

US Presidential election shows why Tories must back gay marriage or lose power, George Osborne warns

- Chancellor says Mitt Romney's defeat in race for the White House shows winning the economic argument is not enough
- Tory election strategist invokes Margaret Thatcher's message that political parties only win when they reflect modern society
- Backbenchers will rebel against gay marriage legislation as former defence minister warns military chaplains could be sacked if they oppose the policy

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George Osborne invoked Margaret Thatcher's warning that political parties could only be successful if they reflect modern society

Conservative hopes of winning the next election depend on publicly backing gay marriage, George Osborne warned today.

With dozens of Tory backbenchers expected to oppose legislation in the parliament, the Chancellor insisted the legislation of same-sex marriage was backed by 'a clear majority' of Brits.

Mr Osborne, who is also Tory party election strategist, invoked Margaret Thatcher's belief that political parties can only be successful if they reflect modern society.

The first sentence of her introduction to the 1979 Conservative Election manifesto read: 'The heart of politics is not

political theory, it is people and how they want to live their lives.'

However, Mr Osborne's argument that backing gay marriage must be part of further Tory party modernisation is likely to anger traditionalists who claim the project failed to win the election in 2010.

Today former Tory defence minister Sir Gerald Howarth claimed military chaplains could be disciplined or even sacked for upholding traditional marriage if the legislation goes through.

But Mr Osborne drew parallels with the US Presidential election, noting that the Republican Mitt Romney won the economic argument with American voters, but Democrat Barack Obama – who backed gay marriage - was supported by more people for his social policies. Mr Osborne also made clear that he opposes any cut from the current 24-week abortion limit.

'I should declare my personal position on these social issues: I wouldn't change the current abortion laws and I strongly support gay marriage on principle,' Mr Osborne wrote in The Times.

'Of course in Britain these issues are ones of individual conscience and free votes, but I am proud to be part of a Government that will introduce a Bill to allow gay marriage.

'It is worth reflecting that in Britain, as in America, a clear majority of the public support gay marriage, and an even bigger majority of women support it. That majority support is just as high in the North as it is the South, and it is equally high among all socio-economic groups.

'Successful political parties reflect the modern societies they aspire to lead. As Margaret Thatcher said in the first sentence of her introduction to the 1979 Conservative Election manifesto: "The heart of politics is not political theory, it is people and how they want to live their lives".'



US President Barack Obama used an ABC News interview in May this year to say he believed same-sex couples should be allowed to marry

Political strategists have long argued that it is the 'economy, stupid' which wins elections. But Mr Osborne said social issues swung the result in America.

'It is astonishing that Mr Romney won the election among men by a clear-cut margin of 7 per cent but it was Mr Obama's 11 per cent lead among women that won it for the President, even though many of those that voted Democrat thought Mr Romney would manage the economy better,' said the Chancellor.



Former defence minister Sir Gerald Howarth has warned the Ministry of Defence that military chaplains could be sacked if they oppose gay marriage

'President Obama's high-profile endorsement of equal marriage for gay couples also enthused younger voters. But polls found that a majority of all Americans supported him on the issue and voted for it in all four states that held ballots.'

The Chancellor's intervention is likely to cause further tensions between the Tory leadership and backbenchers who have warned against backing gay marriage.

Sir Gerald Howarth, who was sacked from the Ministry of Defence in September's reshuffle, has written to Defence Secretary Philip Hammond to warn about the impact on military chaplains.

Sir Gerald said: 'Under the Government's proposals if the definition of marriage is rewritten, then those chaplains who maintain their support for the traditional/biblical meaning could face disciplinary action and even dismissal.'

Colin Hart, campaign director of the Coalition for Marriage, which opposes same-sex weddings, said:

'David Cameron keeps promising that this proposal is popular and will not have any adverse effects, but here we have a former defence minister in very stark language saying this is simply not true.'

'All the polling shows that a majority of voters don't back the changes and the public is increasingly hostile to the Government's plans.'