



Evangelical Leaders Endorse “True Conservative” Santorum

Santorum’s support for Specter against pro-life conservative Patrick Toomey in the 2004 Republican primary was a particularly bitter pill to swallow for the many Santorum supporters who were backing Toomey. Some blamed the Senator for Toomey’s defeat, claiming his support for the four-term incumbent was enough to make the difference in a primary that Specter won by 15,000 votes, in a 51 percent to 49 percent victory over Toomey. “The person our members are most infuriated at is Rick Santorum,” Stephen Moore, president of the conservative Club for Growth, told the *Washington Times* after [Specter’s narrow win](#). The Club for Growth had contributed \$1 million to Toomey’s campaign and spent another \$1 million in television ads in an effort to unseat Specter, the *Times* reported. But President George W. Bush and the Republican National Committee backed Specter in the closely fought primary.



“The national party showed us that we are really ‘Repubocrats,’” Sandy Usher, a well-known conservative activist in the state, said at the time. “I’ve been disgusted for a long time, so this did not surprise me.”

“Santorum and his staff are really going to have to work hard to heal the wounds they caused,” said Bob Sevcik, then a member of the state party central committee and self-described “Reaganite.”

Specter opposed restrictions on abortion throughout his Senate career, voting repeatedly against legislation to ban partial-birth abortion, which Santorum sponsored and helped pass into law. Yet Santorum appeared in an ad during that 2004 campaign in which he praised Specter for supporting the President’s tax plan. “Arlen is with us on the votes that matter, to move our agenda forward for this president and for our country,” Santorum said. “I’m proud to endorse Arlen Specter.”

With the primary behind him, Specter went on to win the general election, while emphasizing during the fall campaign his differences with the White House on tax policy, as well as issues such as abortion and embryonic stem cell research. His victory helped Republicans capture a majority of Senate seats, but in a strange turn of events, Specter switched parties before his term was up, then lost in his bid for reelection to U.S. Rep. Joe Sestak in a Democratic primary in 2010. Sestak then lost to Pat Toomey, the same Republican Specter had defeated six years earlier. While he was still a Republican, Specter cast the key 60th vote that enabled Senate Democrats to pass the President’s healthcare bill without a filibuster. The “ObamaCare” legislation will effectively result in federal funding for abortion.



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Santorum lost his own reelection bid in 2006. Though it was a heavily Democratic year, conservative anger over his support for Specter may have contributed to the landslide victory by pro-life Democrat Robert P. Casey, Jr. Santorum is now in a field of GOP presidential candidates trying to overcome the perception that Romney is the one who is “electable” in a fall campaign against President Obama. Ironically, “electability” is part of the explanation Santorum offers for his support of Specter eight years ago. When questioned about it on his campaign stops, the candidate has been telling audiences that Specter had a better chance than Toomey of winning the fall election and that his election helped create a Republican majority. He has also said that Specter, who would become Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, had privately pledged to support whomever President Bush might nominate to fill any vacancies that might arise on the Supreme Court.

Specter denied having made such a pledge, though he did actively support the confirmation of both Bush nominees to the high court — Chief Justice John Roberts in 2005 and Samuel Alito in 2006. Santorum’s claim became an issue in the Democratic Senate primary in Pennsylvania, however, when Sestak seized it and turned it against Specter.

“Rick Santorum’s revelation that the sitting Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was shepherded through the confirmation by a Judiciary Chairman — Arlen Specter — who had sold his support in a political quid pro quo casts a serious doubt on the integrity of that process,” [Sestak said](#).

Throughout his 16-year career in the U.S. House and Senate, Santorum has supported pro-abortion candidates with endorsements, appearances at campaign events, and contributions from his political action committee, formerly called “Fight PAC” (now “America’s Foundation”). In 2007, Santorum campaigned in New Jersey for Governor Christine Todd Whitman’s reelection, despite her veto of a partial-birth abortion ban in that state. When the Legislature passed the ban again over her veto, Whitman said she would not defend the law against a court challenge.

“Governor Whitman and I agree on 90 to 95 percent of the issues,” Santorum said at a [Republican rally in Hopewell](#). “And when I find someone I agree with on 90 to 95 percent of the issues, I enthusiastically campaign for them because they’re heading this country in the right direction.” Whitman, who was appointed director of the Environmental Protection agency by President George W. Bush, has lately been leading an effort to create a new party and began urging former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman to run as a third-party candidate even before Huntsman dropped out of the hunt for the Republican nomination.

Representatives of all the candidates but Huntsman made presentations at Saturday’s conference of evangelical leaders, but Santorum emerged as the consensus candidate, chosen over former House speaker Newt Gingrich on the third ballot. “There is clearly a united group here that is committed to see ... a true conservative elected to the White House,” [said Tony Perkins](#), leader of the Family Research Council and spokesman for the group. Santorum, campaigning in South Carolina for that state’s January 21 primary, [hailed the endorsement](#) as the affirmation of “a strong, consistent voice across the board on all the conservative issues.”

Yet [the Club for Growth last week noted](#) that Santorum voted for the No child Left Behind Act, “which massively increased the federal role in education,” and for expanding Medicare to include a prescription drug benefit, with no way to pay for it. Santorum also voted for the transportation bill that funded the infamous “bridge to nowhere” in Alaska and against an amendment offered by Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) to divert that money to help victims of Hurricane Katrina. At the same time, the report praised Santorum’s work as “a leading author” of legislation that overhauled the nation’s welfare



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system in the 1990s. “However, on balance, Santorum’s record in Congress is generally one of favoring bigger government and more spending — not atypical during the Bush years where Santorum served in Senate leadership.” In its fact check of rival candidate Ron Paul’s charge that Santorum is a “big government conservative,” the Club for Growth concluded it is “mostly true.”

Photo of Rick Santorum: AP Images



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