

# The Single Person's Burden

By Thomas F. Coleman / Arizona Republic / February 15, 2004

If you are an unmarried American, you may be single, but you're definitely not alone. You are actually part of a growing population that is on the verge of becoming the nation's new "unmarried majority."



There are 86 million unmarried adults in the United States. We head up half of all American households.

Our living arrangements are diverse. More than 27 million of us live alone. Another 10 million have a partner. The other 49 million unmarried Americans live with roommates, housemates or relatives.

From one perspective, we are already an "unmarried majority" nation. The Census Bureau estimates that the average American who lives to age 70 will experience more adult years being unmarried than married.

Most unmarried individuals, couples and families are not aware they are being treated unfairly by government policies and corporate practices. And even though unmarried Americans represent 35 percent of the nation's voters, we are being ignored by politicians.

Both major parties and all major contenders in the 2004 presidential race are reaching out to families, married couples, parents, seniors, women and racial and ethnic minorities. But none of them will say the "S" word. It is as though "single" is a dirty word in American politics.

Fairness in the workplace is an elusive goal for many unmarried workers, especially since federal law does not prohibit employment discrimination based on marital status. Most state civil-rights statutes offer no protection to unmarried workers, either.

Although we comprise 42 percent of the nation's workforce, we generally get paid much less in terms of benefits compensation in comparison with married workers who receive subsidies for spousal and dependent benefits. Despite these financial inequities, we are often required to work more overtime and on holidays or to travel more or to relocate more often than our married co-workers.

For unmarried tenants, fairness is not guaranteed by federal fair-housing laws. Most state statutes do not include marital-status discrimination.

Many automobile insurance companies impose a hefty "marital status" surcharge on unmarried drivers, even if they have an excellent driving record. It seems unfair to charge higher rates to a driver who has escaped an abusive marriage by getting a divorce or to impose more expensive premiums on a recent widower or to

surcharge an all-A college student who is single.

Knowing about these and other areas of unfairness, such as inequities in our current tax system, is one thing. Doing something about them is quite another.

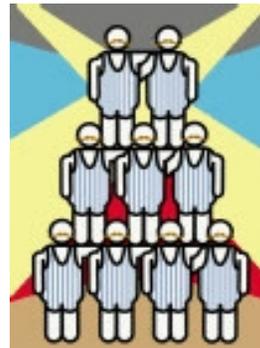
You may be single, but you don't have to fight these injustices alone. We created Unmarried America, an equal-rights organization, to seek more fairness for unmarried workers, consumers and taxpayers, and greater recognition of single voters.

We are a non-profit and nonpartisan organization with members in all states. Our Web site, [www.unmarriedAmerica.org](http://www.unmarriedAmerica.org), provides news, advice and resources for people who are single, divorced or widowed, as well as for single parents and domestic partners.

Unmarried America reaches out to elected officials and corporate executives by suggesting ways to create more fairness for a population that is becoming "a new majority in the new millennium."

Members of Congress have joined Unmarried America, as have state legislators, mayors and city council members throughout the nation.

We wish that all elected officials, including the unmarried governors of Arizona and Hawaii, take a cue from



the governor of Delaware and dozens of other elected officials by accepting our open invitation to become an honorary member of Unmarried America.

But support from leadership at the top has little meaning unless there is also grass-roots support. That is why unmarried individuals need to get involved.

Single people need to stand up and speak out for equal rights. We need to write to elected officials and political candidates and insist that they address the issue of marital-status discrimination. We also need to write to newspaper editors and contact radio talk-show hosts to share our views.

The squeaky wheel gets oiled. We are creating a collective voice that can become loud enough to be heard by the nation's economic and political power brokers.

By broadening our membership base we can "pump up the volume" of Unmarried America. ♦♦

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