

## HOMOPHOBIC CAMPAIGNS BACKFIRE IN THE CAROLINAS

By Lightning A. Brown

Political strategists and campaign planners who predicted big wins for "clean" campaigns this year came out the victors in the Carolinas and elsewhere as votes were counted in the 1986 general elections for U.S. Senate and House and for state offices. And unlike the political bloodbath of 1984, public rejection of hate campaigns at the polls was reflected in an absence of election-year violence and harassment against gays.

"Clean campaigns" were not the only campaigns run, however. In Senate races in South and North Carolina, gay-baiting directly or indirectly marked the strategies of losing candidates Henry McMaster and Jim Broyhill, both Republicans. Nearly half of the ten North Carolina congressional races involved appeals to "gay issues" as defined by conservative strategists — AIDS, pornography, the national Gay Rights Bill, and "Bible principles."

### Hollings Supportive

In South Carolina, incumbent Democratic Senator Ernest Hollings weathered a challenge from Republican Henry McMaster which hit hard on Hollings' co-sponsorship of S.430, the Senate Gay Rights Bill. "This gay rights legislation that Fritz Hollings sponsored would give homosexuals, that is the gay community, special privilege in the 1964 Civil Rights Act along with other minorities," McMaster's campaign chairman David Thomas charged. "Sen. Hollings is actually working, not for the people of South Carolina, but for certain segments located in and around the San Francisco area," Thomas said.

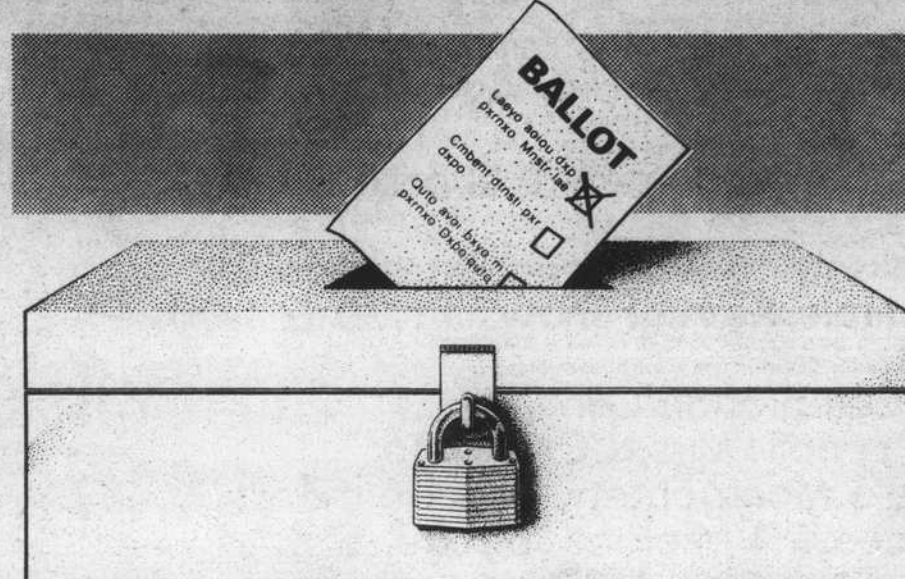
Hollings' spokespersons defused the charges by taking them head on, denouncing them as part of a "dirty tricks, negative campaign", and defending Hollings' support for gay and lesbian civil rights. The campaign issued a position paper on the Gay Rights Bill, which read in part, "Hollings has never favored preferential treatment for anyone or any group of people, and he opposes quotas. But he does believe that the Bill of Rights and the Constitution were intended for all of our citizens."

South Carolina voters decided by a margin of over 200,000, which netted the Democrat 64% of the vote, that Hollings is in step with his state. It was a victory for inclusive politics and an important Southern endorsement for S.430.

