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CNN

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HEADLINE: Dade County Passes Gay Rights Ordinance -- Again

BYLINE: Judy Woodruff, William Schneider

HIGHLIGHT:

In 1976, Dade County, Florida, tried to become a symbol to the nation when the county government passed one of the country's first gay-rights ordinances. A year later, Dade county became a very different kind of symbol when that new law was overwhelmingly repudiated by the voters. This week saw another gay rights vote in Dade County and another symbol.

BODY:

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WOODRUFF: This week, a county commission in Florida passed an ordinance prompted by two decades of politics, drama and conflict. That vote, although local, was enough to earn the "Political Play of the Week."

Our Bill Schneider joins us now from New York to explain -- Bill.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER, CNN SENIOR POLITICAL ANALYST: Well, Judy, in 1976, Dade County, Florida, tried to become a symbol to the nation when the county government passed one of the country's first gay- rights ordinances. A year later, Dade county became a very different kind of symbol when that new law was overwhelmingly repudiated by the voters. This week, we saw another gay rights vote in Dade County and another symbol.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

(voice-over): In 1977, the fight against gay rights was led by entertainer and Florida orange juice-spokeswoman Anita Bryant. She called her crusade "Save our Children."

SOTU
Hate crimes

TO MICHAEL
WALSHMAN

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(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP, 1977)

ANITA BRYANT, FLORIDA ORANGE JUICE SPOKESWOMAN: I believe that, more than ever before, that there are evil forces round about us, even perhaps disguised as something good, that would want to tear down the very foundation, the family unit, that holds America together.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SCHNEIDER: In 1998, the fight for a new gay-rights ordinance was led by civic leaders who wanted to make a different kind of statement about their community, a community that sees itself as a major international center. They called their campaign "Save Dade."

KATY SORENSON, MIAMI-DADE CO. COMMISSIONER: And it sends the message to the greater world that we welcome everyone.

SCHNEIDER: In the 21 years since the 1977 referendum, the conflict has become national -- gay rights activists on one side, religious conservatives on the other. So, when the issue came up for a vote by the Dade County commission this week, the atmosphere was highly polarized. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: It's a shame there's a lot of ignorant, uneducated people out here who don't know the issues. It's about human rights for everybody and they just don't get it.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: We are equal in this country. Why should they have a special privilege? Why should they? Why are they so special?

SCHNEIDER: Why was the outcome different this time? In the past, gay rights has mystified many voters. It sounded like a solution for which there was no known problem. That changed in October when the nation was shocked by the brutal murder in Wyoming of a gay college student named Matthew Shepard. For the first time, many straight Americans saw the kind of violence and discrimination gays face. They found out there was a problem.

Tuesday's showdown vote in Miami was high drama.

UNIDENTIFIED COMMITTEE MEMBER: This motion passes seven to six.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I'm happy. I'm speechless.

SCHNEIDER: It took 21 years -- an entire generation -- for this to happen. The vote could not have been closer, and opponents are threatening another recall. But the symbolism was unmistakable. The 1977 vote marked the arrival of the religious right as a political force. The 1998 vote could mark the beginning of its decline. The leaders of Dade County made a statement: times have changed. And they earned the "Political Play of the Week."

(END VIDEOTAPE)

SCHNEIDER: In 1955, when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus to a white man, for the first time, many whites saw how angry and humiliated blacks felt about segregation.

In 1991, when Anita Hill testified before Congress for the first time, many men saw how angry and humiliated women felt about sexual harassment.

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Those were consciousness-raising experiences for Americans, and so was the Matthew Shepard tragedy -- Judy.

WOODRUFF: Bill, you mentioned that this could mark the decline of the religious conservative movement in this country. Are there ways to measure that?

SCHNEIDER: Well, we didn't see the religious right do particularly well in last month's midterm. Two Republican governors who lost, in Alabama and South Carolina, were closely aligned with religious conservatives. Now, they lost in part because they were opposed by gambling interests, but still they were one of the -- some of the few incumbents who were defeated.

I think there's a lot of sentiment among Republicans that it was an embarrassment for the GOP in 1996 when the religious right resisted Bob Dole's effort to put a tolerance statement in the party platform that said the party would be tolerant to people with different views on abortion. That was an embarrassment and it allowed the Democrats to seize the tolerance issue. I think a lot of Republicans were unhappy about that, and they want to change the message of the Republican Party. Their view is: The religious right is welcome in the Republican Party, but it has to be a big tent. They can't control the party's message.

WOODRUFF: All right. Bill Schneider with us today from New York.

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LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: December 4, 1998

Andrew Tobias

TO MURRAY WARDMAN
FYI -
R Soc. 6-16/11

December 10, 1998

President Bill Clinton
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

It was such a pleasure and privilege having dinner with you. Like our dinner last year, it left everyone truly inspired by your leadership, talent and good will.

Encouraged by your openness to the idea, I thought some more about what the country might be ready to hear in a State of the Union address. It seemed to me that a small section on diversity or inclusion might be appropriate and that, if so, something in the attached might be helpful.

Sincerely,

Andrew Tobias

PS - It has come to my attention that you are an awesome Scrabble player. In a couple of years when all this is over and you have a little time to enjoy your accomplishments . . .

[INCLUSION]

Difference is difficult to accept, but diversity, we are coming increasingly to realize, is our great strength.

This past year, the country conducted a constructive conversation on race
[paragraph on RACE]. But race is only one of the ways in which we are diverse.

This past year, millions of God's gay and lesbian children did just what they have always done. For the most part, they worked hard, paid their taxes, loved their families and improved their communities. The difference is that this year, as each year in the recent past, more and more of them were able to do so openly and honestly, and more and more of us came to realize that honesty and love can never be sins; that these citizens are, for the most part, good neighbors, good employers, good employees, good family members. Even good Congress people. For the first time in this nation's history, an openly gay person was elected to a first term in Congress. Congress people have on quite a few occasions been RE-elected once they prove themselves; this year, an openly gay Republican was re-elected from Arizona and an openly gay Democrat from Massachusetts was so popular he ran for his tenth term unopposed. But when the people of Wisconsin elected Tammy Baldwin to Congress, they sent a message: "We won't prejudge you based on your sexual orientation any more than we would prejudge you based on your race or your religion or your gender," they said. "This is America. Every responsible, contributing citizen deserves respect and equal rights." I call on Congress to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. And in the wake of the awful murder of Matthew Shepard, and of the horrible murder of James Byrd, Jr., chained to a pickup truck and dragged two miles through East Texas, I call on Congress to pass the Hate Crimes Act. Yes, assault is assault, murder is murder. But the law has long recognized degrees of heinousness based on motive. We need to send a message that hate is the most heinous motive of all.