

[MARRIAGE]

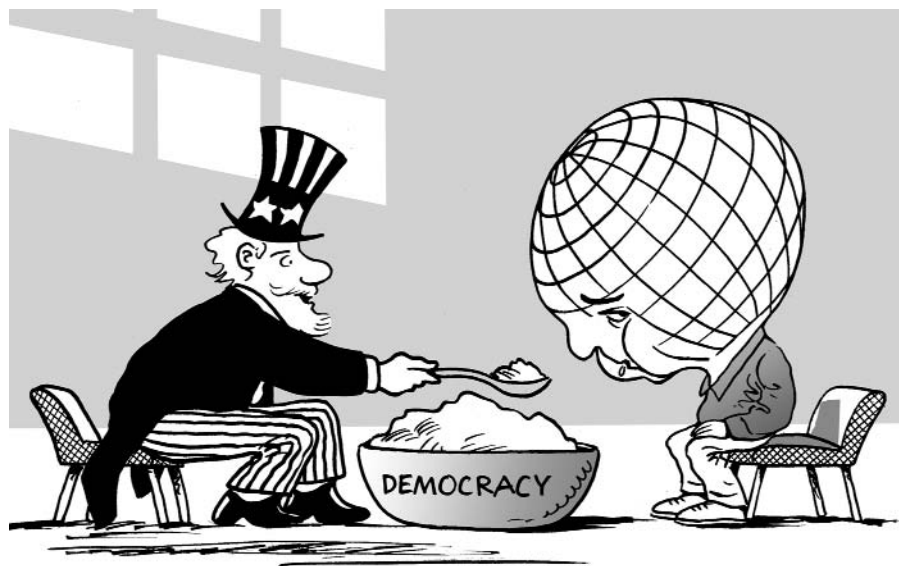
KEEPING THE COVENANT

"Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the Constitution of any State, nor State or Federal law, shall be construed to require that marital status or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon unmarried couples or groups." Thus reads the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment to the Constitution, presented for Senate consideration on Nov. 25.

Conservatives are sensibly reluctant to alter the fundamental law of the land. Where others grab for the radical remedy, the Right looks to legislation, and to the states. But, as Burke famously wrote, "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation." As the married family is the foundation of society—and given the threat it confronts in same-sex unions—rarely has the Burkean burden been so perfectly met.

The federalist instinct is sound, and were the Founders' constitutional order in good health, it would rise to the challenge. Federalism, however, depends on the principle of subsidiarity: that the government closest to the people best understands their problems and responds to their concerns. It is not a license for unaccountable state courts to act as agents of social change. The family joins the nationwide endangered-species list not by popular demand but by the whim of the Massachusetts judiciary. Back of that is the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Lawrence v. Texas*, which overturned a state sodomy law and threatens to do for same-sex unions what *Griswold* did for abortion.

Federalists who oppose this amendment make an ideological fetish of a political principle, a mortal conservative sin. The text is far from perfect and may leave loopholes for civil unions—marriages in all but name and equally dam-



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aging. Even so, its first sentence is strong, and its passage would mark a resolute first step toward curbing the courts, defending the family, and restoring constitutional self-government.

[DIPLOMACY]

BREAKING THE MIDEAST IMPASSE

When Colin Powell announced he would meet the framers of the unofficial Geneva Middle East peace accords, Israel snapped. Said the vice premier, "He is not helping the process. ... This a wrong step by a representative of the American administration." Powell snapped back: "[A]s ideas emerge, from whatever source, it seems to me not inappropriate to ... see what they are saying and take it into account." President Bush publicly concurred, as did Russia and the EU.

Times are tough for Ariel Sharon. His second-term polls have never been lower, Likud dissenters speak out, and his closest allies grow weary of his obstructionism. The *New York Daily News* quotes an unnamed U.S. official as saying the president "doesn't get Sharon's foot-dragging." But the solution to all, however difficult, is at hand—push the road map, dismantle the settlements—if Sharon is statesman enough to follow through.

