



# *Rick Santorum Will Not Be Babysitting America*

*His campaign is almost over, but his nanny-state conservatism deserves a deeper look.*

Christopher Moraff  
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Since his strong showing in Iowa, there's been lots of talk about former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum's prospects for winning the Republican nomination for president. I'll take this opportunity to put those ruminations to bed: He has absolutely no chance. Oddsmakers at [Intrade](#) put the chances of him dropping out of the race before February 5th at 55 percent. (If you're the wagering type, you can bet on it yourself for \$6.50 a share the last time I checked.)

Santorum's defect—if it can be whittled down to just one—is that he lacks the popular appeal and unifying message to beat Barack Obama next year, which has become the single overarching caveat for winning the GOP's nomination. In particular, his divisive stance on social issues like contraception, homosexuality and women's rights—and the offensive comments that often accompany it—place him to the right of most Republicans and has made him a pariah among everyone else, including progressives, centrists, moderates and Libertarians.

But while he may be irksome, writing him off as inconsequential ignores the peculiar path [Santorum has blazed through the conservative establishment in America](#) since first entering Congress in 1991, and how he managed to alienate himself from most of his contemporaries on the Republican right. More importantly, it risks underestimating the potential danger of what he represents to America's constitutional democratic tradition.

The Catholic son of an Italian immigrant, Santorum's beliefs embody an Old World collectivism that draws its inspiration from the trinity of family, church and community and sees a unifying role in a strong central authority. He claims to support "freedom with responsibility," and rejects unrestrained individuality and self-obsession in favor of what he sees as a politics of the common good, which may sound nice on paper but is a dangerous philosophy if you happen to fall outside his idea of what is proper and conventional. In its expression, Santorum's vision of conservatism is grounded in an almost paternalistic view of the government as the ultimate arbiter of morality. He'll tell you he doesn't support outlawing contraception or sodomy, for instance, but will argue it's a state's right to do so, completely ignoring the rule of law that protects minority interests from the "tyranny of the majority."

"The idea is that the state doesn't have rights to limit individuals' wants and passions. I disagree with that," said Santorum, in a 2003 interview with the [Associated Press](#). "I think we absolutely have rights because there are consequences to letting people live out whatever wants or passions they desire."

This places him quite outside the realm of classical conservatives like Ayn Rand, and diametrically opposed to someone like Barry Goldwater, who wrote, in 1963:

"Every man, for his individual good and for the good of his society, is responsible for his own development. The choices that govern his life are choices that he must make; they cannot be made by any other human being, or by a collectivity of human beings."

For Santorum, individuality undermines the collective good, and is therefore a danger to society. In his 2005 book "[It Takes a Family: Conservatism and the Common Good](#)," Santorum explains: "Just as original sin is man's inclination to try to walk alone without God, individualism is man's inclination to try to walk alone among his fellows."

To back up his Daddy-knows-best rhetoric, the candidate has sponsored and supported a handful of programs designed to expand education and services for children and the elderly. Among other things, he's proposed tripling the personal exemption in the tax code for dependent children and eliminating the so-called marriage penalty, creating Child Trust Funds with federal money, and funding community-investment incentives and economic-literacy programs. He also supported No Child Left Behind and the Medicare Part D prescription benefit.

For this, Santorum has received a lashing from fiscal conservatives and libertarians who deride his version of what they call "big government conservatism."

Following his unexpected rally in Iowa, conservative pundits like Cato Institute's Michael Tanner, Erick Erickson of Red State, and syndicated columnist David Harsanyi came out of the woodwork to take jabs at Santorum; he's been called the "anti-Reagan," a "[pro-life statist](#)" and a "big government communitarian" by members of his own party. Even his nephew, John Garver—a 19-year-old Ron Paul supporter—recently penned an [op-ed critical of Santorum](#), saying his uncle's policies "stem from his irrational fear of freedom not working."

But with his nanny-state moralizing and support for a smattering of family- and community-building economic proposals, Santorum offers an interesting twist: While preaching about the common good, he's also proposed eliminating corporate income tax, voted against repealing a tax

subsidy for companies that move manufacturing jobs overseas and voted against raising the minimum wage. During his time in Congress he received a 100 percent rating from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for his support of pro-business policies.

If all this sounds eerily familiar, that's probably because you're heard it before.

There's a name for governments that combine paternalistic authority with strict social regulation and corporatist pandering. It was tried once in the land of Santorum's forefathers, and like the candidate, it too saw homosexuality, contraception and the rise of women in the workplace as a threat to order, stability and a healthy society.

I'll give you a hint, it starts with an "F."

Writing on the rise of fascism in Italy, Yale professor Joseph LaPalombara explains:

"In place of liberty fascism offered paternalistic guidance; in place of freedom, it promised law, order and discipline but extracted abject obedience in return; in place of individual rights it imposed those of collectivity ... "

We can all be thankful that Rick Santorum is not going to make it to the White House this time around, but we must never let our guard down. Because if history has shown us one thing it's that when governments start telling people how they should live, things never end good.