

The Front Page

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Evaluating the '84 Elections. . .

Compiled by Jim Baxter

The overwhelming sense of a stunning Republican/conservative sweep in this fall's elections was felt nowhere more keenly than in North Carolina. And, among minority groups, the effects were felt as strongly by gays as any other. Perhaps more so after having been used as a cudgel throughout the election.

North Carolina Republicans — whose state party organization resolved that gays were "a threat" and expressed its "disgust" at "sexually perverted activities" — took three house seats from Democratic incumbents, and dozens of seats in the state legislature. The second Republican governor in a century was elected.

"It's hard to imagine any state worse hit on November 6 than our own," Joe Herzenberg told *The (Miami) Weekly News*. "It was the most devastating loss for the Democratic Party in the twentieth century."

There is no evidence that the "gay issue" had any effect on the election. To those outside the gay community, it's possible that the gay issue never really seemed important. Moderate non-gay people looked on the "gays" versus "fundamentalists" struggle as two far-out fringe elements hassling with one another and having nothing to do with them.

Still, the effect it had on gay people in North Carolina — conservative, moderate or liberal, Republican or Democrat — was not insignificant. In an election year that featured some of the nastiest, and most expensive, mud-slinging in American history, the word "gay" was an unavoidable part of that mud. At the very least, the dissemination of misinformation about gays will take a long time to counteract.

Change Partners and Dance

Conservative leaders, hailing the victories of President Ronald Reagan, Senator Jesse Helms, Representative Bill Cobey and Governor James Martin, saw the election results as an overwhelming affirmation of their quest to preserve "traditional family values." The elaborate inaugural festivities in January, both locally and nationally, were just the icing on an already delicious cake.

Ronald and Nancy, Jesse and Pat, Jim and Dorothy, were widely seen in celebration — dancing, toasting their success, surrounded by triumphant conservatives, jubilant lifetime

Republicans, excited young Republicans and — of course — closeted gays.

Among the inaugural festivities in the nation's capital was the "Inaugural Ball for Young Americans." (It was here that Reagan made his first appearance of the evening.) Costing \$50 per person and offering mixed drinks at \$3.50 each, the ball was held in the D.C. Armory, normally the site of circuses, rodeos and wrestling matches.

David Miner, 22, a student at Campbell College (in Buies Creek, N.C.) and national vice-president of the College Republican Committee, was among those present. Asked for a few words by UPI (1/22/85), Miner enthusiastically parroted the party line: "The Democratic Party is the party of big labor bosses, homosexuals, tax increases, gloom and doom."

It would have come as a surprise to him, then, to know that also attending the event was Jeff Snow, office manager of Concerned Americans for Individual Rights (CAIR), the group formed last year for conservative and Republican gays.

Snow, 24, a native of Mobile, Alabama and long-time participant in Republican youth groups, told *The Washington Blade* that he expected to surprise some of his former colleagues by informing them of his work with CAIR.

Nor was Snow alone at the capital's inaugural celebrations. (See related story this issue.)

The presence of gays at national and state inaugurations brings to mind the essential question: did gays win or lose in the '84 elections?

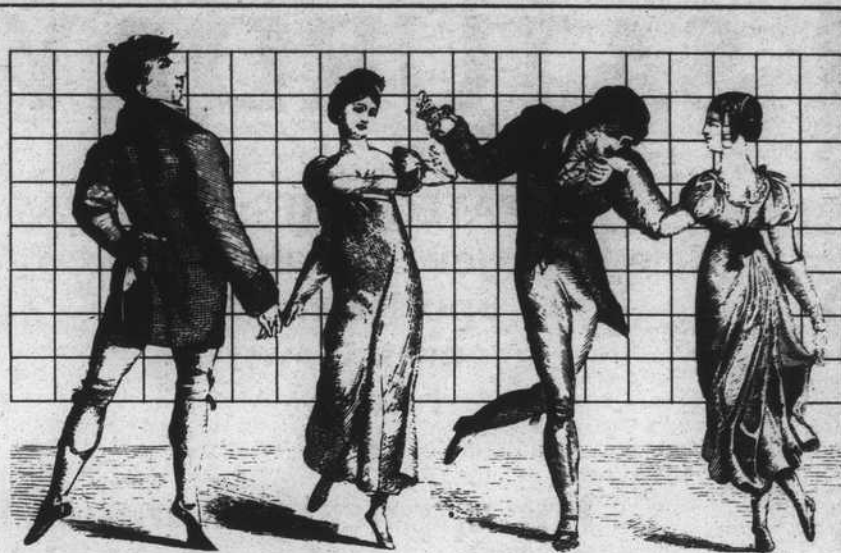
Was there a clear mandate, dictated by conservative forces and supported by the majority of voters, which indicate the end of the gay rights era?

The answers to these questions, not unlike the contents of the inaugural guest lists, are not at all what you might expect.

The Presidential Race

In the wake of President Ronald Reagan's landslide reelection, gay Republicans were savoring the possibility that the Reagan administration's second term could open new opportunities for gays supporting the principles of the Republican party. They argue that Reagan's economic and foreign policies

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After the Ball

Some Republican leaders may have been surprised to find several openly gay colleagues joining them at the Reagan inaugural committee's nine official Inaugural Balls on January 21.

Bruce Decker, co-founder and current board member of Concerned Americans for Individual Rights, the group formed last year for politically moderate to conservative gays, told *The Washington Blade* just before the inauguration, "I've received a lot of calls from prominent gay Republicans who are planning to attend some inaugural events."

Gay Republican Frank Ricchiazzi, chairman of the Republican Party in his Los Angeles assembly district and an openly gay member of the Los Angeles County Republican Party, mingled with his gay and non-gay colleagues at several inaugural functions.

Perhaps the biggest irony among the Republican establishment came with seeing former Congressman Robert Bauman, a founder of the American Conservative Union, attending inaugural functions with a male date.

Not all gay Republicans attending these events were open, however. "They don't really see why they should make an issue of their sexual preference," Decker told the *Blade*. "These are folks who support the president's policies in terms of national defense and the economy. They're part of the party establishment."

Dallas, Texas, gay bar and real estate magnate Frank Craven, who has been admitted to the Republican "Eagle" club for contributing thousands of dollars to the party, attended official inaugural functions, including the gala party featuring entertainment by Frank Sinatra, with an entourage of Texas gays.

Craven told the *Blade* that he planned to limit his activities to the official inaugural events and did not intend to "make an issue" of gay rights.

Most gay Republicans, who are not openly gay, attended only the same inaugural functions as their heterosexual counterparts. Nevertheless, some closeted gay Republicans, many of them rumored to be well known within the Republican

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