[ALLIES]

ONE WAR AT A TIME

At the height of the Civil War, England threatened the divided nation with an external conflict if Lincoln didn't surren-

der Confederate emissaries seized from the British steamer *Trent* by the Union. President Lincoln wisely cautioned, "One war at a time." That advice still holds.

Remember Afghanistan, buried on page A23 by the invasion of Iraq? Beyond the capital of Kabul—just barely under the control of America and her allies—Taliban elements have regrouped, and poppy cultivation has increased 30-fold since 2001. More troops are needed to stabilize the country, but we're otherwise engaged.

NATO has already contributed men and matériel and would be an obvious source for more aid. Secretary General Lord Robertson has called for doubling the organization's troop commitment to Afghanistan. But NATO is now under pressure to take part in the occupation of Iraq, where Britain also has forces invested. At the Dec. 1 meeting in Brussels, where Robertson said that NATO's credibility is on the line in Afghanistan, Poland and Spain urged the alliance to send troops to Iraq.

There is no simple solution, but there is a clear lesson. Fighting an unnecessary war while a more important one is ongoing amounts to unthinkably bad strategy, folly on an imperial scale.

[ECONOMICS]

STEP ASIDE, STEELERS

When he enacted tariffs to save an American steel industry struggling to survive foreign dumping, President Bush became Pittsburgh's hometown hero. He was set to run the table on Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia.

But then he changed course. Under threat of a European trade war and pressure from free-traders, the president proved he has no steel in his spine.

Long before the official announcement, there was word on the wind that the tariffs would soon be past tense. Team Bush couldn't have picked a worse time to go trawling for campaign cash in Steel City, but ducking a scheduled drop-by would have sent the wrong signal. So the White House spin shop tried a different tack. Rather than avoiding the steelworkers likely to experience a much colder Christmas next year, the president offered greetings to "Knowledge City." As in the four-time Super Bowl Champion Knowledge City.

We get the joke: in the free-trade fantasy calloused hands that built the furnaces of industry get manicured for the Information Age, and everyone lives happily ever after. The city that steel built turns bookish. But Pittsburgh isn't buying that line. "He got my vote the first time," one union man told ABC News. "The second time, he won't."

[EUROPE]

IMPORTING ANTI-SEMITISM

Conventional wisdom holds that there is a "rising tide of anti-Semitism" in Europe. For the hawkish Right, this useful notion—conjuring as it does still-raw memories of Kristallnacht and Nuremberg Laws—helps discredit those erstwhile allies opposed to unprovoked invasions. It is an old American stereotype: a Europe forever in thrall to atavistic hatred, violence, and despotism. On the Continent, one is led to wonder, is it 2003 or 1933?

The spike in anti-Semitic incidents—synagogues burned in France, Jews assaulted in Berlin—is disturbing, and indisputable. What can be disputed, however, is its source and cause. Enter the European Monitoring Center on

Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), which commissioned a study of the new anti-Semitism, and then suppressed the report. Typical of a European establishment ever on alert for resurgent fascism, but which never notices "former" Communists actually in power, the EUMC expected to, in the words of "Casa blanca's" Vichy policeman, "round up the usual suspects."

Instead, the censored report pointed to Muslim newcomers and, to a lesser degree, pro-Palestinian leftists engaged in rhetorical overstretch. According to study co-author Juliane Wetzel, "it singled out the group (young Muslims), which they (the EUMC) seek to protect." "It would have been very much easier," says Wetzel, "to have only the right wings," but "because [the report] clashed with political correctness," down the memory hole it went.

The study also found the timing of the "new wave" significant: it began in 2000, with the start of the second Palestinian *intifada*. "New," then, turns out to be the perfect epithet, the perpetrators having no connection to historic European anti-Semitism, racial or religious. There is an historical irony here. Rejecting ethnic chauvinism, Europe opened her borders, but thus did she import the Arab-Israeli conflict and again put the Jews at risk.

[CULTURE]

RUBBER TO THE ROAD

L'affaire Lewinsky introduced a new vocabulary to the nation's front-pages, and in D.C. it's as if the king never left the building. But mixing sex and government isn't limited to the Oval Office. You can now do it at the DMV.

