

Educated elitists

Mamas, don't let your children grow up to be collegians. Heaven forbid, they might turn out to be educated.

In back-to-back speeches this past weekend, former U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum went into full-blown culture warrior mode. He said John F. Kennedy's 1960 speech about the separation of church and state made him want to throw up. And he called President Barack Obama a "snob" for wanting to place a college education within the reach of everyone.

"President Obama once said he wants everybody in America to go to college. What a snob," said the former senator from Pennsylvania.

"There are good, decent men and women who go out and work hard every day and put their skills to test that aren't taught by some liberal college professor to try to indoctrinate them. Oh, I understand why he wants you to go to college. He wants to remake you in his image."

Actually, it's Santorum's remarks that ought to make everyone want to throw up.

Why? Because he's pandering.

A survey for the Manufacturing Institute noted that 600,000 manufacturing jobs are going unfilled because of a shortage of skilled workers. Note the word skilled. Those workers need to be retrained at the very community colleges Obama has said are the gateway to future jobs.

Automation has made manufacturing a high-tech field. New manufacturing jobs require workers to have computer and technical skills.

"It used to be that a factory owner would say, 'I need 20 guys,' and pull them right off the street," P.J. Thompson, president of Trans-Matic, a metal-parts manufacturer, told *The Washington Post*. "Now it's: 'I need 20 guys with very specialized technical skills.' There's a mismatch."

You can be a great worker, but without the requisite skills, you won't get the job.

Santorum's disdain for higher and public education is just as eye-opening. He has referred to colleges and universities as "indoctrination centers" for the left. He dismisses climate change as a leftist plot.

Yet, in 2006, when he ran for re-election in Pennsylvania, he touted the virtues of the state's primary and secondary schools, and Santorum's 2006 campaign website pledged that he "is equally committed to ensuring every Pennsylvanian has access to higher education."

Santorum also backed President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind reform plan, but now says he didn't believe in it.

What else doesn't he believe in?

... and there is this editorial column from Ruth Marcus of *The Washington Post*:

Santorum's flip-flop

I was getting ready to write something nice about Rick Santorum. Then Santorum talked me out of it.

The nice thing was about his self-described support for Title X, the federally funded family planning program that provides contraceptive services for low-income women.

Santorum has pointed to his support for Title X in explaining his position on contraception: personally opposed but not in favor of imposing that view on others.

Hmmm, impressive. Especially impressive because Mitt Romney has said he would eliminate funding for Title X. Evidence, it would seem, that Santorum can separate his personal morality from his public policy stances.

"It's funny that I've been criticized by Gov. Romney and by Ron Paul for having voted for something called Title X which is actually federal funding of contraception," Santorum told CBS's Charlie Rose. "My public policy beliefs are that contraception should be available. Again, I've supported Title X funding."

Excellent. Except, here is Santorum, five days later, at the Arizona presidential debate:

"As Congressman Paul knows, I opposed Title X funding. I've always opposed Title X funding, but it's included in a large appropriation bill that includes a whole host of other things," Santorum said.

"What I did, because Title X was always pushed through . . . I said, well, if you're going to have Title X funding, then we're going to create something called Title XX, which is going to provide funding for abstinence-based programs."

When it comes to flip-flops, this is a land speed record. If Santorum has "always opposed Title X funding," you sure can't tell from his record.

Romney tried to call Santorum on his about-face. "You didn't say, 'This is something I was opposed to; it wasn't something I would have done,' " Romney noted. "You said this in a positive light, 'I voted for Title X.' "

The notion that this is a black mark on Santorum's record -- the fact that the Arizona audience booed Santorum when he began to explain away his vote in favor of Title X -- illustrates just how extreme the Republican debate has become.

Requiring religious institutions to spend their own money on contraceptive coverage that violates their moral views is one thing. I thought the Obama administration erred initially when it failed to exempt Catholic hospitals and charities from the requirement.

But opposing a program that prevents unwanted pregnancies -- and therefore reduces the number of abortions -- is crazy. According to estimates by the Guttmacher Institute, "contraceptive services provided at Title X-supported centers helped prevent 973,000 unintended pregnancies in 2008, which would likely have resulted in 432,600 unintended births and 406,200 abortions."

The case against Title X funding tends to center on the money the program provides to Planned Parenthood.

"Gov. Romney simply does not believe that federal taxpayer dollars should be used to fund groups that provide abortions or abortion-related services," campaign spokesman Andrea Saul told me.

This argument makes no sense, even if you accept the fungibility of money to Planned Parenthood argument. Less than a quarter of Title X funds -- \$70 million of \$327 million -- go to Planned Parenthood. As a matter of fiscal responsibility, preventing unwanted pregnancies saves money.

And if Romney, Santorum et al. want to eliminate Title X family planning money, do they also want to zero out Medicaid contraceptive coverage, which amounts to much more than Title X funding (more than \$1 billion) and which also goes to Planned Parenthood?

The candidates would do well to heed the advice of a fellow Republican: "We need to take sensationalism out of this topic," he said. "If family planning is anything, it is a public health matter."

The Republican was George H.W. Bush, then a Texas congressman, arguing for the creation of Title X in 1969. But that was four decades -- and a different Republican Party -- ago.

He refers to public education as "government education," yet he was willing to bill the Penn Hills School District near Pittsburgh \$72,000 to educate his children at home.

Despite views that are clearly on the fringe, Santorum is running nearly even with GOP front-runner Mitt Romney heading into today's Michigan primary. And polls indicate he is leading Romney in Ohio.

That someone who dismisses the importance of post-secondary education, who opposes pre-natal testing, who is against women in combat and has questioned whether mothers should work outside the home, is still in the race for the Republican presidential nomination is shocking.

Some might even say it's nauseating.