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Former Senator Rick Santorum

INTRODUCTION

Rick Santorum spent sixteen years in Congress – four years in the House followed by 12 years in the Senate – before losing to Democrat Bob Casey in 2006. In the last two years of his Senate career, he had an average Club for Growth rating of 77%, compared to an average of 73% for all Senate Republicans over that same time period. In the previous thirteen years before the Club had a scorecard, Santorum accumulated an average score of 76% on the National Taxpayers Union scorecard. This compares to a 71% average among all Republicans. NTU is a non-partisan group that advocates for limited government.

TAXES

The Club for Growth is committed to lower taxes – especially lower tax rates – across the board. Lower taxes on work, savings, and investments lead to greater levels of these activities, thus encouraging greater economic growth.

Santorum has consistently supported broad-based tax cuts and opposed tax increases either by sponsoring key legislation or by casting votes on relevant bills. Some high profile votes include:

- Voted NO on the Clinton tax hike in 1993¹
- Voted YES on the capital gains tax cut in 1997²
- Voted NO on a cigarette tax hike in 1998³
- Voted YES on repeal of the Alternative Minimum Tax in 1999⁴
- Voted YES on the 2001 Bush tax cuts⁵
- Voted YES to repeal the Death Tax in 2002⁶

¹ [House roll call vote 406, 1993](#)

² [Senate roll call vote 160, 1997](#)

³ [Senate roll call vote 162, 1998](#)

⁴ [Senate roll call vote 261, 1999](#)

⁵ [Senate roll call vote 170, 2001](#)

⁶ [Senate roll call vote 151, 2002](#)

- Voted YES to the 2003 Bush tax cuts⁷
- Voted YES to extend the Bush tax cuts in 2006⁸

Nevertheless, like many politicians, Santorum supported various proposals that tinkered with the tax code and increased its complexity. Santorum sponsored a bill in 2005 that would provide a general business tax credit for building or rehabilitating homes for low- and middle-income individuals in certain areas.⁹ He also supported a bill in 2006 that would provide a \$100 “gas-tax holiday” in the form of a rebate check to every family in the country as a way of alleviating the pain caused by high gas prices.¹⁰ And he sponsored a bill that would give telecommuters a tax credit of \$500.¹¹

Despite these relatively small blemishes, Santorum’s record on taxes is very strong.

SPENDING

The Club for Growth is committed to reducing government spending. Less spending enhances economic growth by enabling lower taxes and diminishing the government’s economically inefficient allocation of resources.

On spending, Santorum has a mixed record and showed clear signs of varying his votes based on the election calendar. In the 1990s, when he was only a freshman Senator, he was a leading author on the bill that completely overhauled the country’s welfare system.¹² He also voted for the Freedom to Farm Act in 1996 that started the process of ending direct farm subsidies.¹³ When Congress decided that it couldn’t live up to that promise, it voted to re-establish the subsidies in 2002 with the Farm Security Act, a bill that Santorum rightly opposed.¹⁴ He also voted for a balanced budget amendment and a line-item veto in 1995.^{15 16}

More recently, when he was out of Congress, Santorum opposed TARP¹⁷, the stimulus¹⁸, the auto bailout, and the Fannie-Freddie bailout.

However, there is a troubling part of Santorum’s record on spending, which is found in the years sandwiched between these periods of fiscal restraint. His record is plagued by the big-spending habits that Republicans adopted during the Bush years of 2001-2006. Some of those

⁷ [Senate roll call vote 196, 2003](#)

⁸ [Senate roll call vote 118, 2006](#)

⁹ [S. 859, 2005](#)

¹⁰ [New York Times, 04/27/06](#)

¹¹ [S. 1292, 2005](#)

¹² [Associated Press, 04/28/95](#)

¹³ [Senate Roll Call Vote 57, 1996](#)

¹⁴ [Senate Roll Call Vote 30, 2002](#)

¹⁵ [Senate Roll Call Vote 98, 1995](#)

¹⁶ [Senate Roll Call Vote 115, 1995](#)

¹⁷ [The Iowa Republican, 10/02/09](#)

