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Yahoo Watch: Gay Rights Groups

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

In this morning's Washington Post, Richard Soccarides, who was an adviser to President Clinton on gay rights issues, had this to say about the failure to overturn "Don't Ask; Don't Tell": "The Washington-based gay rights groups made a decision early on that they were better off going along with the president's timeline and that right now that looks like a serious miscalculation." Of course, gays and lesbians who lack health insurance might feel differently. Gays and lesbians who watched their 401ks plummet or who lost their job in the recession might feel differently. Gays and lesbians who were worried about predatory credit practices might feel differently. It is not like the President of the United States has been sitting on his hands these two years. The myopia of Soccarides's remark is stunning.

To be clear: The blame for the failure to repeal "Don't Ask; Don't Tel" rests squarely with the Republican Party. This carping about what the administration could have done or should have done is misplaced. Perhaps the leaders of the gay rights movement would better consider their own tactics, and how those tactics helped defeat repeal. For example, was it wise to have Lady Gaga star at a rally in Maine? Their goal was to call attention to their cause in the home state of the two GOP senators who might have voted the other way. But, putting Lady Gaga at the center of the event had the only, and foreseeable, consequence of trivializing the issue. As Sen. Susan Collins said when asked about the event, "I look to Admiral Mike Mullins for advice."

Ah, but Lady Gaga is a star. The largest gay rights group in Washington, the Human Rights Campaign Fund has proven itself over the years to be very good at throwing lavish fundraising dinners, but not much else. They have focused on gay marriage to the exclusion of other, arguably more pressing, issues such as AIDS funding. They expect the President of the United States to jettison issues that affect the whole country to consider issues that affect only their constituency. Make no mistake. "Don't Ask" should have been repealed. But before they start casting the blame elsewhere, gay rights groups need to look to their

own inability to promote their cause with a little less Gaga and a little more substance.

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