

# What If?

Gender equality and amendments to the Constitution of The Bahamas  
*By Barrington H. Brennen, March 20, 2016*

What if my six-year old son developed cancer because I gave him food to eat? Then wouldn't it be wise not to feed him to prevent him from getting cancer? On the other hand, wouldn't it be inhumane not to feed him? If I do not feed him, he will die. So naturally I must take the risk of feeding him so he can live. Why should I allow my fear of him getting cancer, of which I have no proof, cause me not to give him food to eat? Shouldn't I just give him the food and let the future deal with my "what ifs." Feeding him is simply the natural thing to do.

I am certain you are saying that this illustration is absurd. Yes it is. And so are many of our "what ifs" in life.

Do you realize that "what ifs" can cripple you? Sometimes they are simply frivolous or stupid. They freeze us in a position of nothingness or allow us to become stagnated. What ifs can cripple a relationship, family, and nation. What ifs can even cripple a government.

So what is my point? Recently the House passed four amendments to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. These amendments have been approved by House and the Senate, and then will go to the final stage of approval, a national referendum. These amendments are dealing with citizenship in the Constitution. It is seeking to remove all discrimination and unfairness between male and female in the constitution regarding citizenship. The national debates are stirring up passionate discussions and many are construing "what if" scenarios that have no foundation in themselves. They are only what they are--"what ifs."

For every law, policy, or legislation, one can raise a million "what ifs" that can stifle discussion and lead us down a path of do-nothingness. That is the whole nature of "what ifs"--They lead us nowhere. Too many are allowing the what ifs to block an intelligent discussion and a noteworthy decision in the end. Here are the amendments in brief:

- 1) A child born outside The Bahamas would become a Bahamian citizen at birth if either its mother or father is a citizen of The Bahamas by birth.
- 2) The foreign spouse of a Bahamian citizen (male or female) would be able to obtain citizenship subject to satisfying existing national security and public policy consideration and new provision guarding against marriage of convenience.
- 3) A Bahamian father of a child born out of wedlock would be able to pass his citizenship to that child subject to legal proof that he is the father.
- 4) It would be unlawful to discriminate based on sex and sex would be defined as meaning male or female."

Many are arguing that amendment number four will open a can of worms and can lead to same-sex marriage. That truth is that these concerns are only what ifs. Honestly, we can

have many what ifs on any current or future law in The Bahamas. The amendments are clear and simple. They deal with citizenship and discrimination and it is really the equitable way to go. Interestingly, The Bahamas is the only English-speaking country in the Caribbean that has not passed these amendments to the Constitution. A few of these countries are noted to be homophobic but have still passed these laws. Why? Because they realize these amendments are for the greater good. They have less what ifs. To date, there is no evidence that by passing any of these bills, they will impact marriage.

It is my view that the group of people who should support these amendments fully are the Christians. Why! Because the gospel is about freedom and equality. Do you realize that if God had a “what if” when he created humans, He would not have given us freedom of choice. God could have said: “What if Adam and Eve decide not to love and obey me?” Suppose God’s what if pushed Him to decide not to give humans that freedom of choice? The good news is that He did give us the freedom. He took the risk. If He did not give us that freedom, we would have been miserable souls today. Even though some do not choose Him that’s the risk He took.

Many think that they are protecting the future of our nation by believing that their “what ifs” are real. Yes, while asking the appropriate “what if” question can help us to be wise, often too many what ifs reveal a state of fear of change which lock us into the old, dark house of frustration and pain. While many think that The Bahamas is so much more advanced than many of our Caribbean nations, the shocking reality is that The Bahamas is really behind most of the Caribbean countries in our policies, divorce laws, gender equality issues, etc.

Remember fellow citizens, what ifs blur the brightness of our future. What ifs can block the sun rays of freedom. What ifs can send a dark cloud over justice. What ifs can push us into a deep pit of do-nothing-ness. Let us keep focused on the real intention of these four bills—equality for both males and females under the law. No matter how they are worded, someone will have a what if. So let us remove the what ifs and replace them with “we will do it” simply because it is the right thing to do.

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