### Sanford v. Broyhill

In the wake of the bitter and vicious campaign feud between Jim Hunt and Jesse Helms in 1984, North Carolina voters were also clearly sick of "dirty tricks" politics. Those candidates who ignored the public's distaste for negative emotionalism almost universally lost their elections. And even in races where negative tactics were carried out through "unofficial, non-campaign" committees such as The Freedom Council and Citizens for a Conservative Court, negative messages tended to bring down the Republican candidates they were intended to reelect — Senator Jim Broyhill and Chief Justice Rhoda Billings.

In the Jim Broyhill campaign, the N.C. Freedom Council (the state chapter of an organization founded by evangelist/politician Pat Robertson), attempted to nurture anti-gay sentiments as a campaign issue without involving the candidate directly in the debate. But the indirect approach failed to bring out finicky Fundamentalist voters, who were not impressed with Broyhill's voting record against abortion rights and gay/lesbian issues in Congress and regarded him as too moderate. "You can't put a moderate Republican up against that kind of thing and expect to win," said Roanoke Bible College professor Rev. C. Barry McCarty, who is also state Social Services Commission chair. "You've got to give the Down



to have turned out their vote, and blamed weaknesses in the Broyhill campaign for the Republican loss. *New York Times* exit polls in North Carolina indicated that Fundamentalists represented around 11 percent of those voting.

Pat Robertson's Freedom Councils mailed out 10,000 letters saying that Broyhill had taken the "right" stance on such issues as "pornography, gay rights, and abortion", and on appointment of conservative judges to federal courts. A group of Fundamentalist activists, including Rev. Kent Kelly of Southern Pines and Rev. Thomas Vestal of Raleigh mailed at least 9,000 brochures to Christian leaders damning Senator-elect Terry Sanford for supporting the United Nations and disarmament. The National Right to Life Committee also did "unofficial non-campaign" mailings for Broyhill, and loaned his campaign a political consultant to aid the Republican in

### Only "Normal" Violence

The relatively restrained 1986 campaigns were accompanied by another sort of respite for gay men and lesbians. In contrast to the all-out attacks against gay people (and purportedly gay-sympathetic candidates) in 1984, which coincided with police roundups of gay men in Raleigh, Charlotte, and Greensboro, with arson of one gay bookstore, and with nine brutal murders or attempted murders, violence and harassment against the gay community remained at "normal" levels. Protests against entrapment campaigns in Wilmington and Greensboro, and against official job discrimination policies in Charlotte also appeared to gain greater public support than two years ago. (In Raleigh, the District Attorney who engineered the 1984 gay roundups lost his bid for reelection in the June Democratic run-off primary.)

The so-called "Gay Rights Platform," which has never been proposed or adopted by any gay liberation group in this country, is frequently cited by Fundamentalist groups in their anti-gay campaigns.

East conservative Democrats a reason to cross over..." Other Fundamentalist organizers claimed courting conservative crossover voters.

The Democratic campaign of Terry Sanford ignored the "unofficial" anti-gay attacks from the Broyhill campaign, except for blanket appeals to "decent campaigning" and "common sense". As a result, Sanford managed to define the issues on which Broyhill was forced to run — trade policy for textiles, farm supports, and environmental/nuclear issues — questions for which Broyhill's bland style could generate little excitement.

(The National Congressional Club, Jesse Helms' powerful organization, mostly stayed out of the Broyhill-Sanford race. Their candidate, David Funderburk, was rejected by Republican primary voters for his negative tactics this Spring. Instead, they focused their fall election activities around supporting Senator Jeremiah Denton in Alabama. Denton lost to Democrat Richard C. Shelby, who was backed by "big union bosses, Jesse-Jackson-type activists and gay rights supporters," according to one of ten Congressional Club fund-raising letters sent out for the election. Shelby's coalition carried just over 50% of the Alabama vote. The defeat of Congressional Club candidates was similar to the 1982 off-year elections, in which all five Club-endorsed candidates were defeated. The Congressional Club reported spending around \$8.5 million on the election, roughly half of Helms' 1984 budget.)

