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Don't Let McCain Hide His True Colors

By: YOAV SIVAN

The LGBT community has a particular gift it can give America this election season-exposing John McCain as anything other than the moderate he will endeavor to run as in the general election in November.

The truth is, we have no choice but to lead the way in defining John McCain before he defines himself. Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton don't have the time to do it. So here's your handy guide to the true John McCain.

First, let's not go overboard on McCain lest we lose our credibility. He deserves praise for his opposition to President George W. Bush's attempts to ban marriage equality in the US Constitution. He is at least a consistent states' rights conservative.

But when it comes to the state level, particularly in his own Arizona, McCain has been a staunch supporter of a constitutional amendment that would define marriage as a union between a man and a woman. He appeared in ads in 2006 to promote the passage of that amendment- the first such effort in the US that failed, thankfully.

McCain also never passes up a chance to express support for the Pentagon's discriminatory policy of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. At best, on a day when he's making an appeal to a moderate crowd, he states that wartime is not suited to efforts at reforming the military - not a particularly happy prospect for those who think we need to fundamentally rethink military assumptions at the heart of the Iraq fiasco, but that's a topic for another column.

At other times, McCain doesn't flinch at climbing into the homophobic abyss to make his case for the Don't Ask, Don't Tell status quo. "Open sexuality within military," he rather inartfully argued, "presents an intolerable risk to morale, cohesion, and discipline. The national security of the United States, not to mention the lives of our men and women in uniform, is put at grave risk."

Heck, if that kind of irrationality came from an LGBT leader, McCain's Republican colleagues would rank it somewhere on the scale between flamboyant and hysterical.

John, maybe there's something you're not telling us?

All right, all right... so McCain is no Larry Craig. But that's not to say they don't have a lot in common - both men voted against adding sexual orientation to the definition of hate crimes and against prohibiting job discrimination on sexual orientation grounds.

On the Republicans' leading hot-button issue outside their gay-bashing natural habitat - a woman's right to choose - if McCain is not Attila the Hun, he could pass for Michael the Huckabee.

In the primaries, McCain assailed Mitt Romney for supporting "abortion on demand" and allowing "a law mandating taxpayer-funding for abortion." McCain has felt so strongly about curtailing a woman's right to choose, that for his robo-call to Florida voters on the night before that state's primary, he focused on abortion rather than his professed passion, national security.

Yet fearing 2008 won't be its year no matter whom the Democratic nominee is, the Republican establishment will soon accelerate its portrayal of McCain as an appealing moderate for the masses, somewhat like California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger or the once-upon-a-time Rudy Giuliani, America's ex-mayor.

Make no mistake - the extreme makeover has already begun. The Republicans' top foot soldier in this endeavor is Democrat-turned-Independent Senator Joe Lieberman. Though he won't be McCain's vice president, he's become McCain's running mate, quite literally. The two gentlemen may want to consider investing in miracle surgery for conjoined twins.

How are the Democrats responding? When Fox News put Senators McCain and Clinton on the air in a surprise split-screen gimmick a couple of Sundays ago, anchor Chris Wallace all but invited Clinton to take a potshot at her prospective opponent.

She refused, saying, "I've got my hands full."

But we in the LGBT community don't. Let the punches begin.

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