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New York Activists Say Giuliani Has Retreated on Gay Issues

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NEW YORK -- Frustrated by what he regards as the shifting stance of Republican presidential candidate [Rudolph W. Giuliani](#) on gay rights, Ryan Davis logged on to [MySpace](#), gathered a few of his friends and grabbed a [video](#) camera. Together, they created a minute-long [YouTube](#) video aimed at hurting the former [New York](#) mayor with social conservatives in early primary states.

"Gays for Giuliani," it's called.

"I couldn't think of a more ironic title," said Davis, a 25-year-old gay writer and director, sitting in his cramped Hell's Kitchen apartment, showing off what he calls his masterpiece. With the theme music of "The West Wing" in the background, the video shows gay New Yorkers saying things such as: "I would be hard-pressed to think of any conservative politician who embraces the gay community like Giuliani does."

"When he was our mayor, Giuliani was pro-gay rights," said Davis, who describes himself as a libertarian Democrat who supported [Howard Dean](#) for president in 2004 and Republican [John McCain](#) in 2000. "Now that he's running for president, Giuliani has abandoned us. I wanted to remind voters, especially conservative voters, who Giuliani was."

Many gay New Yorkers share Davis's opinion of Giuliani's two terms as mayor, when he spoke openly about anti-gay violence and campaigned for a statewide hate crimes law early in his administration. He drafted and signed the most sweeping municipal domestic partnership law in the country in 1998 and declared, "I believe New York is setting the pace for the rest of the country." He appointed openly gay officials to high-level positions.

Gays took heart from what Giuliani did outside City Hall, as well. He marched in gay pride parades. He dressed in drag -- one year he wore fishnets and did high kicks as a Rockette; another year, at the annual Inner Circle press roast, he was [Marilyn Monroe](#) seducing [Donald Trump](#). He made no secret of having a small circle of gay friends, among them Howard Koeppel, a New York businessman.

When Giuliani separated from his second wife, Donna Hanover, he moved in with Koeppel and Koeppel's partner in their Upper East Side apartment.

However, New York's gay activists charge that Giuliani has backpedaled in his support over the past few months, especially on the issue of civil unions.

In 2004, Giuliani told [Fox News](#): "I'm in favor of . . . civil unions." But in April, Giuliani's campaign told the [New York Sun](#) that a civil unions bill passed by the [New Hampshire](#) legislature "goes too

far" because it is "the equivalent of marriage." The switch left activists wondering what happened to the man whose mayoral staff went through dozens of pages of the city code to replace the word "spouse" with "domestic partner." The Gay City News, a weekly newspaper here, headlined its latest front page: "Rudy Flakier: Giuliani further retreats on civil unions."

Giuliani also upset some with his new stance on gays in the military. In 1999, early in his abortive bid for the Senate against [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#), Giuliani criticized the [Bill Clinton](#)-era Pentagon policy of "don't ask, don't tell." But at the Republican debate in New Hampshire in June, he walked away from revising the policy. "At a time of war, you don't make fundamental changes like this," Giuliani said.

Gays also felt a snub this month when Giuliani joined the rest of the Republican field in declining to participate in a presidential forum on gay issues in [Los Angeles](#).

"Fact is, he can't run away from his record on gay rights. Not all of it was positive -- Rudy Giuliani has always been a complete double-edged sword -- but when everything was said and done, it was a good record," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, an advocacy group, and formerly the head of two influential New York-based organizations: the Empire State Pride Agenda and the [New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project](#).

Asked about the charge of backpedaling, Maria Comella, a spokeswoman for the Giuliani campaign, addressed only the civil unions issue in an e-mail: "Mayor Giuliani has consistently supported the rights and benefits as afforded by domestic partnerships, while opposing gay marriage."

Some of Giuliani's gay supporters -- including members of the group Log Cabin Republicans -- point to his Web site, where at the end of the "On the Issues" page it says that Giuliani "believes in equal rights under law for all Americans."

Exit polls in 2004 showed that 4 percent of voters were openly gay and 77 percent voted for Democrats. According to a recent study by the [San Francisco](#)-based Community Marketing Inc., voter turnout among gay men is twice that of the nation's voters as a whole. (Lesbians turn out a little less often than gay men.)

But overtly seeking out gay voters may have negative consequences for a politician. A poll by Quinnipiac University, released the day before the presidential forum on gay issues, found that more than a third of voters in the battleground state of [Ohio](#) view the endorsement of a gay rights group as a negative.

As mayor of liberal New York, Giuliani had to garner the support of various communities, [GOP](#) pollster Tony Fabrizio said, but on the national stage, a Republican presidential candidate has to attract social conservatives, many of whom are less likely to support gay rights.

Said Fabrizio: "Outside New York, the rest of America has this image of Giuliani as a tough, no-nonsense guy who cleaned up [Times Square](#), closed sex clubs. And that Giuliani doesn't sound like the Giuliani who's pro-choice, pro-gay rights, et cetera. Until Republican primary voters are given information that counters the image they have of Giuliani, many of them will assume that he is who he says he is."

All the Democratic presidential candidates are on the record as supporting gay rights issues such as nondiscrimination laws, hate crimes bills, partner immigration rights and repeal of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy. The leading Democratic contenders, Clinton (N.Y.), [Sen. Barack Obama](#)

(Ill.) and former senator [John Edwards \(N.C.\)](#), support civil unions, though like their Republican counterparts, they oppose gay marriage.

On the Republican side, no candidate has campaigned in support of gay rights.

Aside from a YouTube channel, "Gays for Giuliani" is nothing more than a YouTube video, despite rumors in the blogosphere that Republicans and Democrats are behind it. But Davis is thinking about starting a political action committee to raise money to buy a television spot in [South Carolina](#), a key primary state where some bloggers have complained that he is "gay-baiting" and "using Republicans' fear of gays to undermine Giuliani's candidacy."

Said Davis: "A few years ago, when Giuliani was running to get reelected as mayor of New York, he would have liked to use a video like this. He would have run it and said, 'Look, gay people support me!' "