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Hemphill: Will Sanders' flip-flop impact vote?

By Alan Hemphill

September 26, 2007

San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders' tearful support of gay marriage reminded me of the "crying judge" of just a few months ago.

(You may not recall the ruling that gave Anna Nicole Smith's body to her daughter's guardian — who remembers or even cares — but you probably remember the crying judge!)

Now, gay marriage is not something I care a lot about. Personally, I am a traditionalist. My wife, Jean, and I have been happily married for more than 50 years, and any change in the gay rights law will not impact my life one whit, one way or another.

My concern is having a personal or even religious opinion dominate a politician's vote. Mayor Sanders told the voters when he ran for public office that he opposed gay marriage. No doubt some voters cast their ballot solely, or primarily on that issue.

To his credit, he announced his "new" position on the day he announced he is running for a second term. The question of whether his overnight family conversion was necessitated by the City Council vote putting him on the spot will forever remain unanswered.

Still, I am uncomfortable with ANY politician dictating public policy for millions of people, based solely on their personal religious or family situations. Public decisions should be arrived at after long and serious philosophical and political investigation — and not as a response to a personal family matter.

That is not to say that a lifetime of experiences needs to be ignored — it should not be — but to change a campaign promise, repeated often, on the basis of an emotional short-term family situation is not the way I want my political leaders to operate. I want to vote for people with some assurance that they will keep their word, and that neither their philosophies or their political positions will have a sudden and emotional political awakening.

I suppose that the next mayoral election will turn to a greater or lesser degree on this issue — not so much the gay rights issue but the flip-flop issue. Voters must ask themselves what their confidence factor is in each candidate — as the first President Bush found out when he reversed his position, to his detriment, on taxes.

In the end, voters seldom assign a "shroud" to someone on a single issue but are likely to make a decision among the candidates — and no one yet knows the entire field of choices.

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San Diego voters have not been particularly wise in recent memory. They have elected people whose votes impoverished our coffers, who have been indicted or imprisoned, and who generally brought disrepute to the city. Corruption and incompetence seem endemic to both political parties on the national scale, but San Diego always felt as if it was immune to such things. Yes, I was here during the taxi corruption period, but we always thought that was an anomaly.

It once was, but what was once an anomaly is now the norm. Hopefully, it is more incompetence than corruption.

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