



Maloney, Sean Patrick (b. 1966)

by Linda Rapp

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Sean Patrick Maloney
campaigning for
Congress.

Long a champion of glbtq and progressive causes, Sean Patrick Maloney was elected to the United States House of Representatives from the 18th District of New York in 2012. He is the first openly gay U.S. Representative from New York state.

Maloney is a member of what he humorously described to Jonathan Miller of the *National Journal* as a "small Irish-Catholic family." He has five brothers and one sister.

Maloney's parents are Americans, but his father's work as a lumberman caused the family to live temporarily in Canada. It was during their stay in Sherbrooke, Quebec that Sean Patrick Maloney was born on July 30, 1966.

The family subsequently settled in Hanover, New Hampshire.

In high school Maloney developed an interest in history, particularly with respect to civil rights. He continued his education at Georgetown University, but after two years he transferred to the University of Virginia, from which he received a bachelor's degree in international relations in 1988.

After spending a year doing volunteer social work in Peru, Maloney enrolled in the law school of his alma mater and earned his juris doctor degree in 1992.

That same year he became involved in Bill Clinton's presidential campaign, working as a deputy to Susan Thomases, who was in charge of scheduling.

Following Clinton's victory Maloney passed the bar exam and began practicing as an attorney, but when Clinton ran for re-election in 1996, he once again joined the team, working as the director of surrogate travel.

During the second Clinton term Maloney worked in the office of Chief of Staff John Podesta and eventually became a senior West Wing advisor.

In that capacity he was one of two representatives sent by Clinton to the funeral of Matthew Shepard, the gay college student brutalized and left to die, tied to a fence outside of Laramie, Wyoming. A contemporary news article described Maloney as "the highest ranking openly homosexual man on the White House staff."

Maloney is the partner of Randy Florke, a designer and businessman. The couple has been together since 1992, when Maloney, in New York to help with the planning of the Democratic convention, met Florke, who was then working for decorator Juan Pablo Molyneux.

The couple established a household, and a third member soon joined it. The grandson of Molyneux's

chauffeur was in need of a stable environment since the boy's parents were addicted to drugs. Maloney and Florke opened their home and their hearts to the child, named Jesús, and, following the death of his mother, adopted him.

Maloney later recalled to Penelope Green of the *New York Times* that a friend had asked him, "Shouldn't you tell your parents you're gay before you adopt a child with another man?"

Maloney stated that he felt that "Jesús made it easier" for him to come out to his mother and father because it created "some common ground" for them all.

"Whatever their fears and preconceived notions were about what it meant to be gay had to be integrated with the healthy family they saw us creating," he declared to Green.

The family continued to grow as Maloney and Florke subsequently welcomed adopted daughters Daley and Essie.

(Somewhat ironically given the fact that marriage equality featured prominently in Maloney's campaign for Congress, he and Florke have not married even though same-sex marriage became legal in New York in 2011.)

When the second Clinton administration ended in 2000, Maloney took the position of chief operating officer at KiodeX, a company that specialized in commodity trading and risk management. Upon the sale of the company three years later, Maloney returned to the practice of law.

In 2004, in his capacity as legal advisor and member of the Matthew Shepard Foundation, Maloney was interviewed for an episode of the ABC News show *20/20* about the college student's murder. When the show was aired, the producers had deleted Maloney's interview entirely and utterly distorted the facts of the case, portraying the murderers of Shepard as drug addicts who were motivated only by a desire to rob Shepard and did not commit a hate crime.

The parents of Shepard were dismayed by the tabloid nature of the report and its misrepresentations. In a statement, Judy Shepard said that in the interview that was cut, Maloney "was quite eloquent in stating the facts pertaining to Matt's case, his knowledge of hate crimes in general, and in debunking *20/20's* attempt to rewrite history." Her own remarks, she said, "were reduced to a few very personal maternal comments taken out of context to make it appear as if I agreed with *20/20's* theories. That couldn't be farther from the truth."

