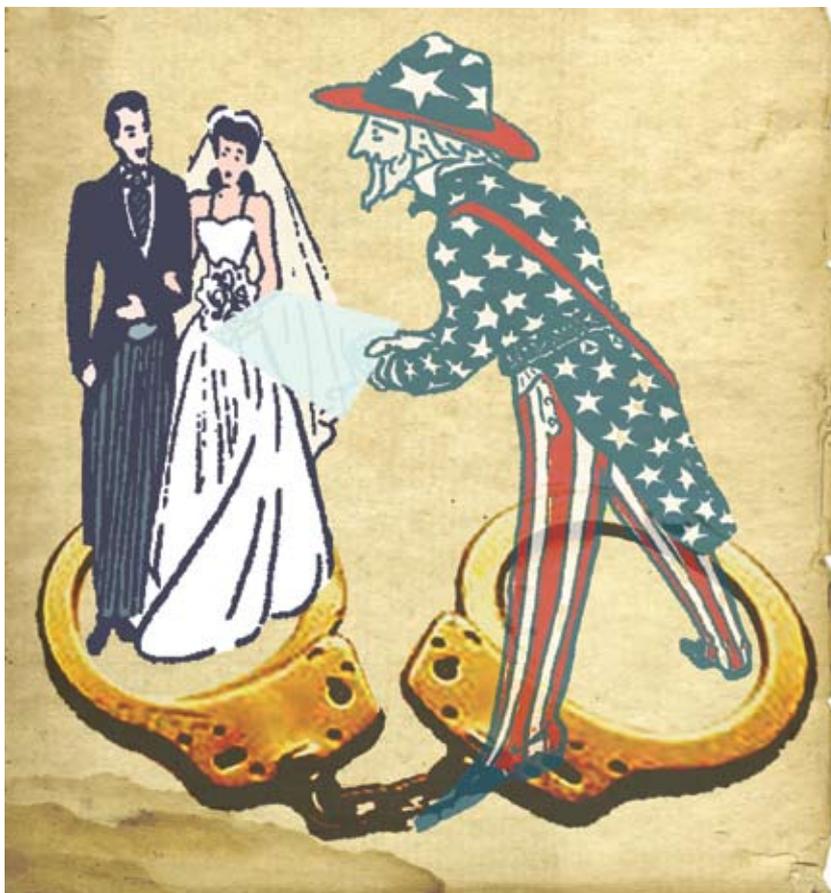


Lark of the Covenant

So let me get this straight: Marriage is, like, forever?



Human papillomavirus. The theory of evolution as a product of a rabbinical conspiracy. Faith-based prisons. Gay adoption. Our Legislature concerns itself with such intriguing topics. And why not? I mean, property taxes? Children's health insurance? A functioning court system? Zzzzzz. What snorers. ¶ I was looking forward to another sexy cheerleader law until I remembered that its author, Al Edwards, was booted out of his seat in last spring's Democratic primary. So I was left to investigate what William "Bill" Zedler has cooking. Could the Republican state representative from Arlington top his 2003 bill proposing to regulate bars that hire someone "unclothed or in such attire, costume or clothing as to expose to view any portion of the female breast below the top of the areola or of any portion of the pubic hair, anus, cleft of the buttocks, vulva or genitals"? ¶ It turns out that this session, Zedler has authored a bill that would introduce covenant marriage to Texas. Apparently, this marriage upgrade would put the fault back in no-fault divorce and make it

harder for couples to split up. Not quite sexy cheerleaders, but then, what is?

I visited Representative Zedler and asked him a few questions.

I was raised Catholic. Essentially, we have covenant marriage. It's sort of a "Hotel California" deal: You can check in, but you can never check out. Unless you're a Kennedy.

And then you get annulments.

So is covenant marriage a way to make Texas more Catholic?

Oh, I don't think so.

