



Congressman Jim Kolbe (right) greets the Dalai Lama.

Kolbe (R, AZ) became the first openly gay elected official to speak at a Republican convention in 2000.

Republican Party (United States)

by Donald P. Haider-Markel

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Established in the early 1850s, and running its first presidential candidate in 1856, the Republican Party (often referred to as the Grand Old Party or GOP) has been one of the two dominant political parties in the United States for nearly 150 years. The Party's key beliefs, as reflected in recent party platforms, revolve around a limited national government, protection of property rights and a free market economy, and upholding traditional values concerning the family, religious freedom, and the sanctity of life, among a broad array of other issues.

Early Activism in the Party

Given the Party's beliefs, perhaps it is not too surprising that glbtq activists have not always been welcome within the folds of the GOP. However, gay men and lesbians have been involved in Republican Party politics for a number of years. In 1972 San Francisco's Gay Activists Alliance disbanded and formed the Gay Voter's League, a group that campaigned for the reelection of Republican President Richard Nixon.

Similarly, even non-Republican gay and lesbian activists began trying to influence the Party in 1976. During that year's presidential campaign, President Gerald Ford was "zapped" by activists in Ann Arbor, Michigan over federal immigration rules. The protests forced President Ford to admit that he was not aware that homosexuality was used as a basis for exclusion in immigration rulings.

Support for Traditional Values

Nevertheless, the Republican Party's focus on traditional family values has led many to believe that the Republican Party faithful oppose non-traditional gender roles and glbtq civil rights. Both elite and mass Republicans appear to hold these beliefs as public opinion polls show that Republicans are less likely to support glbtq civil rights than are Democrats.

Not surprisingly, gay and lesbian voters tend to vote for Democratic candidates and liberals rather than Republicans and conservatives. For example, in the 2000 presidential election, exit polls suggest that 70 percent of gay and lesbian voters chose Democrat Al Gore, 25 percent Republican George W. Bush, and four percent Green Party candidate Ralph Nader.

Log Cabin Republicans

But even without high levels of voting support for Republican candidates, glbtq Republicans have made their presence felt. The first organized and visible gay presence at a Republican National Convention occurred in 1984, when Ronald Reagan became his party's nominee for a second term. However, this presence did not prevent a conservative faction of the GOP from trying, but failing, to oust the newly formed Log Cabin Club, a gay Republican group, from the party in 1987.

The effort to oust the Log Cabin Club may have failed because of Reagan's ties to the group. The first

chapter of what would become the national Log Cabin Republicans (LCR) formed in 1978 to fight California's Proposition 6, a ballot initiative that would have banned homosexuals from teaching in public schools. The chapter worked diligently and successfully to convince Governor Reagan to oppose the measure.

In the late 1980s local Log Cabin chapters began coordinating state and national efforts to influence moderates within the Republican Party through a group called United Republicans for Equality and Privacy. During the 1988 election cycle, Log Cabin activists joined with moderate forces within the Party to exert some influence during the presidential campaign, and the Party's nominee, Vice President George H. W. Bush, subsequently endorsed a plan to protect persons with AIDS from discrimination.

Once elected, the first President Bush helped push the plan (the Americans With Disabilities Act) through Congress, and even named a conservative lesbian, Anne-Imelda Radice, to serve as acting chair of the National Endowment for the Arts. Viewing these actions as progress, in 1990 Log Cabin chapters joined together under the Log Cabin Federation, and all Log Cabin groups merged in 1995 to become LCR with high hopes of moderating anti-gay views within the Republican Party.

Reactionary Politics

However, religious conservatives within the Party were becoming increasingly disenchanted with President Bush by the time he faced reelection in 1992. Meanwhile, the Democratic Party was heavily courting the glbtq vote and campaign contributions. The Bush campaign tried to appease both glbtq voters and religious conservatives and succeeded in alienating both groups.

In February 1992 the chairman of the Bush campaign met with representatives of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. The main issue that arose from the meeting was surprise in the Bush campaign that the NGLTF representatives believed that the administration had done little on glbtq issues, and in particular, had not done enough about the AIDS crisis. As reports on the meeting became public, conservative congressional Republicans made their displeasure clear, and religious conservatives increasingly turned towards President Bush's far-right challenger, Pat Buchanan.

Losing ground, the Bush campaign turned to the right, and President Bush publicly denounced same-sex marriage and any notion that homosexuality is normal. Meanwhile, Vice President Dan Quayle went on the attack against the decline in the country's moral values. The Party's shift to the right became clear at the 1992 Republican Party Convention, as key speaker Pat Buchanan railed against homosexuals and feminists, declaring that the country was in the midst of a "culture war."

