

Gay Rights Supporters Win 4 of 5 Fights in Election 2001

Pro-Gay Candidates Diaz & Dermer Elected Mayor in Miami, Miami Beach

By Ron Gunzburger

Election 2001 produced some favorable results for supporters of the gay rights cause. Of five major gay rights-related issues on ballots around the nation, the pro-gay side won four of those contests. Pro-gay candidates also scored several key victories.

In Miami Beach, voters supported the city's plan to provide benefits to the domestic partners of city employees.

Voters in two Michigan cities — Kalamazoo and Traverse City — rejected amendments proposed by Religious Right groups seeking to block those cities from enacting laws protecting gays from discrimination. Voters in Huntington Woods, Michigan, voted to preserve a city ordinance that banned anti-gay discrimination.

The only loss came in Houston, Texas, where voters narrowly approved a city charter amendment prohibiting the city from offering benefits to the same-sex domestic partners of city

employees.

In local elections, Cuban-American attorney and Democratic fundraiser Manny Diaz was elected Miami Mayor in a hotly contested race. Diaz was endorsed by the pro-gay SAVE Dade political action committee. Incumbent Mayor Joe Carollo (R) placed third and was eliminated in the primary contest.

City Commissioner David Dermer defeated former State Rep. Elaine Bloom in the run-off contest for Miami Beach Mayor. While both Dermer and Bloom are pro-gay,

SAVE Dade suffered a minor loss here by endorsing Bloom. The race, however, was largely defined in terms of Dermer's support for environmental preservation versus Bloom's heavy financial support from many of the region's powerful developers.

In Virginia, cellular phone magnate Mark Warner (D) was elected Governor by a 54 percent to 46 percent vote over Religious Right candidate Mark Earley (R). Warner pledged to support gay rights legislation. Attorney General Earley, playing on that issues, briefly used the slogan

"Virginia values, not Vermont values" to taunt Warner. Richmond Mayor Tim Kaine (D), a liberal who supports civil union legislation for gay couples, was elected Lieutenant Governor in a very close race.

In New Jersey, Woodbridge Mayor Jim McGreevey (D) was elected Governor by a landslide margin over an anti-gay conservative opponent. McGreevey opposes restrictions on adoptions by lesbians and gay men. He also supports extending domestic partner benefits to state employees.

Business news media mogul Mike Bloomberg, a Democrat-turned-Republican and gay rights supporter, was elected New York City Mayor. Retiring incumbent Rudy Giuliani (R) endorsed Bloomberg in the final week of the campaign, giving underdog Bloomberg the momentum he needed to win the race. Although the Democrats hold a 5-to-1 registration advantage over Republicans in the city, Bloomberg won by capturing the support of nearly half of the city's Hispanic voters and 25 percent of the black voters.



Mark Warner



Jim McGreevey



Manny Diaz



David Dermer

Miami Beach Says Yes to Domestic Benefits

Anita Bryant Just 'A Bad Memory'

Miami-Dade County voters in Miami Beach have approved a ballot measure offering health care coverage to the domestic partners of gay and lesbian city employees.

With 100 precincts reporting, 65.7 percent, or 6,415 voters said yes to the measure, while 34.3 percent, or 3,343, said no.

The city's current health plan only includes coverage for spouses and dependent children for its 1,728 city employees.

A domestic partner is defined as a committed relationship between two people who consider themselves as a member of

each other's immediate family and have registered their partnership with the city.

Earlier this year, the city commission unanimously supported putting the issue on the ballot for voters to decide in this city of nearly 88,000 people.

A second ballot measure that would offer survivor benefits to the domestic partners of police officers and firefighters was approved,



Jorge Mursuli

with 68.5 percent, or 6,674 votes, cast for the measure and 31.5 percent, or 3,062 votes, against.

Jorge Mursuli, chair of SaveDade, commented on the victories: "Consistent grassroots organizing has an impact. 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. We are grateful to everyone."