¹⁸ [Op-ed, 03/26/09](#)

high profile votes include his support for No Child Left Behind in 2001, which greatly expanded the federal government's role in education.¹⁹ He supported the massive new Medicare drug entitlement in 2003²⁰ that now costs taxpayers over \$60 billion a year and has almost \$16 trillion in unfunded liabilities.²¹ He voted for the 2005 highway bill that included thousands of wasteful earmarks, including the Bridge to Nowhere.²² In fact, in a separate vote, Santorum had the audacity to vote to continue funding the Bridge to Nowhere rather than send the money to rebuild New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.²³

Indeed, Santorum was a prolific supporter of earmarks, having requested billions of dollars for pork projects in Pennsylvania while he was in Congress.²⁴ Perhaps recognizing the sign of the times, Santorum finally reversed his position in 2010, saying that he was opposed to them²⁵, but one must remain skeptical about his sincerity. As recently as 2009, he said, "I'm not saying necessarily earmarks are bad. I have had a lot of earmarks. In fact, I'm very proud of all the earmarks I've put in bills. I'll defend earmarks."²⁶

And while Santorum voted against the Farm Bill in 2002, he sponsored a bill to extend milk subsidies in 2005,²⁷ which he claimed he did to "save countless Pennsylvania dairy farmers."²⁸

An examination of his scores in the NTU rating of Congress shows that Santorum compiled a very strong record on taxes and spending in the first four years of each of his two Senate terms, then a sharp swing to below the Senate Republican average in the Congress before his reelection campaign.²⁹ In the 2003-2004 session of Congress, Santorum sponsored or cosponsored 51 bills to increase spending, and failed to sponsor or co-sponsor even one spending cut proposal. In his last Congress (2005-2006), he had one of the biggest spending agendas of any Republican -- sponsoring more spending increases than Republicans Lisa Murkowski, Lincoln Chafee and Thad Cochran or Democrats Herb Kohl, Evan Bayh and Ron Wyden.³⁰

Santorum also supported raising congressional pay at least three times, in 2001, 2002, and 2003.³¹

¹⁹ [Senate Roll Call Vote 371, 2001](#)

²⁰ [Senate Roll Call Vote 459, 2003](#)

²¹ <http://reason.com/blog/2010/11/19/happy-birthday-medicare-part-d>

²² [Senate Roll Call Vote 220, 2005](#)

²³ [Senate Roll Call Vote 262, 2005](#)

²⁴ [Slate, February 4, 2011](#)

²⁵ http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/1110/Santorum_reverses_on_earmarks.html

²⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfYBJf6oFnk>

²⁷ [S. 307, 2005](#)

²⁸ <http://www.clubforgrowth.org/assets/files/50Things.pdf>

²⁹ <http://www.ntu.org/on-capitol-hill/ntu-rates-congress/members/senate/rick-santorum.html>

³⁰ http://www.ntu.org/ntuf/excel/bt_senate-net-111.xls

³¹ Senate Roll Call Vote 360, 2001; 242, 2002; 406, 2003

FREE TRADE

Free trade is a vital policy necessary for maximizing economic growth. In recent decades, America's commitment to expanding trade has resulted in lower costs for consumers, job growth, and higher levels of productivity and innovation.

Some of Santorum's most anti-growth votes have come on trade issues. Before assessing his votes against free trade, it should be noted that he has cast several pro-trade votes, including:

- Voted YES on the Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA)³²
- Voted YES on CAFTA³³
- Voted YES on the Morocco FTA³⁴
- Voted YES on the Australia FTA³⁵
- Voted YES on the Chile FTA³⁶
- Voted YES on the Singapore FTA³⁷
- Voted YES to Trade Promotion Authority³⁸
- Voted YES to extend normal trade relations with China³⁹

But beyond those pro-trade actions, Santorum has some real duds.

In perhaps the most important free trade vote of the last generation, Santorum voted against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993,⁴⁰ perhaps the most important trade vote cast during his career in Congress. Days before the vote, he said, "NAFTA will produce pockets of winners and losers across the country. Our area is unfortunately one of the losers."⁴¹ That analysis, while arguably correct with regard to a small number of industries in Pennsylvania, ignores the fact that every single consumer in Pennsylvania benefited tremendously from NAFTA, as well as did many more affected industries.

