

Danforth opposes amendment against gay marriage

By Jo Mannies

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Retired Sen. John C. Danforth said today that while he agrees that marriage is only between a man and a woman, there should not be a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage.

Speaking before a local gay Republican group, the former Missouri Republican senator said that the constitution - on the federal or state level - was not the place to deal with social values, whether it be gay marriage or abortion rights.

For that reason, Danforth said, he was among the minority in Missouri who voted against the state constitutional amendment defining marriage as only between a man and a woman and why he opposes the 1973 supreme court decision that said the right to abortion was inherent in the constitution.

Danforth added that he was concerned that some in the Republican Party had been engaging in "gay bashing" rather than advancing the cause of equal rights for everyone.

"When religion and government become aligned with each other, it's inherently divisive," he said.

Danforth stopped short of saying he supported civil unions for same sex couples, but said there should be some legal way to offer them protection - such as the sharing of pension and health care benefits - in recognition of long-term relationships.

The speech marks the first time that Danforth had discussed in detail his views on gay marriage.

But he emphasized he was speaking as a Republican and he still shares his party's core values of fiscal restraint, a strong military and an engaged foreign policy.

Danforth's audience primarily included members of the Log Cabin Republicans of Greater St. Louis, the local chapter of the national group for gays and lesbians.

He called on them to "keep the debate alive." Danforth said right now, all that Republican officials are hearing is the religious conservative message that they have to be aligned.

When a party embraces a "particular sectarian religious agenda as their own," he said, it's divisive and dangerous. Danforth emphasized, however, that he agrees with religious conservatives' concerns about the "growing coarseness of American society."

Today's crowd included the group's national president Patrick Guerriero, who praised Danforth as the type of Republican that the party needs.

"You can be a good conservative and a person of faith and still embrace equality." Guerriero said.

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