Mursuli complimented the National Gay

and Lesbian Task Force for its assistance. They had sent a field organizer, Dan Hawes, into Dade work with the Miami Beach Workplace Equality campaign on voter education and get out the vote efforts. NGLTF training director Dave Fleischer had also worked with Save Dade in early stages of the voter identification efforts.

The vote was historic since it was the first time since 1977 that voters anywhere in Dade County have considered a GLBT issue at the ballot box. The last was Anita Bryant's Save Our Children crusade when voters repealed of Dade County's human rights ordinance. Said a happy SAVE Dade supporter, "She is just a bad memory."

Toy Drive For Children Planned for Holiday

A nonprofit HIV/AIDS agency, The Center for Positive Connections (TCPC) is sponsoring a Holiday Party for 100 children living with or affected by HIV/AIDS on Saturday, December 15th, at the North Miami

Jaycees/Knights of Columbus Hall in North Miami. The party includes food, entertainment, karaoke sing-a-longs, temporary tattoos, face painting and Santa Claus.

Several local businesses and agencies including the Knights of Columbus, North Miami Jaycees, Michelle Pommier Enterprises, Vista Models and a local foundation, Action

for AIDS, have joined together to get the South Florida community to recognize that as a united effort, a positive change can be made in these children's lives.

"We are going to



bring smiles to the faces of 100 kids who might not have a Christmas this Holiday Season" said Sheri Kaplan, founder and Executive Director of The Center for Positive Connections. "Without the community's support, we could not achieve our goal."

Positive Connections, in its 7th year of operation, is funded by foundation & government grants & community support. TCPC's mission is to provide emotional, educational, & social support and holistic services to individuals living with HIV/AIDS, with an emphasis on heterosexuals, the newly diagnosed, and their family and friends.

TCPC began in 1995 as a monthly social

event for heterosexuals living with HIV/AIDS. Today, there are over 1,000 members, and the Center offers a variety of services, including support groups, social activities, counseling, a gym, educational lectures, acupuncture, massage, reiki, iridology, a speakers bureau, a monthly newsletter and more.

New unwrapped toys for toddlers up to 17 year olds and financial contributions are being accepted, please drop them off at the Center Monday thru Friday, noon to eight or call Sheri Kaplan at 305-891-2066 to arrange for a pickup or to volunteer your time or join the Holiday Party planning committee.

Director of Community-Based Organization to Step Down

Jeffrey Wilkinson Leaving South Beach AIDS Project, Joins Miamigo

By Michael James

Jeffrey Wilkinson, the Executive Director of the South Beach AIDS Project (SoBAP), announced this week that he is stepping down from his position with the organization.

Wilkinson, who has been with the organization since June of 1998, will be the new Editor-in-chief of *Miamigo* magazine, a leading upscale South Florida monthly targeting the GLBT community and its supporters.

His last official day will be Friday, November 30, though he will remain available during any subsequent transition period. In leaving his staff position, Wilkinson will also continue to do volunteer

work on special projects for the organization.

Prior to becoming SoBAP's Executive Director, Wilkinson served on the organization's Board of Directors for approximately two years.

In commenting on his resignation, Wilkinson said, "This is not a complete separation. This is about my evolvement into another role with SoBAP on a completely different level. My history with SoBAP has always been about changing gears and roles, to best respond to the needs of the organization as it strives to most effectively serve the needs of the community."

Raymond R. Hart, Chairman of SoBAP's Board of Directors, said that

Wilkinson's more prominent presence and involvement as a staff member will be sorely missed. "Jeffrey has done a wonderful job over the past three and a half years, dedicating a significant amount of personal time to go that proverbial 'extra mile' to do what is needed to get the job done. While we are saddened by his decision, we obviously are extremely happy for him and excited about the new work he will be doing within the community," said Hart.

Recruitment efforts for

Wilkinson's successor have already commenced and a review committee has been established. Hart said that the

replacement process could take upwards of three months and will involve a search locally, regionally, and nationally.

Wilkinson concluded, "I feel fortunate to have been afforded an opportunity that very few people ever have...to work, live, and play in the same small community. I will be forever grateful for the experiences I've had."



Jeffrey Wilkinson