

Gay group sees momentum after U.S. elections

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By Carey Gillam

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (Reuters) - Supporters of gay marriage should be optimistic after the U.S. midterm elections in which Arizona defeated an anti-gay marriage amendment and the passage of similar measures in seven other states was tighter than in 2004, a gay-rights leader said on Friday.

"What a difference an election makes," National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director Matt Foreman told the group's national conference in Kansas City. "We are feeling new hope and optimism."

Foreman said Tuesday's election marked the first time a proposed state constitutional amendment to ban any form of legal recognition for same-sex couples was defeated when Arizona voters rejected the measure.

He also noted that while similar measures prevailed in seven other states, the percentage of voters opposing the anti-gay marriage amendments grew from the 2004 election when they passed in 11 states.

Paul Cameron, chairman of the Colorado-based Family Research Institute, which has promoted laws defining marriage as unions solely between men and women, said, "Unfortunately, there is some good news for them (gay-rights advocates)" in Tuesday's elections.

Cameron also cited the growth in the percentage of voters who sided with gays on the marriage amendments.

Foreman said gay-rights advocates should be buoyed by the election of governors in Oregon, Massachusetts and New York who support their cause, and the defeat of Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum and Indiana Rep. John Hostettler, both Republicans who were outspoken opponents of gay rights.

In all 67 candidates endorsed by the Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund were elected to federal, state and local offices. Arkansas, Indiana and Alabama elected their first openly gay candidates, and Missouri and Washington state elected their first openly gay state senators.

"That ... is a sea change in voter behavior in just two years," he said.

Foreman said with the next Congress dominated by Democrats, the task force would push for increased protections against discrimination in employment, benefits, military service and marriage rights.

The group will align more closely with other progressive causes, such as abortion-rights groups and health-care access advocacy groups to broaden its message and its reach, Foreman told the conference.

"We intend to change society," he said.

