

Michigan sliding down a slippery slope of bigotry

Discrimination of any kind can poison the reputation of an organization, community or a state, with a brush that extends beyond the reach of those immediately affected.

If the State of Michigan is against gay marriage are they also anti-Semitic? Anti-Asian? Anti-black?

Perception is reality, and if you are in any minority class, who wants to take that chance?

Michigan is one of 15 states that bans same-sex marriages and one of two in the Midwest. We share this distinction with bastions of progress like Mississippi, Alabama and Texas. Great.

Every other state has eliminated same-sex marriage bans or ruled them illegal. Now, the Supreme Court will settle the case.

That suits Bill Schuette, the attorney general who has a history of opposing gay marriage: "This case involves people of good will, sincerely motivated, on both sides ..."

That is a lot of crap. People of good will don't try to restrict the rights of others to rights



NOTHING TO HIDE
Bill Schroer

they themselves enjoy. Bigotry is never a sign of "good will."

The problem with waiting is Michigan then becomes compliant by fiat, not by its own initiative. When the U.S. government had to call in federal troops in Alabama to insure the safety of black children going to an all-white school, did everyone think the era of segregation and racism in that state was over?

If you were a highly skilled black worker in demand anywhere in the country, would you have taken a job in Alabama?

Highly skilled workers are in demand in Michigan as the unemployment rate continues to drop.

If those highly skilled workers are lesbian, gay or transgendered, they may avoid coming to a state determined to not end a discriminatory law

until forced to do so by the Supreme Court.

MiBiz, which reports on business news in Michigan, cites examples of highly skilled gay professionals who were warned about coming to Michigan. One was told "You'll regret it."

While many of the largest corporations in the state are working to attract the best and brightest, irrespective of gender orientation, the cloud of the same-sex marriage ban serves as a warning to the entire LGBT community — and beyond.

Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce President Gerald Baker says, "If Michigan is to succeed in attracting skilled workers and in holding onto the millennial generation, it will need to be perceived as a state that is welcoming to all people and lifestyles."

That is the money pitch. Failing to be seen as "open and welcoming" means we stand a good chance of losing millennials and other professionals, most of whom are not LGBT.

That is because many young

people and professionals know that intolerance has a "tip of the iceberg" component. "If this place is too conservative, uptight or bigoted to accept gays — and I know some gays and it's no big deal — it is too uptight and bigoted for me."

To further reinforce that suspicion of bias, the Michigan Senate just (this past week) reintroduced the "Religious Freedom Restoration Act," which I have commented on at length, as legal permission to discriminate against someone based on "sincerely held beliefs."

Couple that with the failure to update the Eliot-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include LGBT protection and the picture isn't pretty.

Maintaining clearly discriminatory practices to the bitter end and institutionalizing permission to discriminate suggests a lack of progressiveness in other areas.

While some may like closing state borders to members of the LGBT community, I doubt many are supportive of 20-somethings abandoning Michi-

gan with their U-M, WMU or MSU degrees for Colorado or California as a result of believing Michigan is intolerant and backward.

And, it isn't just young people who have that thought. Intolerance against any group, which is a form of adult bullying, makes many professionals and people of good will uncomfortable.

Because prejudice is illogical (it is the act of "pre-judging" before one has any facts) it is as easy to be prejudiced against any group — African-Americans, Burmese, Hispanics, and, yes, nudists — as it is to be against LGBT members.

So, who's next? Michigan is either open for business and welcoming to "all people and lifestyles," or it isn't. The two go together.

If we want this state (and ourselves) to fully benefit from the coming economic tailwinds and be a welcoming place for all people, we have to fix more than the roads.

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