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OPINION | **Wednesday, July 21, 2004**

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Gay marriage won't destroy U.S.

By DIANE W. MUFSON - guest columnist

As an avid newspaper reader, reminders of dreadful world problems accompany my morning coffee. The loss of life and chaos continue in Iraq. Afghanistan is a mess, the Middle East remains a powder keg and North Korea brags about big bombs.

In our own country, millions of people lack health insurance, new college graduates can't find jobs, pensions are disappearing, energy prices are sky high and terrorism worries us. These issues need the attention and concern of our elected officials.

And what are our leaders concerned about? Gay marriage. In regard to this, Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., was quoted as saying, "The future of the country hangs in the balance because the future of the family hangs in the balance."

Our national leaders, the people who convinced us they knew there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq that would destroy our country, now want to convince us to alter our Constitution because gay marriage will "destroy" our country.

Regardless of whether one is for, against, or just couldn't care less about gay marriage, it is clear that gay marriage will not determine this country's fate. Gay individuals and gays in committed relationships have existed throughout recorded history.

But sometimes people in power are just not ready to accept societal changes that go against familiar beliefs.

In 1616, Nicholas Copernicus' theory that the earth revolved around the sun was greeted by the church, then the political powerhouse in Europe, as heresy. It took almost 400 years for the church to publicly admit that Copernicus was right.

In the first part of the 20th century, many states had miscegenation laws prohibiting marriage between the races. During the same time period, there was also the belief that when women received the vote, this country would be in dire straits.

A Gallup poll of 1958 showed only four percent of whites approved of marriage between the races, while a recent survey indicates a 70 percent acceptance rate.

Studies indicate that about 10 percent of the population is left-handed, which is about the same percentage as those who are gay. It wasn't too long ago that left-handedness was considered a sign of sinfulness and schoolteachers rapped the knuckles of left-handed pupils to force them to write with the right hand.

None of these societal changes destroyed this country, and neither will formalized

relationships among gays.

If we are truly concerned about family values, then we need more foster and adoptive homes for neglected and abused kids. In my quarter of a century as a practicing psychologist, I have met too many adults who, despite their "proper" sexual orientation, were unfit parents.

There is plenty of urgent work for our politicians. Rather than spending their limited time and energy trying to deny gay couples from marrying or having a stable home or obtaining health benefits, our politicians needs to address the national debt, trade deficits, energy costs, jobs exports to other countries and maintaining our country's position as a leader in the free world.

The American people will not benefit from having a Congress and a president, who went to war based on faulty intelligence, change our Constitution on the faulty premise that gay marriage will destroy our country.

Diane W. Mufson is a licensed psychologist in private practice in Huntington. She is a former citizen member of The Herald-Dispatch editorial board. Her e-mail is dwmufson@ezwv.com.

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