According to the interim director of the District's HIV/AIDS Administration, free condom dispensers will soon be "as common as water fountains" in Washington city government offices, and lest anyone think bureaucrats are having all

the fun, agencies frequented by the public will get special attention. (D.C. already has a program to distribute condoms to beauty salons, nightclubs and, of course, public schools.)

The *Washington Post* reports that the city plans to give away 550,000 male condoms, 45,000 dental dams, and 30,000 female condoms. Before NOW reaches full shriek about the disparity, the *Post* points out that "male condoms cost the city less than a nickel apiece, and the female condoms cost several dollars each."

The plan is billed as AIDS prevention. But will it work? Not likely. The failure rate for male condoms is 12 percent; female condoms are even less reliable. So figure thousands of failures and that many more random experiences courtesy of the District's handy dispensers. Not only is Mayor Anthony Williams wasting taxpayers' money, he's gambling with lives.

[IMMIGRATION]

PULLED OVER

Governor Schwarzenegger is flexing his muscles. The political kind. After promising to repeal the law that granted drivers' licenses to illegal immigrants, the new governor made good. Under pressure from his office and the threat of a ballot initiative by the group that sponsored the recall, the Democratic senate and assembly buckled. When they felt the heat, they saw the light.

Proponents of immigration reform have long argued that this is a winning issue for Republicans. The swift capitulation of California's Democrats proves the point. And this is no time to go wobbly. There are concerns that Schwarzenegger may not have taken his victory to heart—his spokesmen have indicated that he might support licenses for illegals if background checks and other security measures are part of the process.

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To paraphrase Joseph Fouché, that would be worse than a crime. It would be a mistake. Californians, like the majority of Americans, do not want to extend the trappings of legality to those whose first act on U.S. soil was a transgression of our law—and they are willing to throw from office politicians who think otherwise.

[OCCUPATION]

FOR YOUR OWN GOOD

“The only thing they understand is force,” Capt. Todd Brown, a company commander stationed in the Sunni Triangle, told the *New York Times*. As if to prove his point, his men have locked down the town of Abu Hishma and wrapped it in razor wire. A sign reads, “This fence is here for your protection. Do not approach or try to cross, or you will be shot.” So much for spreading freedom.

After a bloody November, the *Times* reports that American forces are employing a new get-tough strategy: imprisoning relatives of suspected insurgents, leveling buildings where they might hide, and forcing villagers to pass through checkpoints. These tactics are familiar. Israel honed them in Gaza and the West Bank, and American officers have traveled there for tutoring.

“With a heavy dose of fear and violence ... I think we can convince these people that we are here to help them,” said Lt. Col. Nathan Sassaman. The more obvious message—one clear in the Palestinian case—is that caged people are more likely to snarl back than to be subdued.

[CHRISTMAS]

REASON FOR THE SEASON

In enslaved Narnia, wrote C.S. Lewis, “It is always winter and never Christmas.” As much could be said of multicultural America, suffering the dreary dictatorship not of black magic but of political

correctness. There are brave holdouts who persist in wishing strangers a Merry Christmas, even as their cherished holy day dissolves more each year into a non-specific catch-all “holiday.” So much has the culture deteriorated, in fact, that “Merry Christmas” is now not only rare but also self-conscious.

Tom Piatak, later in this issue, chronicles the PC Left’s War on Christmas. Little did we know when we commissioned the piece that *TAC* was on the wrong side—until concerned readers pointed out our Nov. 17 cover-wrap, which advertised “A thoughtful Holiday Gift” and a “Special Holiday Offer!” No mention of Christmas.

At any magazine, there is a certain separation of powers between the editorial and business departments. Subscription advertising belongs to the businessmen, and we tend to defer to their judgment. The judgment here, however, reflected a desire not to offend non-Christians, which is too multiculti for our tastes. Though not a journal of theology, *TAC* defends America’s historic Christian culture and advances a traditional, Christian perspective—one appreciated by the serious non-Christians among our readers. Some editors saw the ad’s text in late summer and, not yet in the Christmas spirit, allowed it to slip through. We apologize for our error and, belatedly, wish everyone a Merry Christmas. ■

Christmas issue

The American Conservative will publish its next issue in four weeks instead of the usual two. Our editorial offices will reopen Jan. 5.

