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## GOProud Urges Party to Ignore 'Social Issues' (Like Gay Rights)

by Kilian Melloy

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Mitch McConnell and John Boehner (Source:AP)

The Tea Party helped to return the Republicans to legislative power in the House and narrow the Democratic majority in the Senate. Now the Tea Party, along with a gay conservative group, is asking the GOP to bear in mind who their friends were in the last election--and what they want to see from their elected lawmakers.

[Politico](#) reported on Nov. 14 that the Tea Party Patriots and the New American Patriots joined with GOProud, a gay conservative organization, to call on new Republican leaders to put their focus where voters wish to see it: on smaller, less intrusive government.

"On behalf of limited-government conservatives everywhere, we write to urge you and your colleagues in Washington to put forward a legislative agenda in the next Congress that reflects the principles of the Tea Party movement," a letter from GOProud and Tea Party leaders to John Boehner and Mitch McConnell urged. Boehner is expected to replace Nancy Pelosi as Speaker of the House, and McConnell to lead the Senate minority.

The went on to warn the GOP leaders that, "This election was not a mandate for the Republican Party, nor was it a

mandate to act on any social issue."

The letter was due to be delivered to Boehner and McConnell on Nov. 17. At least 17 Tea Party and conservative signatories had put their names to the letter, [Politico](#) reported, including Ohio-based national Tea Party Patriots leader Ralph King. "When they were out in the Boston Harbor, they weren't arguing about who was gay or who was having an abortion," King told [Politico](#). One point King made was that the political arena could leave room for differing personal outlooks. "Am I going to be the best man at a same sex-marriage wedding? That's not something I necessarily believe in. I look at myself as pretty socially conservative. But that's not what we push through the Tea Party Patriots."

Agreed GOProud chair Christopher Barron, "For almost two years now, the tea party has been laser-focused on the size of government." Added Barron, "No one has been talking about social issues--not even the socially conservative candidates who won tea party support." Rather, Barron characterized various Tea Party groups and GOProud as belonging to an overall " 'leave me alone' coalition," [Politico](#) reported.

Barron's comment seemed to overlook the fact that several Tea Party-backed candidates did take aim at gays during the most recent campaign season: New York gubernatorial candidate Carl Paladino sparked an outcry when he referred to the "gay lifestyle" as not being "an equally valid and successful option" during an address to an Orthodox Jewish audience. Delaware senatorial candidate Christine O'Donnell and Nevada candidate for the Senate Sharron Angle also promoted anti-gay views. But all three candidates lost, as did Ken Buck, a Colorado candidate for the Senate who remarked during an appearance on Meet the Press that being gay is similar to being an alcoholic.

One GOP candidate who expressed anti-gay views and prevailed in the midterm elections was incumbent

Jim DeMint from South Carolina, who addressed the Greater Freedom Rally in Spartanburg, South Carolina, on Oct. 1, where he [repeated claims](#) he had made in 2004 to the effect that gays--and sexually active unmarried women--should be barred from the teaching profession. That view echoed the [Briggs Initiative](#), the 1978 effort in California by then-state legislator Jim Briggs to outlaw openly gay teachers and any heterosexual teachers supportive of GLTB equality.

DeMint told rally participants that he would work to bring more conservatives into government in order to "take our country back"--and deny gays the right to be in certain professions, such as teaching school. The senator also said that unmarried, sexually active women should be barred from the teaching profession, but he did not place any such restrictions on unmarried heterosexual men.

### Gay-Bashing for Votes

Rea Carey, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, told EDGE that GOP candidates--including some Tea Party-backed hopefuls--had turned to rhetorical gay-bashing to garner votes. "Playing the scapegoat card is a nasty tactic they employ to pander to their hardcore base in order to gin up votes and burnish their anti-LGBT or 'family values' credentials," Carey said. "Most Americans are concerned about bread-and-butter issues like jobs and the economy. And, every day, more and more people join the vast number of Americans who support equality. Still, some of these candidates are only concerned with political expediency, and to them that means beating up on others."

But the GOP mainstream joined the general Tea Party sentiment in turning away from social issues and refraining from politicizing the lives, careers, and families of gay Americans. Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour encouraged his party to stick to the election's central message of economic issues, and to avoid divisive social topics, [LifeNews.com](#) reported on Sept. 8. "Any issue that takes people's eye off of unemployment, job creation, economic growth, taxes, spending, deficits, debts is taking your eye off the ball," Barbour told the media. "You run down rabbit trails," Barbour added, "you're using up valuable resources that could be used to talk to people about what they care about."

Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani was an early voice in the GOP chorus calling for a disciplined focus on economic issues, advocating for a de-emphasis of social concerns in the party's platform as early as the start of the Obama presidency, reported [Hot Air](#) on Jan. 21, 2009.

Party unity and focused messaging helped the GOP bounce back from the trouncing the party took two years ago, but the real trick will be to maintain the public's trust for the next two years, a Nov. 3 op-ed by Cato Institute Executive Vice President David Boaz at [Politico](#) suggested--at least, until the 2012 elections. Even now, with the midterms behind them, Republicans should "Avoid social issues," Boaz wrote. "When the Bush Republicans spent too much time on issues like the gay marriage ban and the Terri Schiavo intervention, they alienated suburban and professional women, college graduates, young people, libertarians and independents--overlapping groups, of course," Boaz added. "And they lost two elections."

"After 2008, they seem to have learned their lesson. Even in the face of several states instituting marriage equality, Republicans kept their focus squarely on overspending, health care and big-government overreach--issues that united opponents of the Obama agenda," Boaz continued. "They shouldn't blow it now. They should stick to the economic issues that won them this election and avoid the divisive social issues that cost them 2006 and 2008."

A Nov. -- Washington Post opinion piece by the president of the American Enterprise Institute, Arthur C. Brooks went so far as to say that the culture war of the 1990s--which targeted gays--was now being set aside for the sake of "America's new culture war: Free enterprise vs. government control."

The new cultural struggle, wrote Brooks, "is not a fight over guns, gays or abortion. Those old battles have been eclipsed by a new struggle between two competing visions of the country's future." Brooks broke down the choice ahead as being between European-style socialism and a continuing free market system.

Brooks quoted from Thomas Jefferson, who, in 1801, said in his inaugural address, "A wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement," and went on to note that the drift away from an entrepreneurial economic system began years ago. "The George W. Bush administration began the huge Wall Street and Detroit bailouts, and for years before the economic crisis, the GOP talked about free enterprise while simultaneously expanding the government with borrowed money and increasing the percentage of citizens with no income tax liability."

Brooks went on to excoriate the practice of treating the task of governance as an election-by-election process that functions on "telegenic candidates, dirty tricks and lots of campaign money." Wrote Brooks, "The electorate did not repudiate free enterprise in 2008; it simply punished an unprincipled Republican Party."

Some social conservatives have accused GOProud and gay conservatives as being "infiltrators" rather than agents of actual change, and have decried the shift in focus from social hot button issues such as legal equality for individuals and families to economics. With American society becoming more accepting of GLBT citizens, however, the nation's politics seem bound to change as well. For the moment, it appears as though gays wishing for less government intrusion into their lives may have made common cause with other stripes of conservatism.

Kilian Melloy reviews media, conducts interviews, and writes commentary for EDGEBoston, where he also serves as Assistant Arts Editor.

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