

**BUSINESS**

# Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher says it's OK not to sell homes to gays; loses support of Realtors



Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Huntington Beach (AP file photo)

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By **JEFF COLLINS** | [JeffCollins@scng.com](mailto:JeffCollins@scng.com) | Orange County Register

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U.S. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher told a group of Realtors last week that homeowners should be able to refuse to sell their property to gays and lesbians, a statement that cost him the support of a key national Realtor group.

"Every homeowner should be able to make a decision not to sell their home to someone (if) they don't agree with their lifestyle," Rohrabacher told an Orange County Association of Realtors delegation at a May 16 meeting in Washington, D.C., according to Wayne Woodyard, a former Orange County Realtor president who was at the event.

On Thursday, Rohrabacher confirmed the accuracy of the sentiment, and added that homeowners should have the right to "choose who they do business with."

"We've drawn a line on racism, but I don't think we should extend that line," Rohrabacher said.

"A homeowner should not be required to be in business with someone they think is doing something that is immoral."

The statement ignited a protest by a Realtor gay-rights group, prompting the National Association of Realtors to withdraw its recommendation that members send campaign contributions to Rohrabacher.

"It was determined that Rep. Rohrabacher will no longer receive support from NAR's President's Circle," an association statement said, referring to its list of recommended candidates. Rohrabacher's stance, the 1.3-million-member trade group said, is contrary to NAR's code of ethics, which bans discrimination on the basis of "sexual orientation or gender identity."

"We certainly hope that Congress will ... support the elimination of housing discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity."

The about-face occurred as the 15-term coastal Orange County Republican [is locked in his toughest re-election campaign](#).

He's facing 15 challengers, including eight Democrats as well as onetime political ally Scott Baugh, former Orange County GOP chairman.

"It certainly can't do me any good to have people take me off their endorsement list," said Rohrabacher, who represents California's 48th District in coastal Orange County. "It's sad to see (the association's) priority is standing in solidarity with making sure a stamp of approval is put on somebody's private lifestyle."

Harley Rouda, a Democrat who is challenging Rohrabacher and a son of a former Realtor association president, called Rohrabacher's statements "outlandish and unacceptable," saying everyone should have the same rights to buy and sell a home.

"What Dana Rohrabacher fails to understand is discrimination is discrimination," Rouda said. "It shows how backward his thinking is."

Previously Rohrabacher had been designated as a "Realtor Champion," eligible for support from top Realtor donors.

The Realtors Political Action Committee, the trade group's campaign finance arm, also donated \$5,000 to Rohrabacher's re-election campaign in December and January, campaign finance reports show. Rohrabacher also received donations from numerous agents, real estate developers and Realtor groups.

The backlash occurred after Orange County Realtors met last week with Rohrabacher during NAR's mid-year lobbying conference in Washington and asked him to support H.R. 1447, among other issues.

The measure expands the Fair Housing Act passed in 1968 to add anti-discrimination protections based on a person's sexual orientation and gender identity. The existing law already forbids home sellers, landlords and lenders from discrimination based on a person's race, color, religion, sex or national origin.

Rohrabacher's remarks sparked outrage among gay and lesbian Realtors after Woodyard posted them on Facebook. The founder of a real estate gay-rights group then wrote to NAR President Elizabeth Mendenhall requesting the association revoke its support of Rohrabacher.

"When a supposed champion of the Realtor Party outright states that housing discrimination should be lawful, I hope you agree there should be cause for concern," wrote Jeff Berger, a Florida agent and founder of the National Association of Gay & Lesbian Real Estate Professionals. "Ignoring the congressman's comments belies the decades of serious work and progress NAR has made in the area of fair housing."

Rohrabacher denied he's trying to shore up his conservative flank in the face of opposition from Baugh. Indeed, he said, his stance likely will "alienate a certain number of gays who think I'm anti-gay, which isn't the case."

Rohrabacher added he vehemently opposes housing discrimination based on race, religion or a person's sex.

But, he said, "there are some fundamentalist Christians who do not approve of their lifestyle. I support their rights." He also said he believes the Realtor association's stance is "way out of sync" with its own industry.

Rohrabacher distinguished race-based discrimination from choosing not to do business with someone because of their lifestyle or political beliefs.

Homeowners, for example, shouldn't be allowed to deny a sale to an interracial couple, he said.

But Democrats or Republicans should be able to refuse a home sale to people with opposing political views.

Would Rohrabacher, who uses a medical marijuana cream to ease his arthritis and supports relaxed penalties for cannabis use, be OK if a home seller refused to do business with him based on that lifestyle choice?

"Yes," Rohrabacher said. "Absolutely."

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**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION** For more than a decade, Jeff Collins has followed housing and real estate, covering market booms and busts and all aspects of the real estate industry. He has been tracking rents and home prices, and has explored solutions to critical problems such as Southern California's housing shortage and affordability crisis. Before joining the Orange County Register in 1990, he covered a wide range of topics for daily newspapers in Kansas, El Paso and Dallas. A Southern California native, he studied at UC Santa Barbara and UC Irvine. He later earned a master's degree from the USC School of Journalism.

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