

POLITICAL VIEWS



FROM THE KINGDOM

BY REV BRENDAN HADASH

The Iowa straw polls are just over and I would like to take a quick look from the gay/lesbian perspective at all of our presidential candidates.

There are twelve running for the Republican nomination and two Democratic contenders. In general, the Democrats are so much better on gay goals than Republicans that I have labelled the Republicans the Dirty Dozen and the Democrats the Dynamic Duo.

The Dirty Dozen

The recent widely touted straw poll is just an Iowa Republican party fundraiser with no real political significance; it does give an early indication of the strength of various candidates and sometimes encourages weak candidates to drop out.

The winners of the straw poll were Texas governor George Bush, Jr. (son of former president Bush) and millionaire Steve Forbes. Between the two of them, they had over 50 percent of the total vote. Bush is considered a moderate, and Forbes a conservative.

Bush calls himself a compassionate conservative. On the good side: he defended the right of gay Republicans to attend and set up an information booth at a Texas State GOP convention; he has said that qualified gay people should not be disqualified from high-level government jobs — though he has not appointed open gays or lesbians to his administration; he has gay friends. On the other side, he is opposed to hate crimes legislation, anti-discrimination laws that include sexual orientation, gay and lesbian couples adopting, repeal of the Texas sodomy law, domestic partnership legislation, ENDA (job protection) and same sex marriage. If this is a moderate, heaven help us.

Forbes actually frightens me. He seems ready to do or say anything to get the Republican nomination. He ran for president pledging to cut taxes in the last election, and had little to say about gays and lesbians that I remember. This year, he has decided to go along totally with the radical right, because he thinks this will lead to nomination. He spent two million dollars of his own money trying to buy the Iowa straw poll. When he came in second, he declared himself the conservative alternative to Bush. About the only positive thing I can say about him is that his father, publisher of *Forbes* magazine, was rumored to be a bisexual.

Third and fourth places in the straw poll went to Elizabeth Dole, former head of the Red Cross and wife of former presidential candidate Bob Dole, and

Gary Bauer, president of the Family Research Council. Dole is considered one of the most liberal of the Republicans, and Bauer, one of the most conservative

Dole has said that sexual orientation should not exclude someone from presidential appointments and has always had openly gay staffers in the American Red Cross. She supported the Ryan White CARE Act, a federal bill that funds AIDS programs throughout the country, said she welcomes gays and lesbians people in the Republican Party, and said she would not turn away campaign contributions from gay Republicans. Not much is actually known about her ideas, since she has never been in office before. She seems to try to avoid talking about gay and lesbian issues as much as she can.

If Gary Bauer ever became president, I would move to Canada. He is head of a radical right Christian organization and is rabidly homophobic. He made it a point to stop in Vermont on his presidential campaign, and all he spoke about was how terrible it was that the Vermont Supreme Court would even consider giving gay and lesbian couples equal rights.

Fourth and fifth place in the poll went to TV commentator Pat Buchanan (conservative) and Former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander (moderate). Buchanan is so strongly anti gay that he has declared a "culture war" on homosexuals. When Lamar Alexander ran for president four years ago, he signed a right-wing anti-gay marriage resolution and said he would not accept contributions from Log Cabin Republicans.

It is interesting to note that, with Alexander having dropped out of the race, of the top seven

contenders, only Bush has ever been elected to anything before. I cannot believe that the American people would elect anyone president without some previous political experience.

Of the remaining Republicans, I would ignore former UN ambassador Alan Keyes, who has made being anti-gay part of his platform; former vice president Dan Quayle (who would ever vote for him?), who opposed Ellen coming out as a lesbian; anti-gay congressman Kasich, who dropped out and endorsed Bush, and homophobic Senator Bob Smith of New Hampshire, who left the Republican party to run for president as an independent.

The two at the bottom of the straw poll however are interesting: Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah and Senator John McCain of Arizona. McCain refused to participate in the poll; Hatch just entered the race and has not had time to organize yet. These two are the only ones with solid political backgrounds that would qualify them for presidency. They also are somewhat moderate (for Republicans) on gay and lesbian issues.

Hatch recently "joked" that he is proud of his party because "we don't have the gays and lesbians with us." But he claims to be tolerant and has made positive statements about non-discrimination, though he believes homosexuality is contrary to the Bible. He voted against ENDA, but compromised with Democrats on legislation affecting AIDS and hate crimes. He helped fund raising to combat pediatric AIDS, and supported the appointment of openly gay philanthropist James Hormel as ambassador to Luxembourg.

McCain also supported the appointment of James Hormel as ambassador of Luxembourg. He

said qualified openly gay people would be considered as appointees and bars anti-gay job bias in his Senate office. He supports funding for AIDS research. Jim Kolbe, the GOP's only openly gay congressman, serves on his national steering committee. McCain voted for a 1993 hate crimes measure that included sexual orientation. He says he opposes discrimination of any kind. On the negative side, he voted against ENDA, and opposed lifting the ban on gays in the military. He opposes gay marriages and adoptions by gays. His decision to not enter the Iowa straw poll is an interesting strategy, since he would not have done well — he has voted against Iowa farmers in the Senate.

The Dynamic Duo

After looking at the dismal and disappointing support gay/lesbian issues have among Republican presidential contenders, the Democrats are a breath of fresh air. Vice President Al Gore and former NJ Senator Bill Bradley, the two Democrats running for president, are both courting gay and lesbian voters. They attend gay and lesbian meetings and fundraisers, while the Republicans avoid even talking about our issues.

With so many Republicans with no political experience, it is a bit hard to pin them down on their stances. The best comparison I could find were Human Rights Campaign reports. In 1994, the last year Bradley was in the senate, Bradley voted 100 percent in support of all gay and lesbian issues. The "moderates" McCain and Hatch voted against every one. Specifically, McCain and Hatch voted against allowing domestic partners in the District of Columbia, voted to totally ban gays and lesbians from the mili-

tary, voted against a bill to make it illegal to block access to abortion clinics, voted to require minors to get parental permission before receiving condoms or contraceptives, and voted to ban federal money from going to a school with any program or activity supporting homosexuality as a positive lifestyle. Bradley voted to support our position every time.

In 1992, the last time Gore was in the senate, McCain and Hatch voted to restrict schools from using materials that "promote homosexuality," voted to allow organizations working with children in DC to discriminate against gays and lesbians, voted against workers with AIDS in food-handling situations, and voted to ban the NEA from funding homoerotic art. McCain even voted to prohibit the distribution of bleach used in conjunction with illegal drugs. Gore and Bradley voted with us on each of these votes

Currently, Bradley and Gore both support almost all gay and lesbian issues (except same-gender marriage). They both support a review of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy on gays in the military, same-gender adoptions, and extending legal rights, including health benefits and hospital visitation, to couples.

The presidential election is vital. The next president will not only have the power to propose good laws and veto bad ones, but also will probably make several appointments to the Supreme Court, where the future rights of our community will be decided.

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