As a member of the Senate Steel Caucus⁴², Santorum voted for and co-sponsored a bill to slap tariffs on imported steel in 1999.⁴³

³² [Senate Roll Call Vote 190, 2006](#)

³³ [Senate Roll Call Vote 209, 2005](#)

³⁴ [Senate Roll Call Vote 159, 2004](#)

³⁵ [Senate Roll Call Vote 156, 2004](#)

³⁶ [Senate Roll Call Vote 319, 2003](#)

³⁷ [Senate Roll Call Vote 318, 2003](#)

³⁸ [Senate Roll Call Vote 207, 2002](#)

³⁹ [Senate Roll Call Vote 251, 2000](#)

⁴⁰ [House Roll Call Vote 575, 1993](#)

⁴¹ [Philadelphia Inquirer, 11/11/93](#)

⁴² CQ Member Profile, updated July 2006

⁴³ Reuters, 01/21/99

In 2005, Santorum voted in support of an amendment that would impose a massive, job-killing 27.5% tariff on all Chinese imports if China didn't readjust their currency upward.⁴⁴

In 1997, Santorum sponsored a proposal that would impose a one-cent tax on imported honey with the proceeds going to the National Honey Board to aid in their research, a special interest giveaway.⁴⁵

REGULATION

Excessive government regulation stymies individual and business innovation necessary for strong economic expansion. The Club for Growth supports less and more sensible government regulation as a critical step toward increasing freedom and growth in the marketplace.

Santorum has a mixed record on yet another economic issue – this time regulation. He rightly opposes card check⁴⁶ and the over-reaching Dodd-Frank financial reform bill.⁴⁷ He also voted NO on a cap and trade scheme brought to the Senate back in 2003⁴⁸ and YES on opening up ANWR to oil drilling.⁴⁹ He voted YES to get rid of the Clinton ergonomic rules in early 2001.⁵⁰

He voted NO on raising the minimum wage in 1995 and 2005.⁵¹ But on the same day he voted NO in 2005, he sponsored an amendment that would increase the minimum wage, which he later boasted about to skeptical voters in a 2006 campaign brochure he released called "50 Things You Didn't Know About Rick Santorum."⁵²

He displayed similar duplicity on ethanol. In early 2011, Santorum said, "Prior to 9/11, I was not a big fan of ethanol subsidies, but 2001 change[d] my mind on a lot of things, and one of them was trying to support domestic energy and this is part of it."

The evidence does show that Santorum was opposed to ethanol before 9/11. Twice, in 1997 and 1998, Santorum voted to end ethanol subsidies.⁵³ And the evidence also shows that, at times, he was supportive of an ethanol mandate after 9/11.⁵⁵ But in 2005, Santorum voted to

⁴⁴ [Senate Roll Call Vote 86, 2005](#)

⁴⁵ [S. 1538, 1997](#)

⁴⁶ [Politico, 03/30/09](#)

⁴⁷ [Philly.com, 05/19/10](#)

⁴⁸ [Senate Roll Call Vote 420, 2003](#)

⁴⁹ [Senate Roll Call Vote 72, 2006](#)

⁵⁰ [Senate Roll Call Vote 15, 2001](#)

⁵¹ [Senate Roll Call Vote 26, 2005](#)

⁵² <http://www.clubforgrowth.org/assets/files/50Things.pdf>

⁵³ [Senate Roll Call Vote 155, 1997](#)

⁵⁴ [Senate Roll Call Vote 27, 1998](#)

⁵⁵ [Philly.com, January 31, 2008](#)

end the ethanol mandate.⁵⁶ If the original flip-flop was a principled stand taken by Santorum because of national security concerns, we're at a loss to explain this flip-flop-flip-again vote.

In the same "50 Things" campaign brochure, Santorum boasts about sponsoring a bill to regulate "price gouging and unfair pricing by the big oil companies." This contradicts his opposition to a "windfall profits tax" that Democrats tried to impose on oil companies in 2005.⁵⁷ He also voted YES on Sarbanes-Oxley, which was an overreaching bill that tried to tighten accounting regulations following the Enron scandal.⁵⁸

Like many of his colleagues, Santorum has also flip-flopped on government's role in the housing market. In late 2000, Santorum wrote an op-ed encouraging more home ownership, particularly for low-income families, with the help of government assistance, whether it was through the Federal Housing Administration, or Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.⁵⁹ However, he rightly changed his tune in 2005, when he urged reform of Fannie and Freddie. Along with 24 of his colleagues, he signed a letter that read, "If effective regulatory reform legislation ... is not enacted this year, American taxpayers will continue to be exposed to the enormous risk that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac pose to the housing market, the overall financial system and the economy as a whole."⁶⁰ Unfortunately, Congress did not heed this warning, and the America public knows all too well what the consequences were.

