

opinion

POLITICAL VIEWS FROM THE KINGDOM

by **brendan hadash**



Advice to Republicans

If Republicans want to win the house in Vermont, I have a suggestion. If they find candidates who are gay or lesbian -- or are better than the Democrat on gay/lesbian issues in each district -- they will win. I can prove this.

Surveys show that about 5 percent of voters identify themselves as gay or lesbian. Many in the closet would lie to surveyors so the number could well be double that. If they each have one straight friend, then 5 percent to 20 percent of voters would vote for a candidate who is good on gay/lesbian issues. When Republicans support gays and lesbians they win or do much better than expected as they did in this November's elections. Let me give two examples.

Plattsburgh

In Plattsburgh, in a major upset, Republican Daniel Stewart defeated 10-year Democratic incumbent Clyde Rabideau becoming the first openly gay mayor in New York State. In Plattsburgh, though, Democrats outnumber Republicans, Stewart won because he had the strong backing of the Empire State Pride Agenda, the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, and Log Cabin Republicans.

Who is Stewart? After Stewart had spent eight years in the closet in the Air Force in Plattsburgh, he left and became an activist, starting a local ACT UP chapter and encouraging mayor Rabideau to introduce a measure banning discrimination based on sexual orientation in the city government. He left the Republican Party in the 1980s because of its anti-gay rhetoric. GOP leaders, citing the party's softening stance on gay issues, persuaded him to rejoin the party.

Empire State Pride Agenda (a gay/lesbian state organization) had endorsed mayor Rabideau in previous elections. The choice was difficult. Stewart is gay and a strong Republican proponent of gay civil rights; however, Rabideau had had a long history of working with gays and proposed several gay civil rights measures while in office. ESPA decided it was more important to support a gay candidate rather than one who was just pro-gay.

Philadelphia

In Philadelphia, Democrats have a 4-to-1 edge over Republicans. Republican Sam Katz should have received only 25 percent of the vote. He got 49 percent and came within 1 percent of pulling off the greatest upset in the country. Again, the way he did this was by appealing to the gay/lesbian vote.

For the first time in history, the gay/lesbian community supported a Republican candidate for mayor. Pride

of Philadelphia Election Committee, the Pennsylvania Gay and Lesbian Alliance, and the Log Cabin Republicans supported Katz over Democrat John Street. Even the Liberty City Democratic Club considered a bylaw amendment that would allow them to endorse a Republican, but decided to remain officially neutral. The National Stonewall

Democratic Federation also remained neutral.

Gay/lesbian groups endorsed and worked for a Republican because he courted them. Katz had supported a domestic partners bill, and spoke out in favor of virtually all issues considered important to gays, because he had a gay brother who died of AIDS in 1994. Katz promised to work to widen protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and to have an administration that includes gays and lesbians.

Democrat John Street opposed the gay/lesbian community during his 19 years as president of the Philadelphia City Council. He even had declined, until late in the election, to meet with gay leaders. He had opposed having the council adopt a gay pride resolution to commemorate Philadelphia's Gay Pride festivities. He led the opposition to a domestic partners bill to provide health insurance to partners of city workers. When the council passed the bill, Street joined an effort by anti-gay forces to file a lawsuit to overturn the domestic partners law.

I believe that Republican Sam Katz got 24 percent more of the vote than he should have because he supported the gay/lesbian community. We have a tremendous power if we choose to use it.

Vermont

Now I come to Vermont. We know our allies and foes this year, because an anti-gay bill (H.479) has been introduced in the house. This bill would change the Vermont constitution to forbid gay marriage. A number of Democrats have co-sponsored the bill. If Republicans were smart they would find pro-gay candidates to run against these Democrats, and I believe they would defeat them.

The Democrats supporting H. 479 are Allard of St. Albans Town, Atkins of Winooski, Blanchard of Essex,

Dominick of Starksboro, Gervais of Enosburg, Gretkowski of Burlington, Hoag of Woodford, Howrigan of Fairfield, Krawczyk of Bennington, Lehman of Hartford, McNamara of Burlington, Pembroke of Bennington, Starr of Troy, Valsangiacomo of Barre City, and Willett of St. Albans City.

The Republicans supporting the bill are Baker of West Rutland, Barney of

of Ferrisburg, Hudson of Lyndon, Larocque of Barnet, Larrabee of Danville, Marron of Stowe, Maslack of Poultney, Mazur of South Burlington, McGrath of Ferrisburg, Morrissey of Bennington, Mullin of Rutland Town, O'Donnell of Vernon, Palmer of Pownal, Peaslee of Guildhall, Pike of Mendon, Pratt of Castleton, Quaid of Williston, Richardson of Weathersfield, Schaefer of Colchester, Schiavone of Shelburne, Sheltra of Derby, Sherman of St. Johnsbury, Smith of New Haven, Sweetser of Essex, Towne of Berlin, Winters of Williamstown, Wood of Brandon, and Young of Orwell. (Randall of Bradford also supported the bill.)

If you are in any of these districts, contact your legislator and express your displeasure. We cannot allow legislators to support anti-gay bills in this state and get away with it. If your legislators are

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Highgate, Bourdeau of Hyde Park, Brown of Walden, Buckland of Newport Town, Clark of St. Johnsbury, Cleland of Northfield, DePoy of Rutland City, Flory of Pittsford, Fyfe of Newport City, Gray of Barre Town, Hathaway of Barton, Helm of Castleton, Holmes of Bethel, Houston

not on this list, please contact them and thank them. The gay/lesbian vote in Vermont is one of the largest identifiable voting blocks in the state. If we stand together, we have tremendous power. ▼

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