



Memo to the Tea Party: Rick Santorum Rejects Your Message

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The libertarian Cato Institute's vice president, Gene Healy, is [baffled](#) by the recent surge in support for Rick Santorum among Tea Partiers. Ticking off the former senator's various George W. Bush-era heresies, Healy writes, "The Tea Party movement was supposed to represent an end to this sort of moralistic Big Government conservatism. Animated by 'fiscal responsibility, limited government, and free markets,' as the Tea Party Patriots' credo put it, the movement had supposedly put social issues on the back burner to focus on the crisis of government growth."

The most remarkable feature of Santorum's rise is that he cares most about social issues like abortion, gay marriage, and a tax code with more deductions for heterosexual married couples with kids. He cares next most about a hawkish national-security posture, including a war against Iran to stop them from getting nukes if necessary. The alarming deficits that threaten the country's future are his third and final priority. His approach is an inversion of the Tea Party message.

Yet Tea Partiers are [flocking to him](#).

Daniel Larison gamely tries to explain [what's going on](#). What I'd like to tell Tea Partiers is what *will* go on if Santorum is our next president. He'll talk a good game about shrinking government. But he won't. He'll spend his political capital on the aforementioned social issues, spend a bit more money on related programs at home, and spend a lot more money on the military.

This isn't difficult to predict. "I am not a libertarian, and I fight very strongly against libertarian influence within the Republican Party and the conservative movement," [he said openly last summer](#), adding, "I've got some real concerns about this movement within the Republican Party and the Tea Party movement to sort of refashion conservatism and I will vocally and publicly oppose it."

He's the weirdest choice for Tea Party champion yet.