ENTITLEMENT REFORM

America's major middle-class entitlement programs are already insolvent. The Club for Growth supports entitlement reforms that enable personal ownership of retirement and health care programs, benefit from market returns, and diminish dependency on government.

On Social Security, Santorum has been very outspoken in favor of pro-growth reforms. Even when Social Security was considered the "third rail" in politics, Santorum was advocating personal savings accounts as a way to strengthen the program while giving taxpayers ownership over their retirements. In 1998, he did a town hall meeting with President Clinton advocating for personal savings accounts.⁶¹ In 2005, Santorum led the charge to adopt personal accounts on behalf of President Bush. He also co-sponsored a bill that would "stop the raid" on the Social Security Trust Fund.⁶² He followed that up in 2006 when he voted YES on a similar piece of legislation.⁶³

⁵⁶ [Senate Roll Call Vote 138, 2005](#)

⁵⁷ [Senate Roll Call Vote 341, 2005](#)

⁵⁸ [Senate Roll Call Vote 192, 2002](#)

⁵⁹ Washington Times, 11/06/00

⁶⁰ [CBS News, Oct 20, 2008](#)

⁶¹ [Speech transcript, April 6, 1998](#)

⁶² [S. 1302, 2005](#)

⁶³ [Senate Roll Call Vote 68, 2006](#)

Santorum is opposed to ObamaCare and advocates its full repeal.⁶⁴ In a recent interview, he said that if he were president, the second thing he would do once in office after repeal, would be to end Medicaid as a federal entitlement. “We need to give a block of money to the states. We need to pare back some of these strings attached to this money, and let the states devise their own program,” he said.⁶⁵

Santorum supports allowing people to buy health insurance across state lines and open up tax free health savings accounts.⁶⁶ But as previous stated, Santorum supported the massively expensive Medicare prescription drug program in 2003.

SCHOOL CHOICE

The Club for Growth supports broad school choice, including charter schools and voucher programs that create a competitive education market including public, private, religious, and non-religious schools. More competition in education will lead to higher quality and lower costs.

In an interview in early 2011, Santorum said, “I’ve been for school choice since the very beginning. I’ve sponsored school choice bills.”⁶⁷

That appears to be correct. As a candidate for the Senate in 1994, Santorum filled out a questionnaire in which he signaled his support for school choice. And in at least two instances, in 1997 and 2001, Santorum voted to allow a school choice program in the District of Columbia.⁶⁸ He also introduced at least one bill, in 1998, which would allow states to establish voluntary parental choice scholarship programs.⁶⁹

However, he indicated in that questionnaire that he wanted “national standards” from the federal government and he didn’t support eliminating the Department of Education.⁷⁰ This bears itself out in his record. As mentioned, Santorum supported No Child Left Behind in 2001, which greatly expanded Washington’s control over education.

Santorum now appears to have reversed course. In that same 2011 interview, Santorum said, “Well, the Department of Education is, in my opinion, unnecessary and overseeing a state bureaucracy which is already a big problem.”

While Santorum’s school choice goals move in the right direction, he undermines that with support for too much federal government control.

⁶⁴ [Press release, March 23, 2011](#)

⁶⁵ [Santorum: End Medicaid as a Federal Entitlement, CNS News, January 26, 2011](#)

⁶⁶ [Grand Rapids News, Oct. 12, 2009](#) and [Politico](#)

⁶⁷ [CNSN News, January 24, 2011](#)

⁶⁸ Senate Roll Call Vote 260, 1997 and [Senate Roll Call Vote 179, 2001](#)

⁶⁹ [S. 1996, 1998](#)

⁷⁰ [National Awareness Political Test](#)

TORT REFORM

The American economy suffers from excessive litigation which increases the cost of doing business and slows economic growth. The Club for Growth supports major reforms to our tort system to restore a more just and less costly balance in tort litigation.

Several times during his career, Santorum supported strong reforms to rein in litigation abuse. In 1995, he voted YES to putting caps on punitive damages in product liability cases⁷¹ and to restrict frivolous class action lawsuits.⁷²

He has consistently pushed for medical malpractice reform in an effort to drive down the cost of medicine.⁷³ In 2006, he sponsored a bill to cap non-economic damages related to obstetrical and gynecological services.⁷⁴ For his efforts, the Trial Lawyers of America PAC ran misleading television ads against him during his 2006 re-election campaign.⁷⁵

POLITICAL FREE SPEECH

Maximizing prosperity requires sound government policies. When government strays from these policies, citizens must be free to exercise their constitutional rights to petition and criticize those policies and the politicians responsible for them.

