

# Don't close the door on gays, the Tories tell America



Gay rights remain more controversial in Washington than

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By [Ian Dunt](#)

If conservatives close the door on the gay community they risk years in the political wilderness, a Tory front bencher will tell an American audience tonight.

Speaking at the Cato Institute in Washington beside Maggie Gallagher, president of the National Organisation for Marriage, which opposes same-sex marriage, Nick Herbert, Britain's openly-gay shadow environment secretary, will urge right wingers to bring gay groups into the fold.

"I am not here to preach or to interfere in your affairs," he will say.

"I am here neither to tea party nor to go clubbing.

"But I can tell you what happens to a party when it closes the door to sections of our society and is reduced to its core vote. It's no fun being in opposition for thirteen years."

In an honest and sombre assessment of the Conservative party's treatment of homosexuals, Mr Herbert will offer a frank summing up of the difficulties his party has had with the issue.

In recent history the Conservative party in parliament reflected only a section of our society – male, white, professional, grey-suited and straight," he will say.

"I'm one of two Conservative MPs who have taken out a civil partnership – thanks to legislation which – to their credit – the current Labour government introduced.

"And our party leader, David Cameron, has publicly apologised for Section 28, legislation introduced by a previous Conservative government which effectively prohibited the teaching of the validity of gay relationships in schools, a law which was deeply unpopular not just amongst gay people, but with those who saw it as a divisive and unpleasant sign of state intolerance.

"We needed to say sorry for a stance that was wrong.

"The truth is that there are millions of people who we drove away but who share our values and want to join us."

The intervention is a far more controversial one in the US than it is here. American elections can still be tipped by so-called moral issues which galvanise the Republican core vote.

Some analysts believe George W. Bush secured his re-election on the back of traditional voters worried about same-sex marriage and abortion.

While the Republican party and the Conservatives maintain close links there are strong qualitative differences between their approaches, with the Tories considerably to the left of their American colleagues.

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