

A response to the CPAC boycotters

By Jennifer Rubin

Reaction that I have received to the Conservative Political Action Conference boycott (staged by a segment of social conservatives) from a variety of conservative and libertarian pundits and activists has been quite negative. A thoughtful reaction comes from David Boaz, head of the libertarian Cato Institute. He is careful not to characterize himself as a "conservative," but his views are representative of a segment of the feedback I have received.

David e-mails:

Since the Reagan years, mainstream conservatism has been built around three general concerns: limited government, traditional values, and a strong national defense. Different conservatives emphasized different parts of that agenda, and there's been plenty of room for debate within those broad principles. And sometimes ideas evolve. Take traditional values, for instance: In pre-Reagan years even National Review thought that segregation was a traditional value. That opinion is long gone, and banished from mainstream conservatism. Or take the role of women in society: A generation ago (maybe a long generation) conservatives said that mothers should be home with their children. By 2008 conservatives enthusiastically said that a mother of five, one of them a pregnant teenager and another a special-needs infant, could perfectly well serve as vice president. Conservative ideas on gay rights have also evolved and will continue to evolve. Conservatives defended the sodomy laws until the Supreme Court struck them down (the Montana and Texas Republican parties still do). But most have moved on to opposing gay marriage and gay adoption, and some have even accepted civil unions for gay partners. Twenty years from now, conservatives will deny they were ever anti-gay, just as they now have no memory of ever supporting discrimination against African-Americans or women.

But now some conservatives are trying to split the conservative coalition over the mere acknowledgment that gay people exist, especially gay conservatives. They refuse to participate in the 38-year-old annual meeting of the conservative movement, because one of the 100 or so participating organizations is an organization of conservative gay Republicans. It's not too surprising to see the official social-conservative and religious-right organizations taking this stand. But I'm surprised to see mainstream conservative groups joining them. And I'm glad to see the leadership of CPAC

-- and especially younger conservatives -- rejecting this prejudiced and "splittist" move.

However, even those who agree with the social conservative agenda have been dismayed by the tactics of the boycotters. One of the most eloquent social conservatives, [Pete Wehner](#), has written on the subject. He argues:

[T]he boycotting organizations come across as defensive and insecure, as if they fear that their arguments cannot win the day on the merits. Perhaps they can or perhaps they cannot; but for organizations to pick up their marbles and leave -- and in the process to accuse CPAC of engaging in a "moral sell-out" and of committing an act of "moral surrender" -- strikes me as small-minded and unwise.

Part of this, I suppose, is subjective. There are certainly some hate groups that would be inappropriate to have as a sponsoring organization. But a gay-rights advocacy group like GOProud certainly doesn't qualify. It shouldn't be denied the chance to make its case. Groups that believe they have a strong moral and intellectual case should welcome a public debate on the merits. To do so is consistent with the American tradition. To fail to do so is contrary to it.

The debate is going to continue and I welcome others, on both sides, to weigh in.

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