Rick Santorum, who has compared gay marriage to bestiality, at the Republican national convention. Photograph: Benjamin J Myers/Corbis

High above the Republican national convention, on the 41st floor of a downtown Tampa skyscraper, the Young

"As conservatives we believe that the freedom to marry is directly in line with the core ideals and principles of the Republican party – less government, more individual freedom, personal responsibility and the importance of family," the ad read.

Margaret Hoover, great-granddaughter of Herbert and a former George W Bush campaign official, is on Freedom to Marry's leadership committee and a staunch believer that the party must modernise. Hoover appealed to the core values of the Republican party in an address to the young conservatives on Wednesday.

"If you believe in conservatism, if you believe in individual freedom, if you believe that people take care of people, the government doesn't take care of people, and if you want to have societies based on strong relationships, the fundamental relationship in any community is the partnership that you make with your spouse.

"I believe every American should have that freedom, and that is wholly consistent with being a party of individual freedom."

The problem for pro-equality Republicans is that they are a relatively small voice within their party, whose right-wing is dominated by those whose Christian faith heavily influences their stance on social issues.

The uphill battle they face was exemplified during the Republican primary campaign, where Rick Santorum, a man who has attracted criticism for comparing gay marriage to bestiality, was the candidate to run Mitt Romney closest. Tony Perkins, president of the right-wing Family Research Council, was involved in drafting the GOP platform, which

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