### Triangle Races

In N.C. Congressional races, political gay-baiting backfired for conservative candidates four districts. Republican candidates Bill Cobey, Howard Moye, Stu Epperson, Bud McElhaneey took their party's 1984 anti-gay platform plank to heart and emphasized opposition to gay rights in their campaigns. All were defeated by Democrats who emphasized decent, moderate campaigning and who espoused decent, moderate stands.

Most outspoken against the gay community were the campaigns of two Triangle area Congressional candidates, Bill Cobey and Bud McElhaneey, whose districts include the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area. In both cases, according to election day exit interviews, voters concluded that the conservative campaigns were too extreme on various religious and social topics. Among these, homophobic appeals on issues such as AIDS, pornography, and "traditional Bible values" appear to have been important in defining what was "too extreme".

Anti-gay tactics were most bizarre in Durham's 2nd District, where Republican challenger Bud McElhaneey accused conservative Democratic incumbent Tim Valentine of supporting federal funding for gay pornography. The Republican candidate charged that "publishing companies of homosexual material" were being funded through the National Endowment for the Arts. McElhaneey, who formerly owned a Christian bookstore and ran a Fundamentalist church school, promised to

stop expenditure of tax money for any publications or writers which support gay lifestyles.

Attacking Valentine's vote in favor of the Washington, D.C. AIDS Anti-Discrimination Bill, McElhaneey also charged that Valentine was "in favor of AIDS," a claim which Valentine ridiculed. Valentine received the greatest majority of any Congressional winner, over 70% of an electorate composed of progressive urban voters, blacks and rural white conservatives to whom McElhaneey's anti-gay tactics may have seemed uncalled for and out of place.

(Valentine, for his part, is no supporter for gay rights. In 1984, the congressman told reporters that the problem with the national Democratic Party was that it pandered to people with "strange romantic preferences.")

It was the second loss this year for McElhaneey, one of two Republican candidates who joined in the failed attempt this summer to oust Durham mayor Wib Gulley for his Gay Pride Week proclamation. The recall petition against the mayor had been widely regarded as an election stunt, although one of great significance, both for the progressive victors and for the Republican/Fundamentalist coalition which lost both the recall drive and the election itself.

Last-minute attempts by unidentified groups or individuals to resurrect the "gay issue" in Durham through a spurious poster campaign and a series of letters to the editor "exposing" election endorsements by a non-existent "Gay and Lesbian Solidarity" group also failed when local papers refused to cover the hoax, or printed disclaimers with letters that did appear. One letter, from a Mary-Elise Haug, called the idea of gay political endorsements "immoral and disgusting" and advocated "To prevent a gross perversion of traditional family structure and the further spread of AIDS, we the people of North America have one solution — vote Republican." No Republicans were elected in Durham.

In Raleigh's 4th Congressional District, another eleventh-hour attempt to stir up anti-gay emotionalism also backfired. At an election eve press conference held by Republican Congressman Bill Cobey, conservative Democrat David J. Martin, a Cobey supporter, denounced Cobey's opponent, David Price, for espousing "anti-biblical" views and being lenient toward "the godless homosexuals." Martin also told reporters at the news conference that Price, as executive director of a national Democratic rules commission in 1984, had given special privileges to gay Democrats in planning for the 1984 Democratic national convention in San Francisco.

The Cobey news conference, which was reported in election day newspaper editions, was the third time during the campaign that homophobic tactics backfired against candidate Cobey, resulting in voters' identifying him as a religious extremist. On the Sunday before the election, a group of Baptist ministers publicly protested the Republican campaign's distribution of political brochures containing anti-gay material on car windshields during morning services, and condemned Cobey for improperly mixing politics and religion. Earlier, in September, widespread public criticism forced Cobey to apologize for mailing a fund-raising letter in which the candidate had identified himself as an "ambassador for Christ" and criticized his opponent as "not willing to take a strong stand for the principles outlined in the Word of God."

Cobey, a vocal Fundamentalist, did not follow Broyhill's lead in distancing himself from these anti-gay tactics. After the Martin outburst, for example, Cobey expressed support for the attack, saying "He's speaking, of course, on his own. He has a right to say anything he wants to. He made a

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