Decline and Fall of the Dollar

With the U.S. economy posting an 8.2 percent growth rate in the third quarter, President Bush appears to have timed his tax cuts for maximum benefit in 2004.

All systems are go for the election year. The deficit could hit \$500 billion, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan is holding interest rates at 1 percent, money is plentiful and cheap.

Though manufacturing jobs vanished for the 40th month in a row in November, the jobless rate seems certain to shrink over the next 12 months. Happy days are here again.

But there is an ominous cloud on the horizon. The dollar is in a sickening decline, having lost nearly half its value against the euro. The price of gold has risen from around \$260 an ounce to \$400.

To the Alfred E. Newman Economic Club, this is excellent news. A falling dollar, they say, makes exports cheaper and imports more expensive, thus aiding U.S. producers and easing the pressures for protectionism—which is like celebrating the loss of an arm because one can buy shirts cheaper.

A falling currency is the mark of a failing country. Our falling dollar reflects fading confidence in the administration's ability to manage America's household. And there are sound reasons to be worried about the management of our financial accounts.

This year, the United States will run two immense deficits. Our merchandise trade deficit and U.S. budget deficit will each hit 5 percent of GDP. Americans are borrowing 10 percent of GDP to finance present consumption. With our anemic savings rate, we must borrow from foreigners to maintain our binge

buying at the malls.

Like inflation, devaluation is theft, the clandestine confiscation of a people's wealth by their own government. And when any currency sinks, there are strategic as well as economic consequences.

U.S. citizens, robbed of their wealth, lose faith in government. U.S. aid dollars do not go as far. U.S. troops abroad find their lives harder. It costs more to maintain troop levels in the field. America cannot run an empire on a collapsing currency. Just ask the Brits.

Today, oil is priced in dollars. When the euro was worth 83 cents, a few years back, it took 36 euros to buy a barrel of oil at \$30. Today, a \$30 barrel can be bought for 24 euros. OPEC, feeling itself cheated, could raise the price of oil, raising gas prices here and dealing a blow to the U.S. recovery.

The greater danger is that foreign central banks that hold \$1 trillion in U.S. Treasury bonds will start shedding them. Any such dumping could force Treasury to raise interest rates to attract new borrowers to finance our twin deficits, cutting off recovery.

It is hard to see an early or painless end to the process that has set in. As this cancer eats up our wealth, the world, seeing the United States unable to stop creating new dollars, will continue to sell them off.

In Washington, spending is out of control. Republicans compete with Democrats in voting pork and creating new programs. Bush has not vetoed a single bill.

Discretionary spending is growing at rates unseen under Republican presidents. This capital city is like a reform school for delinquents where the monitors and guards have left the doors unlocked and taken the day off.

We can now see U.S. budget deficits all the way to the horizon, requiring hundreds of billions in new borrowing each year. The same holds true for our 30-year string of rising trade deficits.

In the long run, a cheaper dollar will cut the trade deficit by reducing our ability to buy foreign goods. But in the short term, a sinking dollar could send that trade deficit soaring. For we have come to depend on foreigners for 15 percent of the goods and services we buy and an even higher share of the manufactures we consume.

As with drugs, such dependencies are not easily ended.

As has been said here before, free trade is not free. The Global Economy is a system devised by Americans where other nations will play only so long as it advances their cold national interests.

Today, China, by force of will, is holding its currency to 8.2 yuan to the dollar, refusing to let it rise, though this would increase the purchasing power of Chinese workers. The Bank of Japan is buying dollars. Both are determined not to let their currencies rise. They continue to sell cheap to hold and expand their share of America's \$11 trillion market, to strip us of our remaining manufacturing.

They sacrifice the present to the future, as we sacrifice our future for the present. But the chickens of globalism are starting home to roost for George Bush and the United States of America. ■