

NATIONAL

The Salvation Army has rescinded a decision to extend health benefits to the domestic partners of its employees in a regional division. The turnabout came as a result of a pressure campaign by anti-gay organizations forcing the group to backtrack on a policy that only weeks ago it said was "made on the basis of moral and ethical reasoning."

After a weeklong barrage of lobbying from the extreme right wing, the Salvation Army's national leadership instituted a new policy Nov. 12 stripping regional divisions of the authority to make decisions on expanding health benefits. The new directive rescinded the group's Nov. 1 decision allowing its Western Corporation in Long Beach, Calif., to provide coverage for the domestic partners of its employees.

"Today, the Commissioners' Conference established a national policy to extend health benefit access to an employee's spouse and dependent children only," Commissioner Lawrence R. Moretz said. "I assure you, again, that the Salvation Army has not changed its position on marriage and the family, homosexuality or other position statements, nor have we changed any of our basic doctrines or moral positions. In rescinding the policy and establishing a national policy on health care benefit access to spouses and dependent children only, we must stand united in the battle that will undoubtedly follow from those who would now challenge our biblical and traditional position. We will not sign any government contract or any other funding contracts that contain domestic partner benefit requirements."

Elizabeth Birch, Human Rights Campaign executive director, was "dismayed" at the action. "If this decision stands, the Salvation Army will have unambiguously identified itself as an anti-gay organization," she said.

In a statement earlier this month announcing the policy to extend employee benefits to domestic partners, Col. Phillip D. Needham, Western Corporation chief secretary, said changes in the American family dictated a change in policy. "This decision reflects our concern for the health of our employees and those closest to them and is made on the basis of strong ethical and moral reasoning that reflects the dramatic changes in family structure in recent years."



Lawrence R. Moretz

while, a Houston city proposition to ban domestic partnership passed by a narrow margin.

In a 58 percent victory, Traverse City voters rejected changing the local charter to prohibit measures granting gay men, lesbians or bisexuals "protected" status. The anti-gay American Family Association prompted the proposal after the city commission passed a resolution opposing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

If passed, the amendment would have reversed that resolution and stopped future gay equality measures in the city. "We are completely delighted to see that the people of Traverse City said 'no' to discrimination despite the

American Family Association's scare tactics," said Bonnie Deigh, Traverse City Campaign Against Discrimination co-chairwoman.

A similar city charter amendment in Kalamazoo failed with 54 percent of the voters supporting equality. In the Detroit suburb of Huntington Woods, 69 percent voted to uphold an ordinance approved by the city commission earlier this year prohibiting anti-gay discrimination.

"Michigan voters have soundly defeated these anti-gay ballot measures and took a stand for diversity and acceptance. This is a clean sweep," said Sean Kosofsky, Triangle Foundation policy director. "The AFA's message of discrimination will not fly in Michigan, and we strongly encourage them to heed the message from voters and stop their anti-gay crusade."

In Miami Beach, 65.7 percent voted for Measure 102, which offers health care coverage to domestic partners of city employees. And 68.5 percent favored Measure 115, which expands pension benefits to cover the domestic partners of fire and police workers.

The wins help reverse the legacy of Anita Bryant, who launched the modern anti-gay movement with her successful 1977 "Save the Children" campaign to overturn a Dade nondiscrimination ordinance. This is the first time county residents have voted on gay equality issues since her divisive effort.

"Consistent grassroots organizing has an impact," SaveDade chairman Jorge Mursuli said. "Four years ago even our supporters were skeptical about our ability to succeed. Today, we have nearly 70 percent of the voters with us. It is a testament to our ability to organize."

A House-Senate committee compromise Nov. 6 on an anti-gay amendment sponsored by U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., diminished its impact by stripping it of harmful language.

The amendment, which passed the Senate 51-49 and in the House on voice vote, prohibits federal funding to schools that choose not to offer facilities to Boy Scout troops because of the national organization's discriminatory policy banning gays. If the Helms language had survived the House-Senate committee conference, it might have withheld funding from schools that elected not to sponsor Boy Scout troops—a process that is much more expansive than allowing equal access.

But during the conference, U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., made sure the provision was eliminated, mitigating the potential damage of the amendment. "While we are disappointed and would have preferred the complete elimina-



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Voters overwhelmingly supported the rights of sexual minorities in five out of six ballot measures Nov. 6.



Sean Kosofsky

Three anti-gay efforts in the Michigan cities of Huntington Woods, Kalamazoo and Traverse City—two to enact discriminatory city charter amendments and one to repeal a civil rights law—were rejected by strong margins. Also,

two favorable Miami Beach measures passed in Dade County, Fla., to extend domestic partnership coverage to same-sex employees. Mean-

Continued on Page 20

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