

	<p><b>Online Exclusive!</b> Get your choice of three popular LG phones at huge discounts! Free Overnight Shipping &amp; Instant Discounts with online orders</p>	
---	--	---

## Roy Ashburn: Where do gay Republicans fit among conservatives?

Roy Ashburn, a Republican state senator in California, said Monday that he is gay. The disclosure raises new questions about gay Republicans' place within the conservative movement.

By Michael B. Farrell Staff writer / March 8, 2010

San Francisco

In a Monday morning interview on a California radio talk show, Republican state Sen. Roy Ashburn said he is gay. The public confession comes just days after his drunken-driving arrest led to reports that before the police stop, the conservative lawmaker had attended a gay nightclub.

### Related Stories

Eric Massa exits House, but not quietly  
Why Americans are so angry

Senator Ashburn, who is unable to seek reelection because of term limits, also said in the interview that his decision to scrap a planned bid for US Congress was partially because of issues surrounding his sexual orientation.

Republican activist Jon Fleischman told The Sacramento Bee that while Ashburn was already "in a coffin" politically over supporting tax increases last year, Monday's disclosure was like "hammering nails into it."

While it is unclear just how much Ashburn's sexual orientation – apparently something of an open secret in Sacramento – played in his decision to leave politics, it raises new questions about gay Republicans' place within the conservative movement.

While openly gay Republicans still face many hurdles, there has been significant change in how many conservatives view sexual orientation, says Charles Moran, spokesman for the Log Cabin Republicans, a conservative group that advocates gay rights.

"Absolutely, the Republicans still have issues they are trying to overcome in terms of of sexual orientation," Mr. Moran says. "We are kicking down the doors and really forcing the Republican Party to deal with the fact there are gay conservatives."

Of course, there are openly gay elected officials across the United States, but few of them are Republicans. Indeed, there are no openly gay Republicans in Congress.

This year, though, openly gay conservative Matthew Berry is vying for the Republican nomination to contest the congressional seat held by Rep. Jim Moran (D) of Virginia. Mr. Berry is "not a gay candidate, but a candidate who happens to be gay," said Robert Turner, vice president of the Washington chapter of the Log Cabin Republicans, in an e-mail response to questions. "And he's good on the issues that Republican voters care about – taxes, education, national security, fiscal responsibility."

"When you let your gayness define you, that is when people -- the voters -- lose interest," Mr. Turner said.

According to Moran, conservatives such as former Vice President Dick Cheney and Meghan McCain, who both support gay marriage, are changing many conservatives' negative views about homosexuality.

"[W]e are seeing a few more gay candidates running as Republicans each year," said Turner.

It's possible that Massachusetts could soon have the highest-ranking elected official who is gay. In the state's upcoming governor's race, a Republican candidate for lieutenant governor – Massachusetts Senate minority leader Richard Tisei – is openly gay.

In the view of others, however, conservatives are a long way from accepting any openly gay ideological compatriots.

"While conservatives have embraced the equal rights and equal dignity of Jews, African-Americans, and women, they have not yet reached that point with gay people," said David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, at a recent forum in Washington on gay and conservative politics.

Now that Ashburn has said he is gay, this question has emerged: Will he change course on many gay-rights issues, which he previously voted against?

Ashburn represents the largely conservative Bakersfield, Calif., area, and he has a long record of voting against gay-rights measures. He told talk-show host Inga Barks on Monday that his votes were an effort to represent the views of his constituents.

"My votes reflect the wishes of the people in my district," he said. "So as each of these individual measures came before the Legislature, I cast 'no' votes ... because the measures were almost always about acknowledging rights or assigning identification to homosexual persons."

Ms. Barks asked whether he agreed with those votes on gay rights issues, but he didn't answer the question. "I voted as I felt I should on behalf of the people who elected me," he said.

**[Editor's note:** *New material was added to this story to include comments from sources who responded to the Monitor after initial publication.*]

**Follow us on Twitter and Facebook.**

© The Christian Science Monitor. All Rights Reserved. **Terms** under which this service is provided to you. **Privacy Policy**.