

To: Interested Parties

From: David M. Smith, Human Rights Campaign

Re: HRC's 2006 Election Activity

## **BACKGROUND**

This year, under the leadership of Joe Solmonese, the Human Rights Campaign flexed its political muscle in unprecedented and strategic ways that helped alter the political dynamic in key races across the country. Victories for strong, pro-equality candidates have secured fair-minded majorities in both the House and the Senate, and the 110th Congress promises to be the most pro-equality in history. Voters in Arizona also appear to have made history this year, defeating that state's discriminatory domestic partnership ballot initiative (pending the count of more than 200,000 absentee ballots).

Out of the 225 candidates that HRC endorsed, 210 proved triumphant, with several races still too close to call. HRC was involved in 19 Senate victories, 180 House wins and 11 successful governors' races. HRC also helped to defeat some of the most anti-gay voices in Congress, including John Hostettler and Rick Santorum, signaling that the era of gay-bashing for political gain is coming to an end.

The Human Rights Campaign was also involved in states where anti-gay initiatives were on the state ballot. It is clear that the dynamic on same-sex marriage has progressed significantly in the past two years. And although we had heartbreaking losses in seven states, with a near-win in South Dakota, this year history was made as Arizona voters rejected their discriminatory proposal against domestic partnerships. The unprecedented victory in Arizona is a **symbolic turning point in the march toward marriage equality**.

This election cycle, HRC:

- 1) Targeted 30 races in 18 states.
- 2) Placed 84 staffers on campaigns across the country and mobilized thousands of HRC members.
- 3) Spent more than \$5 million in election-related activities.

HRC's strategic investment of \$5 million in targeted areas played a decisive factor shaping the outcomes of races and helping to move the House, Senate and state houses toward a more fair-minded body of government. HRC placed dozens of staffers in the field, partnered with state and local organizations to organize local volunteers and mobilized more than 650,000 members and supporters to play an active role in campaigns for state and federal office.

In addition to winning key elections, HRC has a new focus on developing and expanding political alliances with party groups and progressive organizations — partnerships which will set the stage for advancing equality under the law and making our policy objectives, including employment non-discrimination and hate crimes legislation, achievable.

To accomplish HRC's ambitious goal of making the gay community a stronger political force, Solmonese recruited a team of seasoned field operatives from across the country. Backed by a collective century's worth of experience in electoral politics, HRC's political team set out to identify closely contested races and arm our allies with the resources and ground troops they would need. The field team put together a strategic, multi-layered electoral program in 22 states where HRC's efforts could mean the difference between victory and defeat.

### **POLITICAL CLIMATE ON GAY ISSUES CHANGING**

While the hallmark of this election has been voters' discontent with congressional leadership and the president, one of the most striking ways the political climate has changed in the past two years is with regard to gay issues. Among an electorate currently motivated by anger, instead of fear, attacks on gay rights no longer hold the power they once did.

Conservative extremists pulled a chapter out of their 2004 campaign playbook to exploit the gay community for political gain, but their efforts fell flat with voters angry and disillusioned by corruption and the Iraq war. The failure of right-wing candidates to mobilize their base with anti-gay messages this year is a clear sign that scapegoating GLBT Americans for political points is no longer a potent political tactic.

This legislative year, anti-gay politicians attempted to again energize conservative evangelical voters by bringing the Federal Marriage Amendment to a vote in both the Senate and the House. Despite claiming momentum for their side, they instead suffered the defection of two senators, Gregg and Specter, who changed their previous votes and opposed the constitutional amendment. Extensive polling at the time showed that voters on both sides of the same-sex marriage issue agreed that this was not what Congress should be focusing on as a priority.

For the past year, anti-gay lawmakers at the state level have endeavored to pass measures that would ban adoption by same-sex couples. These efforts stalled in more than a dozen states, with not one bill or proposed ballot initiative even reaching the floor of a state legislature for a vote.

Despite failing so far to move base or persuadable voters with anti-gay messages this year, a few campaigns continued to pursue this tactic, most notably Ken Blackwell and Jean Schmidt in Ohio, and John Hostettler in Indiana. The election, however, demonstrated that support for GLBT equality is not a liability, and that scapegoating the GLBT community is a failing strategy in all but the most conservative of regions.