The actions by the Bush campaign and the rhetoric of the Party's Convention led LCR to refuse to endorse President Bush. Ironically, however, even as the Party turned to the right in 1992, LCR chapters were being established throughout the country at a rapid pace, and media coverage of the Party's own Convention noted the presence of the first-ever gay and lesbian delegates, most of whom were LCR members. Nevertheless, the Party's turn to the right led gay and lesbian Republicans to abandon President Bush in favor of the Democratic candidate, Bill Clinton.

Fundraising for Moderate Republicans

Even with the setbacks of the 1992 election cycle, LCR chapters were thriving, and in 1993 the federation established a lobbying office in Washington, D. C. and soon afterwards formed a political action committee that attempts to raise \$100,000 per election cycle for moderate Republican candidates. LCR even assisted in electing the first openly glbtq Republican to any state legislature when it helped Chuck Carpenter reach the Oregon House of Representatives in 1994.

Throughout the early 1990s LCR lobbyists attempted to educate their Party on glbtq issues and concerns. They tended to focus on less partisan issues, such as funding for AIDS research and health care programs.

The group continued to grow, and by 1996 LCR had six staff members and an annual budget of \$700,000.

Local chapters of LCR were heavily involved in party politics in several states during the early 1990s and were credited with assisting in the elections of several Republican governors, including Pete Wilson in California and William Weld in Massachusetts.

Both Governors rewarded their gay and lesbian supporters with political appointments. Although Governor Wilson soon appealed to a more conservative base, disappointing gay Republicans, the more moderate Governor Weld became one of the most pro-gay governors in the country. (Weld's reputation as pro-gay, however, cost him the ambassadorship to Mexico, when Republican Senator Jesse Helms and others blocked his nomination.)

A similar pattern emerged in local politics during the early 1990s. In the 1993 non-partisan mayoral election in Los Angeles, nearly 30 percent of conservative gay men and lesbians supported the candidacy of moderate Republican Richard Riordan over the more liberal Michael Woo. Riordan won and rewarded his gay and lesbian supporters with positions on his transition team and the appointment of an openly gay man as his deputy mayor. Mayor Riordan's efforts to court glbtq Republicans paid off during his 1997 reelection, when he received 41 percent of the gay and lesbian vote.

Unwelcome Outsiders

Glbtc activism within the Republican Party became most visible during the 1996 presidential campaign. As President Clinton and the Democratic Party sought to attract even more glbtq supporters than they had in 1992, Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole found himself under fire after refusing a \$1,000 campaign contribution from the LCR Political Action Committee. The news media covered the issue extensively, and the Dole campaign eventually accepted the contribution. LCR continued to grow, and by the end of the 1996 election cycle, the LCR PAC had contributed \$76,000 to local, state, and national moderate Republican candidates.

As the 1990s progressed, gay and lesbian Republicans at the state and local level often found themselves unwelcome outsiders. For example, in 1998 the Texas Republican Party denied the LCR's request for a booth at the state convention. State Party spokesman Robert Black compared the LCR to the Ku Klux Klan and pedophiles. But even with such an outrageous rejection, almost 30 LCR members attended the state Party Convention in June as delegates or alternates, and openly glbtq persons held at least one precinct chair position in all major Texas urban counties in 1998.

In Oregon that same year, openly gay two-term incumbent member of the state House of Representatives Chuck Carpenter lost his reelection bid in the primary to a conservative member of his Party. Carpenter had upset the Party leadership by his 1997 efforts to pass new legislation banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Following failed attempts by the Party leadership to convince Carpenter to resign, religious conservatives within the Party bankrolled a conservative Republican to oppose him. Although Carpenter outspent his challenger by a large margin, raising over \$256,000, more than any House candidate in Oregon history, anti-gay arguments during the campaign won the day, and Representative Carpenter was defeated by 54 votes.

Indeed, a number of congressional and gubernatorial elections in 1998 saw efforts by Republican candidates to paint their opponents as too close to the homosexual lobby, even though some of these Republican candidates, including a number in Virginia, received direct financial and volunteer support from groups such as LCR.

Meanwhile, Republican congressional candidates in states such as Florida, Illinois, and California, were increasingly meeting with glbtq groups, attending glbtq fundraising events, and campaigning in glbtq areas.

Thus, by the late 1990s it was clear that the Republican Party was increasingly divided on glbtq issues, and the support of moderate Republicans was often soft.

