

Some of Our Best Friends...

Some of our best friends are black. In Congress, that is. Actually, in the case of the members from the Carolinas, our *only* friends are black.

There are three black Democrats among the 22 members of Congress from NC and SC. They are the only members of Congress from the Carolinas who are gay-positive.

Nationally, black members of Congress are overwhelming pro-gay. Almost all supported the unconditional lifting of the military's ban on gays, a position supported by less than 25% of the white members. Most black members are co-sponsors of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which would ban employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. Again, fewer than a quarter of white members are sponsors.

All three black Carolina Congress members were elected in 1992. All supported lifting the military ban, and all are co-sponsors of ENDA. But, as junior members of a minority party, they have limited influence.

The 1992 and 1994 elections produced unprecedented changes in Congress. In short, moderate to conservative white Democrats were replaced by ultra-conservative white Republicans and liberal black Democrats.

Before the 1992 elections, the Carolinas were represented by 21 members: 13 white Democrats and 8 white Republicans.

Never at a Loss for Words

Paul Falduto



Redistricting that year added a new congressional district in NC and both states needed to create new majority-black districts. In doing so, other districts were made more white, and more Republican. But elections in 1992 didn't produce many changes in partisan make-up in the Carolinas.

In NC, Republicans gained a senate seat when Lauch Faircloth beat Terry Sanford, but Democrats gained too, as the House delegation went from seven white Democrats and four white Republicans to six white Democrats, two black Democrats, and four white Republicans. Black Democrats Eva Clayton and Mel Watt became the first black members elected to Congress from NC in this century, and all ten other members won re-election.

In SC, Republicans almost knocked off Democrat Senator Ernest Hollings, first elected in

1966. Hollings defeated former Republican member of Congress Tommy Harnett by only a 50-47% margin. (Harnett told voters that Hollings supported hiring quotas for gays, which he doesn't, of course). Republicans did gain a seat in the House, when Bob Inglis defeated Liz Patterson in the Greenville-Spartanburg area District 4. Black Democrat James Clyburn was elected that year too, and all four of the other House members were re-elected, leaving the Palmetto state with 4 members from each party in its delegation.

So after the 1992 elections, Democrats still held 12 Carolina seats, one fewer than before, but three were now held by blacks. Republicans held ten seats, a gain of two.

1994 was a debacle for the Democrats. Three white Democrats moderates retired: Tim Valentine and Steve Neal in NC, and Butler Derrick in SC. All three seats were filled by GOP ultra-conservatives, all of whom won easily. Two other white Democrats, David Price and Martin Lancaster of NC, were defeated, and three others, Charlie Rose and Bill Hefner of NC, and John Spratt of SC, all won with only 52% of the vote, even though each outspent his opponent at least 2-1 (Rose outspent his opponent 9-1).

So we now have a situation where the Democrats hold only seven seats, a loss of five since 1990, and the four remaining white Democrats are not on solid ground. Rose, Hefner and Spratt could all lose in 1996, and Hollings probably won't run in 1998. Rose, with numerous ethical and personal problems, is the most vulnerable.

Even if these Democrats win again, they certainly are not our friends. All voted against allowing gays to serve in the military without restrictions (as did the other five who retired or were defeated in 1992), and none are co-sponsors

of ENDA. All are moving to the right: Rose supported the GOP "Contract With America" on 10 of the 15 major votes; Hefner and Spratt supported seven of the 15. By contrast, Clayton and Watt supported only one (which passed unanimously), and Clyburn supported four.

But even if these moderate Democrats aren't our friends, they do less harm than the ultra-right Republicans that would almost certainly replace them. There seems to be no such thing as a moderate Republican any more, certainly not in the South.

So, are we stuck with giving one cheer for moderate Democrats like David Price, who lost his seat to Fred Heineman by a small margin, and will probably run again in 1996, or Charles Sanders, who is running for the Democratic nomination to oppose Jesse Helms?

Depending on the race, that might make sense. But, then again, why settle for someone who ignores us rather than hates us, if we can do better? Price, for example, would not even sign a pledge not to discriminate against gays on his own Congressional staff, a pledge Heineman signed. We should be encouraging a pro-gay Democrat to run in the May, 1996 primary for Price's seat, and back up him or her with time and money.

In the Senate primary, also to be held next May, there is a very good pro-gay candidate, former Charlotte mayor Harvey Gantt, who is black and narrowly lost to Helms in 1990. But Gantt's campaign so far is non-existent. As of June, he had raised only \$10,000, versus almost \$750,000 for Sanders and over a million for Helms. In 1990, Helms spent almost \$18 million and Gantt spent close to \$8 million. In order to raise that much money again, Gantt will need to collect almost \$20,000 per day from now until the November, 1996 election.

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