## HRC AND THE 2006 ELECTIONS

The Human Rights Campaign's Political Action Committee has raised and spent \$1.2 million, including funding independent expenditure campaigns in six congressional races. More significantly, HRC PAC has bundled more than \$1.3 million in direct contributions from our members to campaigns and party committees, including \$375,000 for Bob Casey, \$160,000 for Sherrod Brown, \$125,000 for Amy Klobuchar and \$50,000 each for Ron Klein and Tammy Duckworth.

HRC organized groundbreaking campaigns this cycle around state legislative-level races. Solmonese prioritized these elections 18 months ago, realizing the impact that these chambers have — not only on the fate of state constitutional amendments and GLBT-related legislation, but also on future redistricting and developing a pipeline of equality-minded future candidates for federal office. In a dozen states selected because control of one or more chambers hinged on a handful of winnable races, HRC has played heavily in legislative races, often leveraging the support of other, non-GLBT coalition partners.

Despite the record levels of spending in campaigns today, the most valuable campaign resource remains a corps of enthusiastic, trained volunteers. HRC devoted considerable resources toward training and engaging our 650,000 members and supporters in campaign work, with some extraordinary results. HRC trained more than 2,500 campaign volunteers, and organized weekly canvasses and phone banks in dozens of districts. With a presence in such key states as Ohio, Pennsylvania, Nevada, New Hampshire, Florida and Iowa, HRC's cadre of trained activists were well-positioned to play key roles in the 2008 presidential contest. HRC is also looking long-term and building the next generation of GLBT political leaders through the HRC Youth College program, which trained 23 trained young campaign operatives and placed them on key races.

Although some races are still too close to call, HRC's efforts successfully helped the following candidates make historic wins:

### **Key Senate HRC Endorsee Victories:**

Sherrod Brown (OH)  
Maria Cantwell (WA)  
Ben Cardin (MD)  
Bob Casey (PA)  
Amy Klobuchar (MN)  
Robert Menendez (NJ)  
Debbie Stabenow (MI)  
Jim Webb (VA)

### **Key House HRC Endorsee Victories:**

Michael Arcuri (NY)  
Melissa Bean (IL)  
Bruce Braley (IA)  
Gabrielle Giffords (AZ)

John Hall (NY)  
Ron Klein (FL)  
Tim Mahoney (FL)  
Harry Mitchell (FL)  
Patrick Murphy (PA)  
Ed Perlmutter (CO)  
Joe Sestak (PA)  
Chris Shays (CT)  
Tim Walz (MN)

**Priority Gubernatorial Candidates:**

John Baldacci (ME)  
Jim Doyle (WI)  
Ted Kulongoski (OR)  
Deval Patrick (MA)  
Ted Strickland (OH)

**Priority State Legislative Chambers:**

Indiana House  
Iowa House and Senate  
Minnesota House  
Montana House  
New Hampshire Senate  
Oregon House

The Pennsylvania House is too close to call.

**Next Steps**

In the coming months, HRC will capitalize on 2006's successes by building momentum with old and new allies on Capitol Hill for passing hate crimes legislation, employment non-discrimination and other measures to benefit GLBT families; working with our allies in New Jersey and other states to pass historic, state-level legislation; and using the growing political leadership and skills of our members to mobilize our community during the 2008 presidential election.

**Statements by Some of the 2006 Election Winners:**

**Said Senator-Elect Bob Casey (Pennsylvania):**

*"HRC got behind my campaign early and has been a tremendous help. The energy and commitment they put behind our campaign was extraordinary. I look forward to working with HRC's incredible staff and membership, especially to advance hate crimes legislation in the Senate."*

**Said Senator-Elect Sherrod Brown (Ohio):**

*"HRC's presence throughout the state of Ohio during this election was nothing short of extraordinary. It demonstrated the best that we can achieve when we work together and stand up for what is right. I was proud of HRC's financial and grassroots support for my campaign, it made a difference in the larger fight for social and economic justice for every American."*

**Said Congresswoman-Elect Gabrielle Giffords (Arizona):**

*"I have stood up for equality in Arizona, and I am grateful that HRC and the GLBT community stood with our campaign during the primary and the general elections. We can accomplish so much for our families when we work together. Fairness is an essential American value, and when we champion fairness, we can win decisive victories in even the most competitive congressional districts."*