Divisions in the Party

These divisions were quite apparent during the 2000 election cycle, which in many ways was the most glbtq-friendly ever. For example, even as the National Republican Congressional Campaign Committee ran anti-gay television ads against Democratic U. S. House candidate Jim Matheson in Utah, the top Republican presidential candidates, Senator John McCain and Texas Governor George W. Bush, softened their anti-gay rhetoric. Senator McCain even hired glbtq staff members and supported the campaigns of glbtq candidates in his state. Senator McCain's support should not have been surprising, considering that LCR had hosted a series of fundraisers in late 1999, raising \$40,000 for the Senator.

Activists in the 2000 election cycle were increasingly visible in state parties, with the greatest number ever being elected as delegates to state party conventions and the national convention.

Nevertheless, the National Republican Congressional Committee encouraged Republican candidates in 2000 to stir up anti-gay sentiment. The *NRCC Issues Book 2000* instructed candidates to explain their opposition to gay civil rights by arguing that the laws "would allow radical homosexuals to impose their lifestyle choices upon everyone else at our workplaces and schools...[T]he discussion of sexual behavior over the water-cooler at work does not deserve special protection from Washington."

Still, both Senator McCain and Governor Bush met privately with LCR representatives during the campaign, and Senator McCain accepted contributions from LCR without hesitation. Moreover, the Republican Party Convention in 2000 focused on diversity within the party, even going so far as to feature the first openly gay elected official to speak at a Republican convention, Congressman Jim Kolbe (R-AZ).

Many delegates who disapproved of Kolbe's homosexuality made their objections known by walking out or turning their backs during his speech. Nevertheless, during the general election, LCR spent almost \$500,000 in targeted voter turnout activities, including radio ads promoting George W. Bush's record in battleground states, targeting independent swing voters, women, and suburbanites.

President George W. Bush had suggested during the 2000 presidential campaign that he would not appoint open homosexuals, but the strong electoral support provided to him by groups such as LCR seems to have convinced him to appoint fifteen openly glbtq people to his administration by October 2003, often over the objections of religious conservatives. Furthermore, in April 2002, President Bush invited 50 LCR leaders to an official White House briefing in an effort to acknowledge LCR's campaign support in 2000. This was the first time a Republican administration invited glbtq activists to the White House.

The election of President Bush and his presumed mandate for unifying the country inspired some Republicans to ensure the Republican "big tent" was open. In August 2001 former Wyoming Republican Senator Alan Simpson and other Republicans met in Cody, Wyoming to form the Republican Unity Coalition, a group of heterosexual and homosexual Republicans determined to incorporate fully gay men and lesbians into the Republican Party and to end sexual orientation bias. Prominent members of the group's advisory board include former President Gerald Ford.

But in 2002 and 2003 glbtq issues continued to divide the Republican Party. A number of Republican congressional candidates "gay-baited" their opponents during the 2002 mid-term elections. However, groups such as LCR continued to grow, establishing chapters in all 50 states and maintaining a staff of more than two-dozen full-time professionals. In addition, gay Republican D. C. Council member David Catania was noted in 2003 as a key campaign fund-raiser for the Bush reelection campaign, recognition that included his selection as a delegate to the 2004 Republican National Convention and as a member of the convention's platform committee.

But as the Supreme Court heard a legal challenge to a Texas sodomy law (*Lawrence v. Texas*) in March 2003, Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA) publicly argued that the Court should not overturn sodomy laws because doing so would allegedly threaten traditional families in a number of ways, including making it possible to legalize incest and bigamy. The Senator's intemperate remarks set off a firestorm of debate with the Party over glbtq issues.

Furthermore, the Supreme Court's eventual far-reaching, pro-gay decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* appears to have energized the religious right wing of the Party, which is especially strong in the South, the Party's conservative base. It has renewed their calls for a Party Platform plank opposing same-sex marriage and endorsing a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.

The lack of consensus about glbtq issues in the Party--with moderates in urban areas and in the Northeast offering at least some measure of support for glbtq rights, while social conservatives, especially in rural areas and the South, remain implacably opposed--will likely continue. In a sense, the question of glbtq rights has been a hot button issue for a larger struggle within the Republican Party. The libertarian wing of the Party has proved sympathetic to glbtq issues, if only because it privileges the concept of individual liberty, while the socially conservative wing has been virulently anti-gay because it sees itself in a religious battle. Groups such as the LCR will likely face an uphill battle for full acceptance within the Republican Party.

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