In 2006 Maloney ran for Attorney General of New York. Receiving about 10% of the vote, he finished third in the primary election, behind Mark Green and Andrew Cuomo, the latter of whom went on to win in the general election. The following year Maloney once again took up public service as First Deputy Secretary to New York Governor Eliot Spitzer, a post that he also held in the subsequent administration of David Paterson. In the Paterson administration, he worked to increase funding for education.

During Spitzer's term Maloney was questioned about a scandal dubbed "Troopergate" that allegedly involved the use of the state police to expose financial irregularities by a political opponent of the governor. In the course of the investigation Maloney was cleared of any participation in the matter, but the issue would resurface.

Maloney left the Paterson administration in 2008 to resume the private practice of law.

He re-entered the political arena in 2012, when he declared his candidacy for the United State House of

Representatives in the 18th Congressional District of New York. After a victory in the Democratic primary, when he won 48% of the vote against four other candidates, he faced incumbent Republican Nan Hayworth in the general election.

In the contest Maloney painted Hayworth as a Tea Party extremist intent on eliminating funding for Medicare and Planned Parenthood, while Hayworth branded Maloney as a "carpetbagger" from Manhattan. She noted that he had moved into the district only a year earlier (but omitted the fact that for 16 years previously Maloney and his family had split their time between an apartment in Manhattan and a country home in nearby Sullivan county).

Hayworth attempted to raise the Troopergate scandal against Maloney, who reiterated that he had done nothing to hinder the inquiry. Andrew Grossman of the *Wall Street Journal* reported that "[g]enerally, those involved in the investigation on both sides defend Mr. Maloney's conduct." In particular he noted a comment by Steve Cohen, who had been the chief of staff to then Attorney General Cuomo and who called the idea that Maloney had impeded the investigation "misinformed to the point of being laughable."

Maloney's homosexuality proved not to be a significant issue in the campaign. Although Hayworth had some Tea Party connections, she is the mother of an openly gay man, and she received endorsements from the Log Cabin Republicans and GOProud, as well as from American Unity PAC, the group founded by billionaire hedge fund manager Paul Singer to support pro-equality Republicans.

Maloney was endorsed by the Human Rights Campaign and the Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund, as well as the *New York Times*. He also received support from his former boss Bill Clinton and from Andrew Cuomo, by then the governor of the state, and a strong glbtq ally who had helped to bring marriage equality to New York.

Both candidates supported passage of the Employment Non-discrimination Act, but, in an interview with Julie Bolcer of *The Advocate*, Maloney cited a difference between them regarding the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which he is committed to repealing.

"The bottom line is, on the most important issue of our time, marriage equality, [Hayworth] will not state a position on DOMA because she does not support marriage equality."

In 2012, when marriage equality for the first time was supported by a majority of American voters, Maloney attempted to make the race in part a referendum on the issue. For fear of losing the support of New York's Conservative Party, which endorses only candidates opposed to equal marriage rights, Hayworth refused to go any further than to state that she considered same-sex marriage a settled question in New York law. Maloney, however, pointed out that her campaign manager resigned his position as a marriage officiant because he refused to conduct same-sex marriages.

While Maloney stressed his commitment to achieving "full equality under federal law" for glbtq citizens, he also told Bolcer that he is not a single-issue politician. He said his first duty is to respond to the needs of his community. He said that "[t]he people in my district are a lot more concerned about why my opponent wants to end Medicare than who I love."

Maloney cited other issues on which he and Hayworth disagreed, including funding for Planned Parenthood--which he favors and she voted to end--and the budget plan proposed by Representative Paul Ryan, for which Hayworth voted but which Maloney decried.

Maloney won the race with 52% of the vote.

Following his victory, Maloney issued a statement saying "I'm headed to Congress fired up and ready to make this country a place where the words 'equality' and 'opportunity' carry serious weight."

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About the Author

Linda Rapp teaches French and Spanish at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. She freelances as a writer, tutor, and translator. She is Assistant to the General Editor of www.glbtc.com.