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Log Cabin Republicans struggle to find a home in modern GOP

Activist group advocates equal rights for gay voters, but party remains hostile to those outside social conservative base

Paul Harris in Tampa
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The Republican party is still dominated by a powerful evangelical base. Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

To many they seem the outsiders at the Republican convention in [Tampa](#): out and proud gay and lesbian delegates who just happen to be conservatives.

But at a gathering being held by the [Log Cabin Republicans](#) to highlight gay or gay-friendly Republican political candidates, some insisted that they were still an integral part of the Republican party.

"We were invited here. In addition to being welcomed here, we want to be here," said Clarke Cooper, executive director of the Log Cabin group at a fancy reception held over finger food and cocktails at a coastal Tampa hotel.

However, to many observers the plight of gay [Republicans](#) seems extremely difficult. Though gay marriage is increasingly common among young Americans, it has become a familiar bugbear for many Republican politicians.

Some rightwing Republicans have made anti-gay statements, like when [Minnesota](#) congresswoman [Michele Bachmann famously said](#) [homosexuality was "part of Satan."](#) Many Republicans opposed letting gays serve openly in the US military. And the official Republican platform to be adopted by the party this week – a platform replete with anti-[gay rights](#) language – aims to limit marriage to between one man and one woman, attacks Obama for supporting gay marriage, and supports plans for federal laws to keep gay marriage at bay.

Cooper admitted that the platform was offensive to him, but tried to see the bright side. "As abysmal as the platform language was, we were able to participate," he said. "The negative language that was in there is not only divisive for certain issues, but it is not helpful in the wider context."

But Cooper said he remained a Republican because he was a firm believer in the conservative values of small government and a muscular American foreign policy.

The Log Cabin group does have allies, too. Andrew Langer, president of the Institute for Liberty, was at the party, and said conservatives had to welcome gay people into the movement as a point of principle. "It is a fundamental

American virtue to leave people alone to their own devices. Gays have as much to fear from the Obama administration as anyone else. It is up to us to educate the rest of the movement as to the error of their ways," he said.

There were some straight delegates there. Bob Dallas, a Republican delegate from Georgia, had come to the party to show his support and play down the importance of social issues in the party. "Even a person who is married will not agree with their spouse 100% of the time," Dallas said.

Being a gay Republican is still not easy, however. David Lamando, an openly gay New Jersey resident, has every intention of voting for Romney in November. "Not so much on the social issues, but on the fiscal issues Romney is right," he said.

But he gets upset by the party's stance on gay rights. "It is very discouraging. I am from a liberal area, and I get a hard time from people for being a gay Republican," he said. "It will change. Younger people are different. People who don't support gay marriage are on the wrong side of history," he said.

For now, though, it is difficult to see the Republican, still dominated by its powerful evangelical base, embrace gay rights any time soon. After all, even at the Log Cabin party, journalists were instructed very carefully not to take any pictures of those attending.

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