



Gay Doesn't Mean Bad

Idaho's gay community tries to put the focus on issues in the Craig scandal

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In just one week, Larry Craig has gone from a relatively unknown senator from Idaho to the catalyst for a national debate on morality and gay behavior.

Politicians, pundits, religious leaders and ordinary citizens have weighed in on the issue, with many condemning Craig for his behavior. And while few argue that his arrest in Minneapolis, guilty plea and subsequent cover-up go against Senate ethics rules, many have placed the emphasis on the question of Craig's sexuality.

They are questions that have plagued Craig throughout his nearly 30-year career in politics, but many gay people are arguing that is not the issue.

The focus needs to be put on his actions, not his orientation, they say.

"I do think the senator's resignation [is] sad in some ways because many people will perceive this as 'Oh my God, if he's gay, he has to resign,'" said Rep. Nicole LaFavour, a Boise Democrat and Idaho's only openly gay legislator. "When really they should be saying, 'God, the Senator has been dishonest with us, and he has voted badly on issues that affect so many, and he's been arrested.'"

"There's really a mix of sadness and frustration," she said. "It's not really the context that we want to have this discussion."

Throughout his career, Craig has voted against nearly all legislation that would have given increased protections based on sexual orientation, as well as those extending legal status to gay marriage and civil unions. For some, the circumstances surrounding his arrest are a little too much to dismiss.

"Most of us view this as more of an ethics and hypocrisy issue and a legal issue, than a sexual orientation issue," said Jody May-Chang, editor of [PrideDepot.com](#), a Boise-based Web site for the gay community.

"For a social issue, it was embarrassing that he was caught doing what he was doing. That's not mainstream [gay] behavior," May-Chang said.

"[They] tend to do it out of oppression, and Larry Craig has supported that type of oppressive environment with his voting record. He's created his own reality really," she said.

May-Chang said she worries that mainstream America will now think that it's normal for gay people to solicit sex in public.

"If you're openly gay with a sense of pride or a sense of respect, you don't have anonymous sex in a bathroom," May-Chang said.

And it's not just gay people in Idaho who are decrying the situation. **The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force points to the wider hypocrisy in Congress. Several Republican leaders are currently the focus of ethical controversies, yet Craig is the only one who was unceremoniously forced from office.**

"What's up with elected officials like Senator Craig? They stand for so-called 'family values' and fight basic protections for gay people while furtively seeking other men for sex. Infuriating pathetic hypocrites. What more can you say?" said Matt Foreman, executive director of the Task Force, in a written statement.

Comments from across the country and around the world have flooded into Web sites and publications condemning Craig's actions, and many of those have pointed to the hypocrisy of his actions and the harm he has done to the gay community.

They are sentiments shared in Boise.

"I don't want him to step down, or be pushed out because he is gay, but because of his hypocrisy," May-Chang said.

LaFavour said she's waiting to see how the majority of Idahoans respond.

"All of us are watching the people of Idaho to see if they can rise above the idea that the senator being gay is the problem in all of this," she said. "I've actually been fairly impressed with the people of Idaho. I think a lot of people are more concerned with the issue of integrity.

"The people of Idaho really care far more about the integrity of issues than his sexual orientation," LaFavour said.

May-Chang said she still holds out hope that some good may come from the Craig scandal. "I'd like to think that people might be a little bit more compassionate to people who are not like they are," she said. "Larry Craig is a classic example of what it's like to be told it's not OK to be what you are."