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Leave Mehlman Alone

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 27, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

Liberals need to leave Ken Mehlman alone. The former head of the Republican National Committee came out of the closet publicly the other day and liberals are howling that his oversight of the 2004 Bush re-election campaign was therefore hypocritical seeing as that campaign played the anti gay marriage card pretty heavily.

First, the right to privacy, upon which most of the judicial arguments for gay rights have been based, either extends to everybody, including former RNC chairs, or it is meaningless. Mehlman, like everyone, is entitled to share as much or as little about his private life as he wants and in whatever way he wants. It is difficult to remember the days before Monica Lewinsky, before Rev. Haggard, before Gary Hart and Donna Rice, but those were better days. I think it is a damned shame that Franklin Roosevelt cheated on his wife, but thank God the country that needed that man upheld the custom that such matters were none of our business. Eleanor had every right to give Franklin holy hell, but America needed FDR in the White House.

Second, I can think of half a dozen reasons why Mehlman did not want to come out, even if he had achieved some degree of self-acceptance, which is not entirely clear from his statements. The most obvious reasons is what has happened. Now, and forevermore, he will be the gay guy, his views will be understood in terms of his sexuality, his complexity as a person will be reduced to that extra strand of DNA. There were many reasons to be for George W. Bush in 2004, reasons that were as accessible to gay men and women as to straight men and women. There are gay people who are quite libertarian on economic matters and supported Bush?s tax cuts for the rich. There are lesbians who are profoundly concerned about radical Islamic terrorists. There are probably transgendered people that are mostly concerned about supporting Bush?s No Child Left Behind. It is, finally, insulting to reduce all gay people to a monolithic ideological group. It is just plain wrong to think the most interesting thing to know about Mehlman, or Andrew Sullivan for that matter, is that they are gay.

No one likes a hypocrite, of course. But, all of us in politics have to hold our noses when we vote. There are no politicians whose views we embrace 100% and if there is, go see a shrink. When I voted for Obama, as when I voted for John Kerry and Al Gore and Bill Clinton and Mike Dukakis and Walter Mondale and Jimmy Carter, I held my nose because of his pro-choice position: I have been delightfully pleased that President Obama has not done much to advance the pro-choice cause and, in the implementation of the health care reform, he has been true to his word that no federal funds would be used for abortion. I know pro-choice Republicans and pro-environment Republicans who did the same when they voted for Bush and McCain.

I expected Republicans to be critical of Mehlman as his departure really shows something that must scare the living bejesus out of them, the fact that for all their talk about elites who are out of touch with Middle America, the leadership of the GOP here in Washington is decidedly more liberal than their base on issues like gay marriage and abortion. But, it is disappointing to seeing liberals attack him. I wish him well and hope, more than anything, that he will help make our whole culture and society recognize that gay folk, like straight folk, come in all sizes and flavors.

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