In the biggest political free speech debate of the last ten years, Santorum was on the right side. He voted NO on the oppressive McCain-Feingold bill in 2002, later calling it “an affront to personal freedoms and liberty.”⁷⁶

Before, in 1997, Santorum offered a campaign finance reform bill as an alternative to an earlier version of McCain-Feingold. He proposed expanding the law to ensure that “contributing to campaigns must be completely voluntary.” The practical effect of his proposal would have been that unions couldn’t use their members’ dues on political activity without their permission. But Santorum has supported a milder form of limits on political speech. Namely, he advocated low contribution limits in his 1997 bill. His proposal actually increased the individual cap from \$1,000 to \$4,000, but only for in-state residents. Out-of-state donors would still be capped at \$1,000. On the Senate floor, Santorum said, “The fact of the matter is, we have low limits. I think we should keep them relatively low, but they should be high enough so people can have some ability to form a little bit of seed corn to start a campaign if they want to run for office.”⁷⁷

⁷¹ [Senate Roll Call Vote 152, 1995](#)

⁷² [Senate Roll Call Vote 612, 1995](#)

⁷³ [HR 3918, 1994](#) and

⁷⁴ [S. 23, 2006](#)

⁷⁵ [FactCheck.org, May 12, 2006](#)

⁷⁶ [Catholic News Agency, Jan. 14, 2008](#)

⁷⁷ Congressional record, Oct 1, 1997

POLITICAL ACTIVITY & ENDORSEMENTS

With two notable exceptions, Santorum's endorsements and political activity have been nothing out of the ordinary or otherwise remarkable.

One of those exceptions came in 2009, in the special election for Congress in New York's 23rd district. Santorum was the second high profile potential presidential candidate (Sarah Palin was the first) to endorse Conservative Party candidate Doug Hoffman over liberal Republican Dede Scozzafava. This showed leadership for the limited government cause because of the timing of the endorsement, coming before establishment Republicans had figured out that Scozzafava was a losing candidate.

Santorum said, "Never in a general election have I endorsed a candidate who ran against the party's nominee, but in this race, [Conservative Party nominee] Doug Hoffman is the real Republican and more in line with the Republican Party of the district."⁷⁸

Five years before, Santorum played a leading role in perhaps the single most important intra-Republican political battle of the last decade outside of the presidential primary of 2008. Former House Majority Leader Dick Armey has called the 2004 Republican U.S. Senate primary in Pennsylvania the start of the Tea Party movement. That race featured arch-RINO incumbent Senator Arlen Specter, who switched to the Democratic Party in 2009, being challenged by pro-growth conservative champion then-Congressman Pat Toomey. The entire GOP establishment backed Specter, but despite that, Toomey came within less than two points of winning. Santorum's active role on behalf of Specter might have been the difference maker.

At the time, Santorum was chairman of the Republican Conference in the Senate, and as such, it would be expected that he would support an incumbent senator's reelection campaign in his home state. What is troubling is the aggressiveness with which Santorum backed the liberal Specter, and the lengths to which he would stoop to mislead Republican voters.

In the years that followed his controversial support of Specter, Santorum has offered a series of revisionist explanations. Those explanations have changed several times, and none of them are consistent with what he said during the 2004 campaign. The only explanation that is consistent is political expediency. Santorum was willing to jettison conservative principles when it suited him in 2004, and he wants to try to explain it away when it no longer suits him on the 2012 presidential campaign trail.

⁷⁸ [Facebook, October 24, 2009](#)

SUMMATION

On the whole, Rick Santorum's record on economic issues in the U.S. Senate was above average. More precisely, it was quite strong in some areas and quite weak in others. He has a strong record on taxes, and his leadership on welfare reform and Social Security was exemplary. But his record also contains several very weak spots, including his active support of wasteful spending earmarks, his penchant for trade protectionism, and his willingness to support large government expansions like the Medicare prescription drug bill and the 2005 Highway Bill.

As president, Santorum would most likely lead the country in a pro-growth direction, but his record contains more than a few weak spots that make us question if he would resist political expediency when it comes to economic issues.