



Voters set to reject gay marriage, ban on abortion

November 8, 2006

By Mary Milliken

LOS ANGELES - Voters appeared to reject gay wedlock in several U.S. states by limiting marriage to unions between a man and woman in one of the few bright spots for conservative Republicans in difficult elections on Tuesday.

But in another highly divisive issue, pro-choice movements were ready to claim victory in South Dakota, where voters favored repealing an abortion law considered the most restrictive in the nation.

An amendment on stem cell research hung in the balance in Missouri, where an appeal by actor and Parkinsons disease patient Michael J. Fox to support the Democratic-backed initiative drew worldwide attention.

With over half of the ballots counted there, the "no" to stem cell research had the lead with 52 percent of the vote.

As Democrats swept the Republicans out of power in the U.S. House of Representatives and made gains in the Senate, conservative voters appeared to have turned out to oppose same-sex marriage and possibly help some Republican races.

Republicans had hoped for a repeat of 2004 when conservative voters flocked to the polls to vote against gay marriage and helped secure U.S. President George W. Bush's second term.

"The marriage amendments are all passing and they may have made the difference in close races," said Tony Perkins, president of the conservative lobby group, the Family Research Council.

Of the eight states where marriage amendments were on the ballot, six -- Virginia, South Carolina, Wisconsin, Tennessee, South Dakota and Colorado -- were headed toward opposing gay marriage. But supporters of gay marriage said they were seeing greater numbers voting in favor of their movement.

"Two years ago we had 11 of these on the ballot, and in only two of them did we do better than 40 percent," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

"This year there were eight and in at least five of them we did better than 40 percent."

But conservatives will see a big blow in South Dakota where they viewed the law as their best chance to challenge a 33-year-old Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion in the United States.

"This means that there has been a rebellion against social, right-wing wedge politics that have been dominating this country," said Sarah Stoesz, CEO of South Dakota's Planned Parenthood, key backers of the campaign to kill the measure.

Tobacco and smoking taxes, property rights and minimum wage levels were also big issues among the 205 ballot propositions in 37 states, according to the University of Southern California.

(Additional reporting by Ed Stoddard in Dallas and Ann Grauvogl in Sioux Falls, SD)