

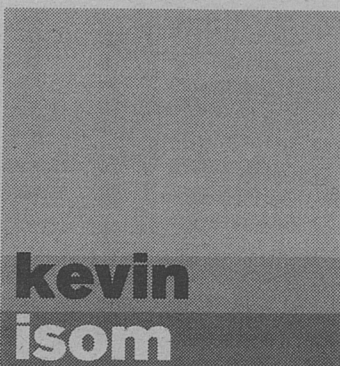
Tongue in Cheek: Fair Tax? Gaily Forward!

We live in a country filled with village idiots who want to teach "Intelligent Design" in the public schools, instead of in the Sunday Schools where it belongs. Meanwhile, the rest of the town yokels are proclaiming that gay marriage — rather than the 50 percent divorce rate — is destroying marriage. Forget "Hello, Dolly!" The latest rage here is "Hello, Christian Taliban!" In a time of scary oddities like these (none of which, I submit, are still quite as scary as the ever popular Ice Capades), it's nice to find something that I can get behind with my so-called "conservative" brethren. Specifically, I mean the Fair Tax.

In case you haven't heard about the Fair Tax proposal, or seen the number one non-fiction best selling book about it on *The New York Times* best seller list, the Fair Tax is a proposal to abolish the Internal Revenue Service and replace all federal payroll taxes — from income tax to social security and Medicare tax — with a consumption tax on only retail goods and services. In other words, you get the full amount of your paycheck (less any state income tax, if your state has one), and you pay a 20 percent tax embedded into the price for retail (not re-sale, but retail) goods and services. To prevent people from paying tax on the basic necessities, every month every household would get a prebate check from the government refunding what that household would be expected to spend on the basic necessities.

Sounds simple, right? No more IRS, no more filing federal tax returns (the capital gains tax would disappear as well), and no more legal tax evasion of the sort that the wealthiest among us are famous for.

The book, *The Fair Tax Book*, explains the plan in more convinc-



ing detail. It was penned by conservative (some would say right wing, I would say gay-unfriendly) Republican Georgia Congressman John Linder and libertarian syndicated talk radio host Neal Boortz, and the idea seems to be gaining buzz among the Republicans who control both houses of Congress.

And what possible relation might this have to the issues I chiefly write about — namely, gay issues? Let me tell you. And it's wonderfully, unintentionally subversive.

How might the Fair Tax benefit gay families? By gay families, I don't just mean single and coupled gay folks with children. I mean gay couples, whether legally married in Massachusetts, or domestic-partnered in those slightly-less-courageous-than-Massachusetts states, or those who are simply coupled in the head-up-the-patootie "I need an anti-gay amendment to protect my straight marriage" states.

Here's how: One of the benefits of marriage is that it confers upon a couple all kinds of federal rights, many involving taxes and benefits that are unavailable to unmarried couples. In fact, thanks to the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA — remember? Rhymes with "coma?"), even in states like Massachusetts where marriage for gay folks is legal, those married

couples can't get the federal benefits of their marriage. Many companies are now offering benefits (like health insurance) to the same-sex partners of their employees, along with the children in their household. But the difference is that married people can get the benefits paid out of their pre-tax income, while gay couples don't. In other words, you don't get the same benefit (even though your company is giving it to you) because you pay taxes on the money that you're paying for the insurance with. So it costs you more than your legally married co-worker.

But if you take out the federal income tax, you take out the difference. We all then get the same benefits and we all pay the same amount for them. There's no more extra taxation on gay folks. And we all — straight and gay alike — get to keep our entire paychecks.

I really like the idea that a concept backed by the John Linders of the world is one that will level the playing field in at least one way between gay folks in committed relationships (along with their children) and straight married people.

I really, really like it when perhaps-unintended consequences work to our benefit.

I really, really, really like it that even our friends who are Democratic can now call their red-state congresspersons and senators and ask them to support something that we can all agree upon.

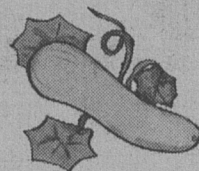
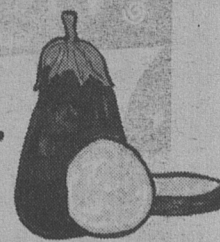
And I just love it that the Fair Tax is actually fair. ▼

Columnist Kevin Isom is the author of It Only Hurts When I Polka and Tongue in Cheek and Other Places, available at bookstores and online. He may be reached at isomonline@aol.com or KevinIsom.com.

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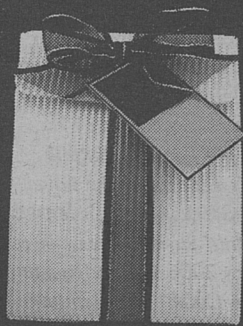


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