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NATIONAL news

A REPUBLICAN ROMP

Crushing defeat stalls gay agenda
by Bob Roehr

Election Day was very good to Republicans at the national level, particularly for one named George W. Bush. He put his prestige on the line by campaigning tirelessly for key candidates during the last few weeks, and the gamble paid off. It reversed historic trends in which the party of the president inevitably loses congressional seats during midterm elections.

In virtually every close race where Bush put in a campaign appearance, his presence more than tipped the balance toward victory. Winnie Stachelberg, Human Rights Campaign political director, called it "a crushing defeat for the Democrats."

"Bush put a new face on the Republican Party," said Rich Tafel, Log Cabin Republicans executive director. He saw victories in the Northeast as "a resurgence of Republican moderates" and the general outcome as yet another nail in the coffin of a queer political strategy that relies only upon the Democratic Party.

The big news was the Senate, where 50-49 Democratic control will flip to Republican control, likely 52-47 once the Louisiana runoff is completed. Jim Jeffords of Vermont is the lone Independent.

The most immediate impact likely will be votes on judicial nominees that liberals had bottled up in committee. The path will not be assured as Democrats still can filibuster individual nominees, and it takes 60 votes to end that debate. It also might ease the way for passage of Bush's faith-based initiative.

Republican Gordon Smith of Oregon ran the first-ever television ad by a candidate touting support for a pro-gay bill. The spot featured Judy Shepard, mother of the late Matthew Shepard, and the senator's championing of hate crimes legislation. He rolled to victory with 58 percent of the vote.

In the Carolinas, aging Republican Sens. Jesse Helms and Strom Thurmond will be succeeded respectively by Elizabeth Dole and Lindsey Graham. Graham's opponent resorted to gay-baiting during the closing days of the campaign, criticizing an ad featuring former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani for rooming with a gay couple when he separated from his wife.

Republicans padded their slim control of the House of Representatives with the final total likely to add a handful of seats. Perhaps the toughest loss for the queer community was that



Rep. Connie Morella of Maryland, one of the few pro-gay House Republicans, was defeated in her bid for re-election

of Maryland's Connie Morella—one of the small number of Republicans in that body who had a 100 percent rating with HRC.

She often was the first and sometimes the only GOP co-sponsor of pro-gay legislation, and she led the struggle for increased AIDS funding on both sides of the aisle. She consistently had won re-election in the Democratic-leaning district but was unable to overcome partisan redistricting that sliced off Republican and added Democratic areas within the boundaries.

"She did anything we asked," said Tafel, reflecting the view of gay lobbyists across the political spectrum. He called her defeat the only dark spot of Election Day and "a tragedy" that she will not be there in the next session of Congress to bring queer issues before the Republican leadership.

Two of the few anti-gay Democratic members of Congress lost their bids for re-election when redistricting forced them to run against Republican colleagues. Ronnie Shows of Mississippi introduced an amendment to the constitution to prevent same-sex marriage, and David Phelps of Illinois was one of two Democratic co-sponsors.

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