

'08 hopefuls at odds over gay issues

Task Force report shows stark divide between Dem, GOP candidates

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A new report highlights the stark divide between Democratic and Republican presidential candidates when it comes to support for gay rights initiatives.

None of the 11 Republican contenders reviewed by the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force support barring employment discrimination against transgender people or permitting gays to serve openly in the military.

Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani is the only contender to clearly support civil unions or domestic partnerships, according to the June 27 report, which marks the first time the 2008 GOP contenders have been evaluated by a major gay organization.

Matt Foreman, the Task Force's executive director, said the review of each candidate's public statements and past actions shows Republicans are trailing their Democratic rivals on many gay issues.

"The differences between the Democratic and Republican fields of candidates on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues are shockingly stark and profoundly depressing," he said.

All eight Democratic contenders assessed in the report support some type of relationship recognition for gay couples, but only two back marriage equality. The contenders also back employment protections for transgender people and open military service for gays.

The report puts new emphasis on the differences between the GOP and Democratic contenders. While numerical ratings were not assigned, most Democrats backed seven of eight tracked issues. Republicans were shown to back one or two issues, if any.

Democratic Rep. Dennis Kucinich of Ohio was the only contender to win a perfect rating from the scorecard. Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, a Republican, was the only contender to take clear stands against all tracked issues.

"The public statements and voting records of the Democratic candidates show that they are clearly light years ahead of the Republicans on almost every issue important to the LGBT community," Foreman said.

John Marble, spokesperson for National Stonewall Democrats, agreed.

"Certainly," he said, "any Democratic candidate would be better on LGBT issues as president than any Republican candidate."

But Patrick Sammon, president of Log Cabin Republicans, downplayed the report's findings.

"I don't think anything in the report, to be quite honest, is that surprising," he said. "We clearly know there's a lot more work to be done with Republicans than with Democrats."

Limited findings

Dave Noble, the Task Force's director of public policy and government affairs, said the report did not survey the presidential hopefuls, but rather made its findings based on voting records and public statements.

"This is what they've told the mainstream press," he said, "not just what they're saying to the LGBT community when they're asked."

Using that methodology, the report's findings for the Republican contenders was limited. Among the 88 checkboxes were 34 question marks, each indicating the contender's stance on an issue was unclear or unknown.

Former Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson had six question marks on eight issues. Former U.S. Sen. Fred Thompson of Tennessee and former Virginia Gov. Jim Gilmore each had five question marks.

Sammon said these candidates are early in their campaigns, though, and still assessing their positions on certain gay issues.

"I wouldn't read too much into having question marks on certain positions," he said.

Marble, however, said the question marks were a key measure of some candidates.

"It's really, really sad that five years ago, Rudy Giuliani and Mitt Romney would have probably received much higher evaluations than what they did receive," he said. "I think that speaks volumes about the anti-gay special interests that control the Republican Party and how able they are to corrupt Republican candidates on the issues."

Sammon said that "social conservatives" have an enhanced voice during presidential primaries, but the candidates would be wrong to "jump through all these hoops" to please what is a "small segment" of the Republican Party.

"It's clear that there are too many people in the Republican Party who still oppose basic fairness for gay and lesbian people, and I think there is a perception that they have more power than they do," he said. "The fact of the matter is, though, that this primary is not going to be decided by what a candidate's views are on gay issues, one way or the other."

That could be why no Republican contenders contacted the Task Force to clarify or correct any report indicators. **Noble said none "reached out to say, 'Hey, we're not as bad.' They all seemed fine with that."**

Among the **Task Force** report's findings:

- No contender was shown to support same-sex marriage. Giuliani was the only candidate confirmed to support either domestic partnerships or civil unions.
- Contenders who oppose employment protections for transgender people were Rep. Duncan Hunter of California, Sen. John McCain of Arizona, Romney and Tommy Thompson.
- Contenders who oppose transgender-inclusive hate crimes laws were Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas, former Arkansas Gov. Michael Huckabee, Hunter, McCain, Romney and Fred Thompson.
- Most contenders were shown to support "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Giuliani has indicated he supports lifting the ban but not during wartime.
- No contender was confirmed to support adoption by same-sex couples.
- Three candidates — Giuliani, McCain and Paul — were shown to oppose a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. Brownback, Huckabee, Hunter, Romney, Tancredo and Fred Thompson all support such an amendment.