

HOMOSEXUALS

Gay Politicians Say Losses Are Partly Offset by Gains

By DAVID W. DUNLAP

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DALLAS, Nov. 13 — Although they lost several major allies and face a far more conservative and hostile Congress, lesbian and gay political leaders said Tuesday's election was not a repudiation by voters of the gay rights movement.

"People are in mourning, as they well should be," said Sheila James Kuehl, speaking here at a conference sponsored by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "Yet, we defeated two anti-gay initiatives, and 24 lesbian or gay officials were re-elected or newly elected."

On Tuesday, Ms. Kuehl became the first openly homosexual candidate elected to the California Legislature, winning in a State Assembly district that includes Santa Monica. Her presence here caused a stir, not only because of her victory but because she is widely remembered for playing the character Zelda Gilroy on the "Dobie Gillis Show."

The initiatives she referred to, in Oregon and Idaho, would have prohibited laws protecting homosexuals, as a class, from discrimination in housing and employment. The measures would also have restricted minors' access to materials about homosexuality in public libraries and would have forbidden public school teachers from presenting homosexuality as normal.

"Basic rights have been defended in Oregon," said Julie Davis, campaign manager for the No on 13 Committee, named for the defeated initiative there, Measure 13.

Oregon voters also re-elected four openly homosexual or bisexual members of the 60-seat House of Representatives. A fifth gay candidate was in a race that was still too close to call.

Voters in Phoenix sent an openly gay man, Ken Chevront, to the Arizona House of Representatives for the first time. Two of five seats open on San Francisco's Board of Supervisors were won by lesbians and another seat was won by a gay man. Three gay United States Representatives — Barney Frank and Gerry E. Studds of Massachusetts and Steve Gunderson of Wisconsin — were re-elected.

While homosexual candidates made strides in local races around the nation, however, two statewide candidates lost: Karen S. Burstein, who ran for Attorney General in New York, and Tony Miller, who ran for Secretary of State in California.

"We've grown to the point where we can be elected locally," Ms. Kuehl said, "but not yet to the point where we can be elected statewide."

When some 1,000 gay and lesbian organizers from around the country began arriving on Wednesday for the five-day strategy session convened by the task force, they did so knowing that political allies like Gov. Ann W. Richards of Texas had gone down to defeat.

"People were not only frustrated but fearful, saying things like, 'This is looking like a scarier place to live,'" said Deborah Johnson-Rolon, co-chairwoman of the task force, a national organization that advocates equality and civil rights for homosexuals.

She said the mood changed as word spread that two dozen gay officials had been elected and that Measure 13 in Oregon and a similar measure, Proposition 1 in Idaho, had been rejected, although a similar initiative passed in Alachua County, Fla., whose seat is Gainesville.

"We realized that we really were making a significant amount of progress," Ms. Johnson-Rolon said.

Peri Jude Radecic, executive director of the task force, said the rejection of the referendums in the

Homosexuals were elected and anti-gay measures defeated.

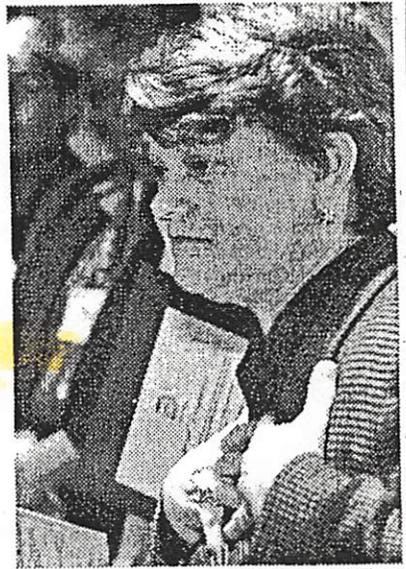
West was "a good, clear signal to the radical right that these kinds of initiatives won't be tolerated." But she also noted that voters had sent any number of highly conservative candidates to Congress and the state houses.

State Representative Glen Maxey, the first openly gay man elected to the Texas Legislature, in 1991, also found mixed signals this campaign season. Though he won re-election in East Austin, he said he had never seen such a high level of violence against homosexuals.

"A half-dozen gay men have been murdered in this state alone," he said. "In this election, I received a death threat. Someone said they were going to vote with a bullet."

Like many speakers at the conference, Mr. Maxey stressed the need for gay organizations to build bridges to other groups.

"Unless we align ourselves to fight



Mark Graham for The New York Times

Sheila James Kuehl, the first openly homosexual candidate elected to the California State Assembly.

hate and fear, we'll all hang separately," said Vallerie D. Wagner, co-chairwoman of the Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum, based in Los Angeles.

Diane Sands, campaign manager for the No on 1 Coalition in Idaho, credited defeat of that measure to a "broad grass-roots coalition," including every major newspaper and elected official, corporations, librarians, two orders of nuns and Mormons.

"Mormons understand discrimination," she said. "Until a few years ago, it was in the Idaho Constitution that a Mormon couldn't hold public office."

Kelly A. Walton, chairman of the Idaho Citizens Alliance, which sponsored the proposition, blamed the defeat on money, saying the other side had a lot more for radio and television advertising. He said the alliance spent \$190,000. The No on 1 Coalition spent about \$600,000, Ms. Sands said.

It appeared that the measure would lose by 50.4 percent to 49.6 percent, Mr. Walton said in a telephone interview, adding, "They out-gunned us financially, and the media were opposed. Yet they only eked out a 3,000-vote margin."

Mr. Walton said he was encouraged to try again in 1996 and would also work to get similar measures on ballots in neighboring Washington and Nevada.

Lon T. Mabon, chairman of the conservative Oregon Citizens Alliance, which sponsored Measure 13, said he would also try again. He noted that Measure 13 had fared better than the alliance's previous referendum, in 1992, which would have classified homosexuality as "abnormal, wrong, unnatural and perverse."