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Protecting the rights of the unmarried American Association for Single People to take on Washington establishment

By **Bill Hillburg**
WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — Forget about finding Mr. or Mrs. Right. The American Association for Single People is all about securing equal rights.

Members of the Glendale-based nonprofit group will arrive in Washington today to lobby Congress on Social Security reforms and other issues as part of their "Unmarried and Single Americans Week" observance.

"People have been conditioned to think that all single people want not to be single. That's just not true," said Thomas F. Coleman, AASP's executive director. "And when people first hear about our group, they think it's a dating service."

Coleman, an attorney and civil rights activist who is single,

said the AASP, founded in 1999 and now with 1,500 paying members, has some serious issues and numbers on its side. According to the 2000 Census, unmarried adults headed nearly half the nation's households and a slight majority of those in California.

Coleman and his fellow activists hope to represent the interests of a broad coalition of single adults — widows and widowers, divorcees, gays and lesbians and those who have never married.

Coleman said the group is concentrating on concerns affecting all unmarried adults and does not support such controversial issues as legalized



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marriage for gays and lesbians.

Social Security, with regulations still steeped in the husband-wife household format, is a major target for the group. Coleman noted that benefits for married Social Security recipients continue for spouses upon the death of a husband or wife.

But, singles' sizable investments in the program are forfeited at death. AASP advocates allowing unmarried persons to designate a child, other relative or domestic partner to receive their Social Security benefits after they die.

But Glenn Stanton, director of social research and cultural affairs for Focus on the Family, a group founded in Southern California by Dr. James Dobson and now based in Colorado, said government should not encourage nontraditional living arrangements.

"These people are striving for

affirmation," he said. "If you want to live together without getting married, nobody is going to stop you, but we're also not going to give you recognition and benefits. Do what you want and live with the consequences of it."

Focus on the Family is backing the Federal Marriage Amendment, a constitutional change sponsored by Rep. Ronnie Shows, D-Miss. The measure would limit the legal definition of marriage to traditional unions between men and women and would deny some government benefits to unmarried adults.

"Throughout history, there has been one model that holds households together — and that's marriage," argued Stanton. "Groups like the AASP are trying to minimize marriage to nothing."

Bill Hillburg can be reached at (202) 662-8925.