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In Conversation: Being Gay in Washington

By [Marin Cogan](#)

"If Nixon could go to Beijing, why can't Romney go to Dupont Circle?" a bald, bespectacled man in the audience at the Cato Institute asks. The crowd—staffers and interns, mostly young people—laughs. He's referring to my neighborhood, historically one of the centers of DC's gay culture, just a mile northwest of glass-walled libertarian think tank in Washington. On Wednesday, David Lampo, a director of publications at Cato and a Log Cabin Republican, discussed his new book "A Fundamental Freedom: Why Republicans, Conservatives and Libertarians Should Support Gay Rights."

It's almost impossible to imagine that the current anti-gay marriage iteration of Mitt Romney (not [this guy](#)) would ever do something like that, but Lampo says the current notions about Republican opposition to gay marriage don't match the polling data. The perception that the party is anti-gay is tilted by an outspoken, homophobic minority amplified in the media, he [argues in the book](#). "I think the conventional wisdom is that all Republicans hate gays, they're opposed to gay rights. What I discovered in researching polling data on this subject is a huge disconnect between the conventional wisdom that I just mentioned and reality that a majority of rank and file Republicans support and believe in gay rights," he says. "That's one of the most interesting and important messages of this book. It's the message that needs to go out to all Republicans."

It seems plausible, at least, in Washington, where the social scene and frequency of involvement in partisan politics makes it pretty likely that you'll bump into, and even be friendly with, someone with different beliefs, including both liberal and conservative gay people. That's not to say gay people here don't face virulent homophobia when walking on the streets at times, or frustrating suggestions from co-workers that they be set up with their *other* gay friend, or awkward questions about their marriages. Since it's difficult to come up with a neat theory of the experience of being gay in Washington, I rounded up friends and sources, some gay, some Republican, to get their thoughts.

—"I do want to nest here and it is good that our California marriage is valid here. I like that wife does mean wife here. That is powerful," says one 30 year old lesbian who works here and lives with her wife just outside of DC. "I think that's probably the most important thing here, people are aware gay marriage is a reality. So if you are married to a same-sex spouse it isn't a bombshell."

—Says one young, straight Republican who's worked closely with leaders in Washington: "I personally believe in the traditional definition of marriage, but I am not offended by others who have a different view or by states where the voting public chooses to redefine marriage. Who am I to judge? It has become a normal part of life for most people under 40. Younger members of Gen X and Millennials have grown up in the MTV culture where homosexuality is not only prevalent, but celebrated. In addition, many of us have grown up in homes where traditional marriages have been affected by divorce or infidelity. This is a generational view even more than it is a Republican or Democratic one. But it is also a geographic issue. Conservatives would be wise to allow the issue to evolve on the state rather than federal level. Governor Christie handled the issue appropriately—let the people of your respective state decide what constitutes a marriage—as long as one's religious beliefs are protected. Hopefully, no matter one's personal beliefs, we can all agree that all people should be treated with respect and dignity and that love, fidelity and commitment are things to be valued and cherished."

—A progressive gay young professional: "DC is great to be gay. It still has problems, like any city. I think it is way more accepting. It is an incentive that we are treated as equal as possible citizens in the district, being able to get married, adopt, etcetera. I do have a couple gay Republican friends and some straight republican friends...they're supportive."

—"I think the majority of Republicans in DC either support gay marriage or are ambivalent," says one young gay Republican in a prominent political job. "I have definitely had colleagues mention that they oppose gay marriage or gay adoption which always surprises me. But I guess the fact that it's surprising shows what the attitudes are here ... The culture is to the point where the acceptable position in town at younger GOP events is pro-gay rights. Nobody wants to be the dude shitting on gays at a party. Far bigger downside than up to doing that."