

Editorial

Comments on gay marriage are troubling

On Sunday, the Des Moines Register Editorial Board published excerpts from a meeting it held with Gov. Terry Branstad, specifically regarding his personal philosophy on the issue of gay marriage.

In between ducking some well-thought-out and to-the-point questions, Branstad managed to make some statements that left our heads spinning.

In the course of the interview, he made some contradictory statements, and dismissed the legitimacy of equal rights for all Iowans.

Take for example, his response to the question, "What's your answer to Sen. Gronstal's argument that we wouldn't let the people vote on rights for African-Americans or for women or for religious groups?" — Gronstal's "argument" being that civil rights trump popular will.

"That's a different issue," Branstad said to the Register. "Let's take California. The same year that Obama was elected president, the first African-American elected president, not only did the people of California vote to restore one-man, one-woman marriage, which was on the ballot in California, the majority of African-Americans and other minorities also voted for that. So that's a different issue as far as I am concerned."

What is the basis of this argument? Is the implication that one minority group that has been wronged should be able to detect when another group is being wronged? Or is the implication that all minority groups are the same? What sound logic! "The majority" of minorities in California endorsed discrimination against 'the gays,' so that must make it OK — right? But it gets better.

"Well, I want to treat everybody with fairness and equity, but I don't think that includes meaning that people of the same sex should be able to be married," Branstad said to the Register. "I don't want to discriminate or treat people in an unfair manner, but this is something that is a new right, that never existed before and one certainly that a vast majority of Iowans don't think was appropriate to be done the way it was done. I think the people of Iowa should have an opportunity to vote on that issue."

Translation: The thought of treating everyone with "fairness and equity" is nice in theory, but I don't actually believe in it. I'm going to say I do in one sentence, but then I'm going to contradict myself a few sentences later, because that's 'icky' and my constituents don't like it.

Usurping the civil rights of a particular minority is not something the constitution of Iowa, or any state, should endorse. This isn't a red or blue issue, and it has nothing to do with ends of the political spectrum or any other arbitrary criterion.

Simply disagreeing with a particular group's lifestyle does not bestow divine prerogative to legislate against it.

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Media



News coverage often focuses on a limited view. Columnist Hanton believes it is important to seek out alternative news sources to develop a well-rounded perspective. Graphic: Rebekka Brown/Iowa State Daily

Demand Al-Jazeera

By Rick.Hanton@iowastatedaily.com

Global economy requires broader range of reporting

During the recent unrest in Egypt, even the uninitiated observer could see drastic differences between Al-Jazeera English's reporting in Egypt and the reports from world news leader CNN as well as the MSNBC and Fox News networks. While the different news stations talked to some of the same experts in Europe and elsewhere, CNN's reporters on site in Cairo early in the protests were holed up in their offices while Al-Jazeera had a wide array of reporters on the street. Other American news giants obviously had trouble expending the money and taking the risk to get reporters in place in Egypt and instead talked to American leaders and analyzed President Obama's speeches on the unrest.

A few days into the protests, CNN reporter Anderson Cooper and a small crew got into Egypt to report from the streets, showing a small ray of light in American TV reporting. I would say that Cooper is notably CNN's best reporter and has never really been afraid of facing violence and opposition to do what he does (some of his early reporting was done from Myanmar on a forged press pass). But, the events in Egypt in recent days have even convinced Anderson Cooper to cry "uncle," and he has decided that he will be able to better report on Egypt from a distance in coming weeks.

Looking back at Al-Jazeera, the prominent news agency in the Middle East, you notice that its presence is almost nonexistent in the United States.

Over the last few decades, the Al-Jazeera

news network has grown into one of the largest news networks on the planet and is seen as a relatively unbiased source of news by residents of the Middle East (compared to state-controlled news networks). But, don't be expecting to find their news channel available on Mediacom or most other U.S. cable providers. They are only available on a few networks in Vermont, Ohio, and Washington, D.C., and of course you can pick up their satellite signal on the Galaxy 19 satellite or on the Internet for free. They seem to have unfairly received a negative connotation for being Middle Eastern in origin and being Al-Qaida's news network of choice for video releases and interviews.

It is possible that Al-Jazeera may gain more goodwill as their footage is shown on the major American news networks in coming days and weeks due to the fact that they have decided to provide their Egypt footage for free under a Creative Commons license to other networks. All the networks need to do is note that their footage comes from Al-Jazeera.

The current crisis, coupled with the massive surge in American Internet traffic to the Al-Jazeera English website, has convinced the network that they may be able to soon push into U.S. news markets in what may be a controversial move. They have even started a campaign to convince U.S. TV networks to carry their signal called "Demand Al-Jazeera" to encourage supporters to host social gatherings in support of the network in cities across the U.S. on Feb. 10.

