

opinion

**POLITICAL VIEWS
FROM THE KINGDOM**
by **brendan hadash**



Holiday Surprises in the House

I was surprised when Bernie Sanders decided to run for re-election. As far as the US House goes, this is very good news for gay and lesbian Vermonters – although it would have been fun to see how he'd fare against Senator Jeffords.

Bernie is one of our strongest supporters in Congress. He was one of only 67 house members to support us by voting against the horrible Defense of Marriage Act, a bill 342 House members supported.

I had an even greater surprise, however, when I decided to look at individual House races across the country.

First, let's set the scene. The experts say that Democrats have a 50-50 chance of winning the House. They just need to win five seats to do it. The easiest seats to win are open seats where there are no incumbents. At this point, there are nineteen seats open because of Republicans retiring or running for other offices and only five open seats that the Democrats will have to defend. Of these open seats, at least 12 are considered potentially competitive. Nine of those seats belong to Republicans, compared to three held by Democrats. This bodes well for the Democrats.

Democrats winning the House next

year would be good for gays and lesbians simply because whoever wins the most seats gets to choose the leaders, and the leaders set the agenda. When you compare the Democratic leaders

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The Human Rights Campaign lists four bills that are important for gays and lesbians: the Hates Crimes Prevention Act; Patients' Bill of Rights; Early Treatment for HIV Act; and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. Democratic Minority leader Richard Gephardt and Minority Whip David Bonior are co-sponsors of all four of these bills. None of the Republican leaders – Speaker Dennis Hastert,

Majority Leader Richard Arme, or Majority Whip Tom DeLay – have co-sponsored any of them.

When you look at actual votes, the difference is even more striking. Of ten bills listed by HRC as important to gays and lesbians, the Republican leaders voted against us every time they voted. The Democratic leaders voted for us nine out of ten times. The one exception was the Religious Liberty Protection Act, and frankly, I'm not sure whether that one would have hurt us or not.

I found a stunning surprise when I turned to the records of the incumbents in the 12 races that are supposed to be the closest in the country. The Republican representatives in question are Baker, Louisiana; Cook, Utah; Dickey, Arkansas; Fletcher, Kentucky; Hostettler, Indiana; Rogan, California; Sherwood, Pennsylvania. The Democrats are Bonior, Michigan;

as important to our community, no Republican voted in our favor more than once. In the same votes, no Democrat voted for fewer than eight of our issues. Look at the four current issues before Congress important to gays and lesbians. None of the above Republicans have co-sponsored any. Of the Democrats, Bonior co-sponsored all four and the others each co-sponsored three.

In short, in the closest races, the Republicans in danger of losing their seats are not supportive of our issues, and the Democrats are among our greatest supporters. If someone wanted to make a cost-effective financial contribution to fight homophobia in the upcoming election, one could not do better than donate to the Democrat in each of these twelve races.

This stands in dramatic contrast with several close US Senate Races such as Rhode Island, New York, and Vermont, where both the Democrat and Republican are substantially supportive of gays and lesbians.

For my early Christmas present next year, all I want is for the seven unsupportive Republican House members listed above to lose and the five supportive Democrats to win. Is that too much to ask?

Brendan Hadash is the minister of the St. Johnsbury Universalist Church.

Forbes, New York; Hoeffel, Pennsylvania; Holt, New Jersey; Maloney, Connecticut.

In the ten votes selected by the HRC

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