Are there no more problems in Texas? Is that why you're worried about covenant marriage? You're the vice chair of the Committee on Public Education. Has the public school system in Texas been fixed?

You know, that's like saying there's only one solution that we can come up with at a time. A lot of the problems that we're having in education today are directly attributable to a high divorce rate. What we know is that children who have parents who have gotten divorced are much more prone to crime, much more prone to drugs, much more prone to educational problems.

How do you respond to people who say, "Hey, I thought Bill Zedler was a get-government-out-of-my-life kind of guy? And look at him. He's horning in on my marriage. Should we just get him a little velvet suit and a pillow and make him a ring bearer?"

Whether we have this bill or not, the government is involved when you get married, because you get your marriage license from the government.

So would that be your answer, then, to somebody who asks you, "When does the nanny state become the busybody state?"

Anytime you're given an option, I don't think it's being a busybody at all.

What would you say to critics who maintain that covenant | CONTINUED ON PAGE 000

WEDDED TO THE IDEA: Loser guys, have we got a law for you!

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marriage is just a way for loser guys who happen to luck out and get a woman to hang on to her?

Why does it always have to be the loser guy?

Touché. Okay, just to make this more understandable to readers, I'm going to use some celebrity names and try some scenarios out. If California had had covenant marriage, would Britney and K-Fed still be together?

Is this her first or second marriage? There was that time where she got married and it lasted less than 24 hours. Is that it?

Fifty-five hours, actually, but never mind. Hypothetically, who should push hardest for covenant marriage: Brad or Angelina?

I have no idea.

If Bill and Hillary Clinton had had a covenant marriage while the whole Monica Lewinsky scandal was going on, could Hillary have gotten a divorce?

Sure.

On the basis of what?

Adultery.

Do you think she should have gotten a divorce?

If there's an adulterous relationship, it's typically because something is missing in the marriage to begin with.

What do you think was missing with them?

Maybe they weren't communicating.

Do you think at this point Hillary and Bill are candidates for covenant marriage?

I'd say it's a good idea for everyone. I mean, if somehow my wife and I got on a rocky road, we would go to counseling.

Let's see how this might work in my life. My husband and I did an informal declaration of marriage in . . . I'm not sure when it was. Cost \$750. We got married for the insurance in '80 or '81. I have the paper somewhere. We've been married for somewhere in the quarter-century range now. At this point, do you think a covenant marriage would be an asset to us?

I would encourage it for anybody I know. You know, we've encouraged people to go to premarital counseling before they got married, and if we see that they're having marital difficulty, we say, "You ought to go to counseling."

So it's all about counseling? Say my husband and I did have a covenant marriage, and he had a "colleague" at his office—maybe she was young enough to be his daughter and possibly a part-time aerobics instructor—and she took him out to lunch all the time, and she was bringing him balloon bouquets every time he sharpened a pencil, but there was no actual proof that anything was going on. Could I divorce him in a covenant marriage?

You could. You would just have to go through

the process.

Would it be harder if I were in a covenant marriage?

It would take longer. You would be going to counseling as opposed to not going to counseling. And sometimes, depending on if you have children, depending on if someone has tried to hide assets . . .

"Hidden assets"! I got you. So if it came to that in a covenant marriage, who would get to keep the house? How would the cars be split up? For example, in our case, who would get the Hyundai and who would get the new Volvo station wagon with the gray leather interior?

As I was saying, even a no-fault divorce can take a long time because you're—

Finding where the assets are hidden! Now, to turn that situation around, could my husband divorce me for having a boyfriend? But what if there was no hanky-panky?

It wouldn't make any difference. It wouldn't matter whether it was a boyfriend or girlfriend, it would all be the same. The only difference is you would have agreed to go to counseling.

One last question: Could you have a covenant marriage here and then just skip off to Oklahoma and get one of those carefree Oklahoma divorces?

Let me look into that. Good question. ♣

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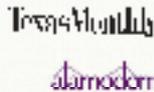
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