

Gay-rights opponent Santorum stands by outed aide

BY STEVE GOLDSTEIN
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WASHINGTON - (KRT) - The senior spokesman for Sen. Rick Santorum, R- Pa., Friday confirmed to a web log that he is gay.

According to PageOneQ, an online gay and lesbian publication, director of communications Robert L. Traynham, said that he was an "out gay man who completely supports the senator."

Santorum, the third-ranking Republican in the Senate leadership has been an outspoken opponent of homosexual rights and a leading proponent of a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.

Santorum, who was traveling in Pittsburgh, released the following statement:

"Robert Traynham ... is widely respected and admired on Capitol Hill, both among the press corps and among the congressional staff, as a communications professional. Not only is Mr. Traynham an exemplary staffer, but he is also a trusted friend confidante to me and my family. Mr. Traynham is a valued member of my staff and I regret that this effort on behalf of people who oppose me has made him a target of bigotry in their eyes.

"It is entirely unacceptable that my staffs' personal lives are considered fair game by partisans looking for arguments to bolster my opponent's campaign. Mr. Traynham continues to have my full support and confidence as well as my prayers as he navigates this rude and mean spirited invasion of his personal life."

Mark Rodgers, chief of staff at the Republican conference, which Santorum chairs, said, "Robert is a tremendous employee and we're all for standing by him." Traynham's homosexuality was not news to the senator or his staff, he added.

In the online interview, Traynham defended his decision to work with the senator. "Sen. Santorum is a man of principle, he is a man who sticks up for what he believes in. I strongly do support Sen. Santorum.

Asked whether he supported Santorum's views on lesbian and gay issues, Traynham told PageOneQ, "Sen. Santorum is a family man. I have been with him for eight years and I am very proud to be with him."

The two-term senator is up for reelection next year. His expected Democratic opponent is State Treasurer Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Traynham began working for Santorum since 1997 as a press assistant and then deputy press secretary. He was press secretary for the senator's 2000 reelection campaign in Pennsylvania. Just prior to becoming communications director in the Senate office, Traynham served as director of communications for the Senate Republican Conference.

Traynham holds a bachelor of arts degree in political science from Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, where he currently serves on the Council of Trustees.

In supporting the Federal Marriage Amendment, which would prohibit gay marriage, Santorum has equated homeland security with the sanctity of traditional marriage. He has referred to gay marriage as "messing with the basic family unit."

During an interview with The Associated Press two years ago about a challenge to the constitutionality of Texas's sodomy law, Santorum said that if the Supreme Court allows gay sex at home (which it ultimately did), "you have the right to bigamy, you have the right to incest, you have the right to adultery. You have the right to anything."

On the marriage issue, Santorum also said: "In every society, the definition of marriage has not ever to my knowledge included homosexuality. That's not to pick on homosexuality. It's not, you know, man on child, man on dog, or whatever the case may be."

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