



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on August 8, 2012

## Conservatives Rip Romney for Ducking Chick-fil-A Fight

Mitt Romney's decision to steer clear of the controversy over Chick-fil-A president Dan Cathy's defense of traditional marriage could cost the Republican presidential candidate votes of social conservatives needed to win the White House, William Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Liberties, said.



"This is the most disheartened that certainly I've felt looking at this entire race," [Donohue told Newsmax](#) after Romney declined to comment on the controversy that followed Cathy's public statement that America is "inviting God's judgment on our nation" by changing marriage laws to include same-sex unions. That was followed by boycotts, "gay kiss-ins" staged at Chick-fil-A sites across the country, and statements by at least three big city mayors that the Chick-fil-A franchises would not be welcome in their cities. To counter the protest, 2008 GOP presidential contender and current Fox News talk-show host Mike Huckabee led a "Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day" that led to record sales, according to officials of the national chain.

"Those are not things that are part of my campaign," Romney said, when asked about the controversy at a press conference in Las Vegas August 3. Romney has stated his support for traditional marriage and opposition to same-sex marriage in the past, but campaign aides said he wanted to keep the focus of the campaign on economic issues, where he believes President Obama is most vulnerable. Obama, who recently announced his support for same-sex marriage, has also refrained from commenting on the Chick-fil-A controversy. But Donohue and other critics warn that Romney's silence strategy could turn off an important part of the GOP's traditional base of support.

"Social conservatives have to make up their mind whether they should just simply stay at home, or go out there and vote for Romney," Donohue said in his Newsmax interview. "I'm astonished that he couldn't even come to grips with the question — leaving gays out of it — do we want the chief executives, the mayors of large cities trying to intimidate, using the power of government against private enterprises whose politics they disagree with? I think it's a pretty simple issue."

The mayors of Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco have issued statements saying Chick-fil-A is not welcome in their respective communities. Mayor Edwin Lee of San Francisco issued what sounded like a "stay out of Dodge" warning in a Twitter message that said "Closest #ChickFilA to San Francisco is



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40 miles away & I strongly recommend that they not try to come any closer.” Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Obama’s former chief of staff, said, “Chick Fil-A’s values are not Chicago’s values.” Mayor Vincent Gray of Washington, D.C., referred to Chick Fil-A as “hate chicken” in a Twitter statement, but acknowledged that he could not in his official capacity block the chain from opening a restaurant in the nation’s capital. Mayor Thomas Menino of Boston wrote Cathy an official letter from the mayor’s office saying he was “angry” to learn that Chick-fil-A was looking for a Boston location. “There is no place for discrimination on Boston’s Freedom trail and no place for your company alongside it,” Menino wrote. The mayor later said he was expressing his personal opinion, though that did little to quell the criticism of those who saw the letter as an abuse of his office.

“Even if Mayor Menino recognizes that his threatened opposition to Chick-fil-A was constitutionally indefensible and legally unenforceable,” wrote C.J. Doyle, director of the Catholic Action League of Massachusetts, “he is still sending an unmistakable message to those who do business in Boston that unless you are on the right side of the homosexual community, you will be on wrong side of City Hall.”

Donohue contrasted Romney’s stand with recent statements by constitutional scholar Alan Dershowitz and the American Civil Liberties Union, criticizing threats by city officials of retribution to the restaurant chain for opinions expressed by its owner. Romney’s “agnostic silence” could be “the defining moment” of the 2012 campaign, Donohue said.

“I don’t understand why Mitt Romney doesn’t just get his Secret Service detail and take his press corps down to a Chick-fil-A and show solidarity with these people,” conservative columnist and former presidential candidate Pat Buchanan [told Politico](#). “Reagan would have walked right on down there naturally.”

Conservative direct mail pioneer Richard Viguerie also weighed in on the issue, telling Newsmax: “Governor Romney has once again disappointed the conservative base of the Republican Party by refusing to support Chick-fil-A when they were attacked by Democrat politicians and others who favor the radical homosexual agenda.”

Throughout his two campaigns for President, Romney has had to battle the perception that he has been a “flip-flopper” on issues deemed important by social conservatives, many of whom have questioned the sincerity of his conversion to a pro-life stand on abortion and his opposition to ObamaCare, which was patterned after the former governor’s own Romneycare plan in Massachusetts. Romney insists he has never been in favor of “gay marriage,” and has called for a constitutional amendment to ban it — though as a candidate for U.S. senator from Massachusetts in 1994, he did pledge to be a more effective champion of “full equality for America’s gay and lesbian citizens” than his opponent, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy. And Romney was governor of Massachusetts when that state’s Supreme Judicial Court ruled the state’s marriage law unconstitutional in denying marriage to persons of the same gender. The ruling, however, did not nullify the existing law. The court called on the legislature to “take such action as it may deem appropriate” within the next 180 days. The legislature did nothing to change the law.

So Governor Romney, in violation of the law that remained in effect, [ordered town clerks](#) to begin issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples May 17, 2004, exactly six months after the Supreme Court ruling. Massachusetts thus became the first state to enact, albeit unlawfully, same-sex marriage, and Mitt Romney became known as the “father of gay marriage,” a paternity he now denies.

That could be another reason why he is staying away from the Chick-fil-A controversy. An outspoken



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defense of Cathy and his stand by Romney might be popular. But it might not be believable.



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