

Three little words shouldn't be so traumatizing

Three little words. That's what keeps bringing us back to this intersection of low comedy and pathos. Three words, none longer than three letters — and yet some of us still find them nearly impossible to say.

Three words: I am gay. If he had been able to say those words, who knows what Roy Ashburn might be today? But we already know what his inability has made him: an object of ridicule.

Ashburn is a Republican state senator in California. He has always been rather reliably anti-gay in his law-making, voting against virtually every gay-friendly piece of legislation, from marriage equality to a simple motion to set aside a day in honor of Harvey Milk, a gay political icon who was assassinated in 1978.

So, naturally, we're all shocked — shocked, I tell you, shocked! — to learn that Ashburn himself is gay. This revelation came after he was arrested for drunken driving earlier this month. Turns out he had done his drinking at a gay bar. "I am gay," he told a conservative radio host. As



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for his anti-gay record? He said he was just following the wishes of the people he served.

Because who wants a leader who thinks for himself?

Then there's Eric Massa, a now former Democratic representative from New York. He stands accused of sexual harassment by a number of his male staffers who claim he groped them. It has since come to light that he faced similar accusations two decades ago when he was in the Navy.

Massa who, according to the Washington Post, shares a townhouse with several unmarried male staffers, still declines to speak the three little words, but he confirmed the latest charges in a bizarre interview with Glenn Beck on Fox News. He also tried to portray it as nonsexual. "Not only did I grope a

male staffer, I tickled him until he couldn't breathe and then four guys jumped on top of me. It was my 50th birthday."

Oh. Well, that explains it, right? When we turn 50, all us manly men like nothing better than to jump atop one another and tickle ourselves silly. Clint Eastwood, Bruce Willis, Alan Greenspan ... all the manly men do it.

Sorry. As I said, low comedy. And pathos.

Because for all the laughter these men evoke with their lies to self and tortured rationalizations to us, I find I have also, hidden in the breath between ha and ha, a certain bitter-sweet pity. There's just something ineffably pathetic in the inability of these middle-age men, in the Year of Our Lord 2010, post-"Will & Grace," post-Ellen DeGeneres, post-Barney Frank, Elton John, Meredith Baxter and Neil Patrick Harris, to simply stand up and say those three simple words.

Perhaps that sounds judgmental. Perhaps it is.

But if so, it is a judgment fueled by the cowardice and mendacity of

those who lack the courage to be what they are, by anger at the hypocrisy of a Roy Ashburn willing to sell out his own for 40 shekels of political approval from those who would hate him if they only knew, and, ultimately, by the realization that we have been at this intersection too many times before.

So you have to wonder: How many James Wests, Ted Haggards, Mark Foleys and Larry Craigs do we have to see, how many shocked spouses and embarrassed children do we have to endure, how many lies, alibis and justifications do we need to hear, before we accept the obvious — that gay is not a choice, gay is not a sin, gay is not a shame. Gay simply is.

And their inability to say, "I am gay," doesn't just speak poorly of gays and lesbians.

Because if what we see here at the intersection of low comedy and pathos indicts certain of them for cowardice and mendacity, you could argue that it indicts the rest of us for much the same thing.

After all, their inability to say



RICH PEDRONCELLI/Associated Press

California state Sen. Roy Ashburn announced that he was gay after his arrest on suspicion of driving under the influence.

what they are only reflects our inability to accept it.

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