

NATIONAL news

nation protections covering sexual orientation. National Stonewall Democrats asked President Bush on Nov. 19 to accompany his plan with an executive order specifically requiring private companies bidding on federal contracts to retain existing civil rights protections. President Bill Clinton signed an executive order in 1998 outlawing anti-gay discrimination in the federal workplace.

Right-wing homophobes already are salivating at the possibility of victory. According to Robert Knight of the Culture and Family Institute, forcing Christian-owned businesses to hire queers would be a "disaster."

"They could decide to stay in business in some cases, or surrender their beliefs," he said. "If the president allows this to happen on a national level, he'll be putting many businesses at risk."



Tom Tancredo thinks Big Brothers and Sisters of America's nondiscrimination policy "ignores...common sense"

U.S. Rep. Tom Tancredo, R-Colo., has spearheaded a congressional sign-on letter to President Bush attacking a policy enacted during the summer by Big Brothers and Sisters of America prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. The agency has had a nondiscrimination policy covering sexual orientation, race, religion and ethnicity for more than 25 years, and in July the rule became mandatory for all affiliates.

"Rep. Tancredo and his associates are playing on long-standing prejudices in an attempt to smear gay men and lesbians who are giving of their time and talent to mentor at-risk youth," said Winnie Stachelberg, Human Rights Campaign political director, in a Nov. 20 statement. "A person's sexual orientation has nothing to do with their ability to provide positive mentoring to children in need."

The letter also has been signed by GOP Reps. John Hostettler and Brian Kerns of Indiana, Ernest Istook and John Sullivan of Oklahoma, Joseph Pitts of Pennsylvania, Jim Ryun of Kansas, Bob Schaffer of Colorado and Chris Smith of New Jersey. In addition to the attack on the nondiscrimination policy, the letter attempts to link sexual orientation with pedophilia.

"The new policy ignores the psychological research and common sense," Tancredo wrote. "As a general rule of thumb, Big Brothers doesn't match up adult men with teen-age girls. Obviously that would set up a risky situation that could lead to sexual abuse."

U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., told the *Washington Post* he supports a provision that would allow faith-based groups receiving federal funding for community service programs to discriminate against gay men and lesbians in hiring—even in cases where local and state non-discrimination laws are already in place. "I will make that stand," he said.



Rick Santorum

Santorum's comments are in contrast to his remarks last year on faith-based initiatives legislation, in which he said he did not want to include a provision to pre-empt state and local civil rights laws in legislation he drafted with U.S. Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn. Elizabeth Birch, Human Rights Campaign executive director, sent him a letter Nov. 25 asking him to clarify his views on the issue.

To date, HRC has not opposed religious exemptions for hiring laws, as long as the groups and organizations are not using federal money. For example, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, federal legislation that would protect gay men and lesbians from bias in hiring, includes language from the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that exempts religious organizations and permits them to favor members of their own faith.

The gay, lesbian and bi community made up 5 percent of the electorate during the 2002 midterm elections, according to a poll released Nov. 21. The survey was arranged after the Voter News Service decided not to identify queer voters this year.

"These numbers clearly demonstrate the importance of the gay community in major elections," said David M. Smith, Human Rights Campaign communications director and senior strategist. "In the current political climate, 5 percent of the vote is often the entire margin of victory."

In the past four consecutive elections, the gay community consistently has represented 4 percent to 5 percent of the electorate. Comparatively, according to the Voter News Service's 2000 statistics, African American voters comprised 10 percent of the electorate, Hispanic voters 7 percent, Jewish 4 percent and Asians 2 percent.

"As a demographic, the gay community is consistently active at the polls. Both parties would be wise to recognize the significance of the gay vote," Smith said. "It's also important to remember that many gay and lesbian voters are reluctant to come forward and be counted out of fear of discrimination—so these numbers are probably low."

The poll measured both the size and voting patterns of the gay community in congressional races. Gay voters in the 2002 elections were 71 percent Democratic, 19 percent Republican, 4.1 percent Libertarian and 2.7 percent Green.

In U.S. Senate and House races, gay voters reported that their top three priorities were the economy, the candidate's political ideology and taxes. Nearly half who identified as gay said they voted out of a sense of civic responsibility.

The poll was conducted from Nov. 13 to 18. A total of 8,280 likely voters were drawn from a prescreened pool of 63,000 people registered with Zogby International. □

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