

The controversy swirling around comments by U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., about gays and the right to privacy lasted through several media cycles and appears to be dying out.

That public debate illustrated both the continued second-class status of gays within the political process but also the remarkable advances that have occurred during the past several years. In 1988, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott's comparison of homosexuality to alcoholism and kleptomania raised barely a ripple in the mainstream media.

It all began with remarks Santorum made in an interview with The Associated Press that was published April 22. He said of the Texas sodomy case now before the U.S. Supreme Court: "If the Supreme Court says that you have the right to consensual [gay] sex within your home, then you have the right to bigamy, you have the right to polygamy, you have the right to incest, you have the right to adultery. You have the right to anything."

The Human Rights Campaign led other community organizations in calling for Santorum to step down from his third-ranking Republican leadership position in the Senate.

AN INCLUSIVE MAN

Senator compares homosexuality with bigamy, polygamy, incest and adultery by Bob Roehr

Democratic presidential candidates Howard Dean, John Kerry and Joe Lieberman were among those taking the lead in condemning the remarks. However, a San Francisco television station reported that an April 23 HRC gathering with candidate John Edwards was closed to the press at the demand of the candidate because he did not want to talk about Santorum.

Four moderate Republican senators publicly urged their colleague to apologize for his remarks, though others reportedly urged that action behind the scenes. Majority Leader Bill Frist issued a statement saying Santorum was "a voice for inclusion and compassion...to suggest otherwise is just politics."

"Santorum is usually a good politician about meeting constituents and listening to concerns,

but he never gave us anything, or if he did, it was certainly scraps," said David Greer, who was president of Pennsylvania's Log Cabin Republicans chapter for several years. He believes individual gay Republicans have supported Santorum but says the organization never gave him any money.

For three days, White House press secretary Ari Fleischer fended off queries on Santorum and the sodomy case behind those comments. Finally, he asserted April 25 that the senator was "an inclusive man."

The statement was a finessing of intense political pressure from those on the social right associated with James Dobson and Focus on the Family to support both Santorum and "the family," and the pressure for "inclusion" that came from Log Cabin Republicans and the broader American public.



Rick Santorum (left, with Trent Lott) is the third-ranking Republican in the U.S. Senate

HRC spokesman David Smith was not surprised and only mildly disappointed by the limited condemnation of Santorum by fellow Republicans. He said, "You can look at the silence in a good way," as Republicans not being comfortable with Santorum's remarks but unwilling to alienate their conservative base by speaking out against them.

And when Republicans did speak, they generally defended the man, not his ideas. [E]

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PUNDITS AND EDITORIALS

"It's obvious that [Santorum] is a moral fascist and is becoming the voice of the American Taliban. He is one of the ever-more-strident family fanatics. What he misses, among many other things, is that society exists for the individual; the individual does not exist for society."

—Longtime gay activist Frank Kameny

"John F. Kennedy drew a distinction between his public role as president of a diverse country and his own private religious convictions; Santorum

explicitly argues the opposite. How can we have any hope of creating a democratic government in Iraq free from domination by repressive religion if we cannot free our own laws of official faith-based biases inflicted on our fellow citizens?"

—Gay conservative Andrew Sullivan

"America does not need a sex police. It's a waste of time and resources."

—Conservative commentator Bill O'Reilly

"The legal framework matters. Mr. Santorum is espousing a worldview, and a disturbing one. On

one side are defenders of the 'healthy, stable, traditional family.' On the other are practitioners of what he calls the 'right-to-privacy lifestyle.' [He is] advocating the right of states to sic their police on two consenting adults in their own homes. You don't have to be pro-'anything' to know what's wrong with this.... The fact that many people disapprove of it does not justify sending the police to knock down doors and barge into bedrooms."

—The Washington Post

"The Ozzie and Harriet world he yearns for doesn't exist anymore, if it ever did. Repeated

divorce and remarriage, along with the public acknowledgment of gay relationships once kept in the shadows, have radically changed the composition of many families."

—The Baltimore Sun

"He does, I think, raise a profound question that he ought to answer himself: If you have the orientation of a moron, do you still have to talk like one?"

—Columnist Richard Cohen, taking on Santorum's religious parallel of "love the sinner, hate the sin"

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