



What “Team” Is Santorum On?

The rigors of a presidential campaign leave a candidate little time for reading and less time for thought. But if Rick Santorum has a few spare moments in a hotel room in Michigan, Arizona, or somewhere in between, he might consider asking a senior campaign advisor (presidential campaigns apparently have no junior advisors) to find him a copy of *Profiles in Courage*, John F. Kennedy’s book about U.S. Senators who risked their careers and reputations by standing with longstanding and firmly held principles against the demands of a short-sighted and frequently erroneous pragmatism. The former Senator from Pennsylvania might peruse, for example, the stand taken by Senator and future President John Quincy Adams when Adams became a political pariah by opposing the sentiments of his party and his region and defending President Jefferson’s embargo on trade with Great Britain.



England, at war with Napoleon’s France, refused to accept the neutrality of her former colonies in North America. British warships routinely fired on U.S. ships and took American sailors captive, “impressing” them into duty on English vessels. Jefferson, lacking the ships and manpower needed to take on the mighty British Navy, eventually settled on the embargo as a retaliation for the British raids and a means of protecting U.S. ships from further attacks.

But even that was too much for the Federalist Party, zealous to protect the commercial interests of the merchants and shipbuilders of the Northeast. Federalists in Adams’s native New England railed against the embargo and even spoke darkly of secession long before secessionist sentiment caught fire in the Southern states during the crises leading up to the Civil War. Adams, a Federalist Senator from Massachusetts and the son of the former Federalist President, was expected to join the opposition to Jefferson’s embargo. Instead, he supported it as a necessary measure in defense of the nation’s honor and its right to peaceful travel and commerce at sea. For that he was denounced by his fellow Federalists as a traitor or worse and denied nomination for another term. Undeterred, Adams fired back at those who “hate me more than they love any principle” and disdained the kind of partisan who “abandons altogether the ground of right, and relies upon what is expedient.”

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Compare that to Santorum’s explanation of why he voted in 2001 for the No Child Left Behind Act, the education bill that was the centerpiece of President George W. Bush’s domestic agenda. Conservatives had been arguing for years that the Constitution of the United States gives the federal government no



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authority over education and for two decades the Republican Party had pledged to eliminate the federal Department of Education. Instead, they doubled its funding and expanded its role in the Bush years. And Santorum, who styles himself the "true conservative" in this year's presidential race, said in [last week's debate](#) in Arizona that he voted for the No Child Left Behind Act not because he believed it was right, but despite his belief that it was wrong:

It was the principal priority of President Bush to try to take on a failing education system and try to impose some sort of testing regime that would be able to quantify how well we're doing with respect to education. I have to admit, I voted for that. It was against the principles I believed in, but, you know, when you're part of the team, sometimes you take one for the team, for the leader, and I made a mistake.

It was "a mistake," he said, to vote against "the principles I believed in." Yet at the same time he defended the vote and the federal program of testing of students and evaluation of schools.

"You know, politics is a team sport, folks. And sometimes you've got to rally together and do something. And in this case, you know, I thought testing was — and finding out how bad the problem was wasn't a bad idea," Santorum said. "What was a bad idea was all the money that was put out there, and that, in fact, was a huge problem. I admit the mistake and I will not make that mistake again. You have someone who is committed."

Committed to what, we might ask. Committed to supporting unconstitutional federal mandates unless they cost too much money, however Santorum determines how much money "too much" is? Committed to standing on principle until its time to "take one for the team"? The fact that there is no constitutional warrant for Congress to impose a testing regime on the local schools, appears not to have entered his thinking. The President and members of Congress take an oath to the Constitution, Texas Congressman Ron Paul pointed out in the debate, not to a party or the party's leader.

"But ... he calls it a team sport," Paul said. "He has to go along to get along and that's the way the team plays. But that's what the problem is with Washington. That's what's been going on for so long."

And so it has, in foreign as well as domestic policy. It's how we got into the nearly decade-long Iraq War, despite the pathetically weak case the Bush administration made for invading a country that had not attacked us and posed no threat to us. Republicans wanted to look strong and patriotic by standing with the commander-in-chief in a crisis of his own making. Democrats were afraid to oppose him for fear of being labeled anti-military and "soft on terrorism." Santorum was, of course, solidly in the pro-war camp then, even as he is now eager to force a confrontation with Iran, despite the [lack of evidence that Iran is developing a nuclear weapon](#).

Even on those "social issues on which he has taken such a strong pro-life stand, Santorum has been a profile in vacillation. In last week's debate, he was challenged by Ron Paul over his support for Title X family planning funding that funnels millions of taxpayer dollars every year to Planned Parenthood, the nation's leading provider of abortions. Santorum insisted that he always opposes Title X funding — except when he doesn't.

"As Congressman Paul knows, I opposed Title X funding. I've always opposed Title X funding, but it's included in a large appropriation bill that includes a whole host of other things including the funding for the National Institutes of Health, the funding for Health and Human Services and a whole bunch of other departments."

In other words, the "true conservative" had to support funding for Planned Parenthood in order to help



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fund the rest of the big government programs that have contributed to a national debt that now stands at more than \$15 trillion. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a better concept for "big government" than the department of Health and Human Services. Is there any human activity or area of concern that does not fall under those two categories?

Add to that Santorum's votes for things such as the notorious "bridge to nowhere" in Alaska and continued subsidies for Amtrak and you have to at least wonder about his claim to fiscal conservatism versus his willingness to, as Paul put it, go along to get along. But we should at least thank the former Senator from Pennsylvania for reminding us why *Profiles in Courage* is a slender volume.



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