

Wisconsin Light

The Voice of Wisconsin's LGBT Community

November 4-18, 1998

BALDWIN WINS! Wisconsin Does It Again

by Bill Meunier

Madison— Wisconsin, the state that gave America its first statewide Gay civil rights law and its first openly Gay Republican congressman, Steve Gunderson, has now given the nation its first openly Lesbian Congresswoman. Tammy Baldwin is going to Congress.

Baldwin who is also the first openly Gay person to win a first term to the House of Representatives, handily defeated former Wisconsin Insurance Commissioner by a vote of 54% to 46%.

Wisconsin Light projected Baldwin as the winner at 8:20pm. An hour and half later two national networks, CNN and CBS also projected Baldwin as the winner but it wasn't until midnight that she took the podium to give her victory speech.

In her speech Baldwin told the cheering crowd, "If this election was about anything, it was about standing up to the many messages of cynicism and negativity out there, and reclaiming our hopefulness and our democracy." Baldwin continued saying, "I can't help thinking that when I take a seat there, our Congress will look just a little more like America. I am proud to be able to represent all of you in Congress. I am proud to be the first woman sent to Congress from Wisconsin." Then came the line that drew the loudest and longest cheer of the night. "I am proud to be first open Lesbian elected to Congress."

Baldwin continued, "We have proven that in a democracy, we decide what is possible. No one can tell us what we can and can not achieve, what we can and can not strive for and what we can and can not dream. This is America. This is a democracy and in a democracy we decide what is possible."

Baldwin's candidacy received massive support from Wisconsin's LGBT community but Wisconsin's Log Cabin Club did back Musser. In March 1997, within days after *Wisconsin Light* broke the story of her impending bid, "Run Tammy Run!" buttons started appearing in Madison's LGBT community. But Wisconsin Gays and Lesbians were far from alone in its support of her candidacy.

Baldwin captured the imagination of a national LGBT community tired of Reggie White, ex-Gay ad campaigns, verbal bashings and physical abuse.

That community responded with hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Those funds, combined with an outpouring of volunteer support, allowed Baldwin to get her campaign issues across to the voters.

Those issues of health insurance reform, saving social security, increased support for public education and help for working families resonated with the electorate. They were buttressed by her reputation as an effective State legislator who eschewed partisan rhetoric and worked to build bipartisan support for her ideas.

National LGBT leaders were ecstatic about the results of the race. The Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund and the

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