation does not play a role in how our law or our university treats someone, regardless of that person's sexual orientation. It is absolutely equal.

We can treat homosexuals and heterosexuals as equals while working to preserve the ideal that marriage is important to society. Let's keep domestic partner benefits out of UNL – it's simply reasonable.

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