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Gay Republican group: freedom to marry lines up with GOP ideals

Republicans in favour of same-sex marriage face an uphill battle, but insist values of small government support their position

Adam Gabbatt in Tampa

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Rick Santorum, who has compared gay marriage to bestiality, at the Republican national convention. Photograph: Benjamin J Myers/Corbis

High above the Republican national convention, on the 41st floor of a downtown Tampa skyscraper, the Young Conservatives for the Freedom to Marry gathered on Wednesday morning to discuss the contentious issue of promoting [gay rights](#) within the Republican Party.

The fringe setting felt somehow appropriate for the group, whose campaign for gay marriage to be made legal across the country means it sits uneasily within the GOP. [The party's official platform](#), published this week, specifically sets out to introduce laws to prevent gay marriage, as well as reinstate 'don't ask don't tell' in the military.

It is an uncomfortable position for gay [Republicans](#) to be in, but they are fighting hard for recognition from the party hierarchy. Supporters of equal rights within the party argue that allowing gay people to marry is in line with the GOP's stated preference for individual freedom and less government interference. It was a line oft-repeated on Wednesday.

"Republicans claim they want small government. They want small government when it comes to entitlement programs, when it comes to Medicare and Medicaid, but when it comes to social issues, they are not as small as they are [on those issues]," said David Lamando, a 21-year-old from [New Jersey](#) who hopes to rise within the party.

Lamando registered with the Democratic Party aged 18 – "They loved me over there," he said – but felt more affinity with conservative economic beliefs and became involved with the GOP after meeting with Log Cabin Republicans – a group which campaigns for gay rights. He is now hoping for a political career within the party.

"It will be harder to rise as a Republican but what's easy is not always right and change is not going to happen unless 21-year-olds like me do it."

Freedom to Marry, the organisation with which the conservative group is affiliated, teamed up with the Log Cabin Republicans to run a full page ad in Wednesday's Tampa Tribune newspaper. The ad stated that allowing gay marriage fits Republicans' non-interference, individual freedom ideals.

"As conservatives we believe that the freedom to marry is directly in line with the core ideals and principles of the Republican party – less government, more individual freedom, personal responsibility and the importance of family," the ad read.

Margaret Hoover, great-granddaughter of Herbert and a former George W Bush campaign official, is on Freedom to Marry's leadership committee and a staunch believer that the party must modernise. Hoover appealed to the core values of the Republican party in an address to the young conservatives on Wednesday.

"If you believe in conservatism, if you believe in individual freedom, if you believe that people take care of people, the government doesn't take care of people, and if you want to have societies based on strong relationships, the fundamental relationship in any community is the partnership that you make with your spouse.

"I believe every American should have that freedom, and that is wholly consistent with being a party of individual freedom."

The problem for pro-equality Republicans is that they are a relatively small voice within their party, whose right-wing is dominated by those whose Christian faith heavily influences their stance on social issues.

The uphill battle they face was exemplified during the Republican primary campaign, where [Rick Santorum](#), a man who has attracted criticism for [comparing gay marriage to bestiality](#), was the candidate to run [Mitt Romney](#) closest. Tony Perkins, president of the right-wing Family Research Council, [was involved in drafting the GOP platform](#), which is unequivocal in its definition of marriage.

"We believe that marriage, the union of one man and one woman must be upheld as the national standard a goal to stand for, encourage, and promote through laws governing marriage," [the Republican platform says](#).

With the GOP's official stance so opposed to same-sex marriage it is unlikely to attract floods of the more liberal conservatives who could help change views within the party.

Casey Pick, the 28-year-old programmes director of Log Cabin Republicans, admitted the document was "damaging" to Republicans' election hopes. "We know especially that support for freedom for all is strong among moderates and conservatives, younger voters and women, all of whom will be critical to winning elections in 2012 and beyond," she said.

Lamando, who is student body vice-president at Stockton College in New Jersey, said the hardline platform is "a mistake, a big mistake". But he is willing to work to drag the Republican party towards the centre.

"People like Rick Santorum are not the voice of the Republican party," he said.

"[Marriage] is not the gateway to man on dog, man on cat, because people can only marry people. And there are only two lines on an American marriage certificate."

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Hamletifyouwish
30 August 2012 4:07AM

There are no homosexual Republicans and no Republicans ever have abortions they are all Christians and would harm no one except those whom may argue with them of course.

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Dresser1
30 August 2012 5:49AM

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Ha HAHAHAAAAHA ha ahahahah!!! Republicans ever giving these people a seat at the table? They don't even admit they have a right to be alive, much less any further rights after that. Darlings, you are all barking up the WAY wrong tree!!! Good luck with all that.

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pdquick

30 August 2012 6:12AM

Your "brand"? Seriously?

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urbanegorrila

30 August 2012 7:13AM

The only real freedoms the Republicans seek is the absolute right to do whatever you want, if you are rich, and the absolute right to starve, if you are poor.

All the Gay Republicans need to do is become richer than Croesus and they will be accepted.

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elexpatrioto

30 August 2012 11:22AM

The bit about the republican party being in favor of individual freedoms and small, noninterfering government went the way of the dodo bird a long time ago when St. Ronald of Alzheimer's made his pact with the right wing, fundamentalist christianists. From that time on, the republicans were welded to the idea that government had not only the right, but the God ordained duty to interfere in everyone's private life. This bit about how small government stays out of peoples' lives is so mid 20th century.

Wake up and smell the roses, Bud. The republican party you envision died long ago.

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elexpatrioto

30 August 2012 11:26AM

At least the Log Cabin Republicans can take some measure of solace in the definition of "Santorum."

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suzaries

30 August 2012 1:14PM

I feel for this kid. He's very naive and is in for a rude awakening.

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