

Gay rights leader says election produced solid gains

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The congressional elections showed solid gains not only for Democrats but for gay rights as well, the executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force said.

"What a difference an election makes," Matt Foreman said Friday as he addressed about 2,000 people at the task force's annual Creating Change conference, which convened Wednesday, the day after the election, and runs through Sunday.

"Coast to coast; north, south, east, west; senate races, house races, state races, pro-LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) candidates defeated those aligned with the forces of political and religious intolerance," he said.

Foreman, who used video clips from "The Wizard of Oz" and a brief moment off the podium to kiss his boyfriend to punctuate his remarks, pointed to the defeat of anti-abortion ballot measures in California, Oregon and South Dakota and to a failed attempt to ban gay marriage in Arizona as signs of gay success at the polls.

Seven other states voted to approve constitutional amendments to ban gay marriage: Colorado, Idaho, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia and Wisconsin. Similar amendments have passed previously in all 20 states that considered them.

But Foreman said there was still progress because the bans succeeded by narrower margins.

In 2004, there were 11 similar ballot measures banning gay marriage, "and in only two of them were we able to persuade more than 40 percent of the voters to oppose them," Foreman said.

More than 40 percent of people in five of the states voted against the amendments.

"Overall, support for us went up from 33 percent in 2004 to nearly 40 percent on Tuesday," he said. "That, folks, is a sea change in public support in just two years."

But strong anti-gay sentiment remains, Foreman said, pointing to sex scandals involving conservatives. Former Republican Congressman Mark Foley of Florida, was caught carrying on salacious online conversation with teenage male congressional interns, and Ted Haggard, the ardently anti-gay former head of the National Association of Evangelicals, was fired over allegations of gay sex and drug use.

"While I'm on this, let me just say one thing to Mark Foley," Foreman said. "Mark, whenever you re-emerge from wherever you are, please don't pop up looking to us for acceptance and support."