I support this campaign to allow Al-Jazeera to be broadcast widely in the United States because while I don't think that Al-Jazeera is unbiased, I do feel they provide a view of the world that is different from U.S. news

networks. There is a theory out there that news networks can be unbiased, which is definitely a pie-in-the-sky ideal that will never happen. The only way to attempt to get unbiased news is to get your news from multiple sources with different perspectives so you can see all sides of an issue. Today that might involve getting news from the BBC and Al-Jazeera, as well as your favorite American news network. Even this sort of perspective is not unbiased, as you do not hear from news sources in Africa, Russia or the Far East, but it is much better than listening to American news anchors alone.

I also believe there is an over-saturation of "American" news networks. We have three (or if Fox is believed, 2.5) major 24/7 news networks on cable TV along with major news organizations at ABC, NBC and CBS. Over time these networks here have been pitted against each other in a battle for viewers. Each network says it is unbiased, but in reality you have the left-wing MSNBC, right-wing Fox News and twitter-following CNN in the middle somewhere. With the array of different voices in U.S. news, it is sometimes nice to see U.S. news from a non-U.S. company like Al-Jazeera or BBC. As one of my high school teachers noted, you usually get less American political bias when you get your news from a foreign news source looking at our country from the outside.

While you might debate whether Ames needs "another news network," I believe that adding BBC America and/or Al-Jazeera would help us gain a better perspective of world events. We can't live inside the protective sphere of American news any longer — it is time for global news in a global economy. I hope you agree.

Politics

Reagan parallels are insincere

By Brandon.Blue@iowastatedaily.com

Media compares GOP's idol with its greatest opponent

To be clear and to be honest, all of this sudden Reagan-love surrounding the Gipper's 100th birthday disgusts me.

This is pretty much the worst possible time for all things Ronald, given the need for, oh I don't know, jobs? Better healthcare reform? Something the GOP promised in the midterm elections? The last thing this country ought to do is to stop and reflect on its 40th president.

And even after the last thing we shouldn't do is compare a conservative icon to the most left-of-center president this nation has ever seen.

To see the media compare Obama and Reagan, I can only conclude that they're in bed with the former's administration. Of all Reagan quotes, none is so final an argument against comparisons to Obama as this: "Government is the problem."

Our current president simply

does not agree with that statement, made in Reagan's 1981 Inaugural Address.

Disagreement on the point between the two is fine, but its very existence disqualifies Obama from these ridiculous juxtapositions.

But the media will work tirelessly to contort his face into Reagan's, and yet the mask will not stay on forever, nor will the sheets. Sooner or later they will both be pulled back to reveal that Obama is only acting the part, and that his administration and the media are not so strange bedfellows after all.

The comparison is also a jab at conservatives, to be sure. Nothing mocks them more than comparing their greatest idol with their greatest opponent. Such jabs are expected; the media has proven time and again that they have no stake in placing conservatives in positive light, from calling their most active members "teabaggers" to openly wilding one of their first strong female figures. It comes across as a low blow, one in a long line of many.

Beyond that, it's just an exercise in pre-re-election campaign tactics. I really can't think of a

single commonality between Reagan and Obama, except that both men wore suits. History will not be rewritten to cast Reagan as a closet liberal, nor even a "bipartisan healer," as the Obama administration would desperately love, though that may be the goal of the political arena, media included, by the end of 2012.

That's really all this is: just political posturing. And what it tells me is simple. The incumbent Democrats fear 2012. It may not be the end of the world, nor the end of them, but they fear it still.

They believe they will not win as they are. They must re-posture, must change themselves and what their plan is for this nation to see victory come election season. It's despicable and yet entirely expected.

But what I absolutely despise is that Democrats are, by paying attention to this Reagan-love, looking into the past at a point when the country should be looking forward.

To those unaware, Reagan is dead. No speeches will dig him up and no politicians will resurrect him. We do ourselves no good wondering what he would do or

think were he alive. He served two terms, left his legacy, and four presidents later, our country continues on its course.

This Reagan malarkey — I can think of no other honest, printable term for it — fails to do any good. The Democrats will come off as the liars they are for trying to tell us a left-wing apple is a right-wing orange, and the Republicans who draw comparisons between Reagan and themselves not only look wistfully stuck in the past, but play directly into the Democrats' hands.

I have made clear before that Republicans are like Mr. Magoo; they must be gently guided into the correct direction or they will stupidly wander the length of their current path.

Why is there no strong Republican voice in the sea of Democratic clamoring? So long as they invoke Reagan's memory, they will curse themselves to live in his shadow.

And, even though I think him a great president, we must let Reagan go. We must now look forward to the challenges ahead for which there will be no Gipper to guide us.