Republican governors’ words shift on gay marriage

By Steve Peoples

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Deep in the history of the Bible Belt, new signs emerged this weekend of divided American families and governors on gay marriage, an explosive social issue that has long been defined by social conservatives as the Great Divide.

While the Republican Party’s religious conservatives continue to fight against same-sex marriage, its governors appear to be backing off of their opposition—in their rhetoric, at least. For some, the shift may be more of a matter of tone than substance as the GOP tries to attract new voters ahead of the midterm elections. Nonetheless, it is a tactical move for a party that has long been defined by social conservative values.

“I don’t think the Republican Party is fighting it,” Wisconsin Republican Gov. Scott Walker told The Associated Press during an interview this weekend at the National Governors Association in Nashville. “I’m not saying it’s not important,” continued Walker, who is considering a 2016 presidential bid should he survive his re-election test this fall. “But Republicans haven’t been talking about this. We’ve been talking about economic and fiscal issues. That’s on the left that are pushing it.”

Walker, like other ambitious Republican governors, is trying to strike a delicate balance.

If three dozen trains load frac sand each week, there are no delays in addition to safety concerns.

While the number of Wisconsin car-train accidents has remained relatively steady in recent years — and derailments actually are down — some residents who live near train tracks used for transporting sand, primarily in western and northwestern Wisconsin, complain about noise and traffic delays in addition to safety worries.

Chippewa Falls resident Patrick Poppo, an activist opposed to frac sand mining, recalls that train traffic in his neighborhood near River Park Saturday in Sheboygan Falls.

While the Republican Party is fighting it, Wisconsin. It found:

» Rail tracks that had not been used in decades now are chugging through Wisconsin. Last week, The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism examined concerns surrounding rail transportation of frac sand in Wisconsin.

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