



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on February 24, 2012

Santorum Claims Specter Traded Confirmation Votes for Campaign support

For a Senator who lost by 18 percentage points when he last ran for reelection, Rick Santorum must have awesome powers of persuasion. According to a rival GOP presidential candidate, Santorum is responsible for the passage of the Obama health care plan because as the junior Senator from Pennsylvania, he persuaded the voters of his state to back senior Senator Arlen Specter over conservative challenger Pat Toomey in a hotly contested Republican primary race in 2004. And Santorum claimed his endorsement of his colleague, who was in line to become chairman of the Judiciary Committee, came after he sought and received from his Senate colleague a pledge that Specter would support President George W. Bush's nominees to the Supreme Court,



Specter narrowly defeated the Toomey challenge that year and went on to win his fifth Senate term. As committee chairman, Specter did support both of Bush's eventual nominees, Chief Justice John Roberts and Associate Justice Samuel Alito, but has denied he made any commitment beforehand. Near the end of his term, Specter gave Senate Democrats the crucial 60th vote needed to break a Republican filibuster against the Affordable Patient Care and Protection Act of 2010. Romney brought up Santorum's support of Specter during Wednesday night's [GOP debate in Arizona](#) after the former Pennsylvania Senator repeated the charge he has made repeatedly in this year's presidential primary campaign, calling the health care plan Romney supported and signed into law as governor of Massachusetts the model for the Democrats' national plan. That makes Romney ill-suited to campaign against "ObamaCare," in a race against the President if Romney is the Republican nominee, Santorum said, repeating a charge that has dogged Romney through the primary campaigns.

"The reason we have ObamaCare," Romney countered, "is because the Senator you supported over Pat Toomey in Pennsylvania, Arlen Specter, the pro-choice Senator of Pennsylvania that you supported and endorsed in a race over Pat Toomey, (Specter) voted for ObamaCare. If you had not supported him, if we had said, no to Arlen Specter, we would not have ObamaCare. So don't look at me. Take a look in the mirror," Romney concluded, to applause from his supporters in the audience.

Santorum, whose campaign has caught on among socially conservative Republicans for his strong opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage, has nonetheless been challenged by conservative voters about that endorsement of "abortion rights" champion Specter over pro-life Toomey. He defended the decision again Thursday night, noting, that Specter, then regarded as a "moderate" Republican had played key roles on the Judiciary Committee in thwarting President Reagan's nomination of Robert Bork



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in 1987 and in saving the controversial nomination of Clarence Thomas to the court by George H. W. Bush in 1991.

“He asked me to support him,” Santorum said. “I said, ‘Will you support the president’s nominees? We had a 51/49 majority in the Senate. He said, ‘I’ll support the president’s nominees as chairman.’ Every nominee Arlen Specter supported from the time he took on Judge Bork and saved Justice Thomas, every nominee he supported, passed. Why? Because it gave Democrats cover to vote for it and it gave Republican moderates cover to vote for it.... I did the right thing for our country,” Santorum insisted Specter later switched parties, joining the Democrats in 2009. Running for a sixth Senate term in 2009 he lost to Democrat Joe Sestak in the party primary. Toomey defeated Sestak and is now the state’s junior Senator. Santorum, a two-term Senator, lost his reelection bid to Democrat Robert Casey by 18 points when Democrats captured both houses of congress in 2006.

“I made no commitment to him about supporting judges,” Specter said Thursday morning. “That would have been the wrong thing to do. As chairman of the committee I supported Roberts and Alito because I thought they were qualified for the job. But I made no deal.” Specter also downplayed the significance of his Senate colleague’s support in that 2004 campaign, calling it helpful “but hardly determinative.”

Little has been made, however, of the propriety of Santorum’s asking for the kind of pledge he described. At the time, the vacancies filled by Bush had not yet occurred, as the retirement of Justice Sandra Day O’Connor and the death of Chief Justice William Rhenquist both occurred in 2005. No one knew a year earlier whom Bush would appoint. For Santorum to have asked Specter to, in effect, trade his votes on Supreme Court nominations in exchange for support in his reelection bid would appear to be at least unethical, if not illegal.

Romney also sparred with former House Speaker Newt Gingrich during the two-hour debate, while Santorum was often on the defensive, answering charges from both Romney and Texas Congressman Ron Paul over Santorum’s votes on funding Planned Parenthood, the nation’s leading abortion provider, and in passing the No Child Left Behind Education Act, the centerpiece of the Bush domestic agenda, in 2001.

“I supported No Child Left Behind,” Santorum acknowledged. “I supported it. 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.” Paul found that argument unpersuasive.

“The Constitution is very, very clear,” said Paul. “There is no authority for the federal government to be involved in education.”



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