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News
Key race could go to Dems
Pro-LGBT Peters seeks to unseat Knollenberg

By Jan Stevenson

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OAKLAND COUNTY -

One could hardly attend any LGBT event this past year without running into Gary Peters - at events hosted by Triangle Foundation, Affirmations, the HOPE Fund, Pride - he was everywhere, and always listening to LGBT people. He reached out early, often and with an intensity unmatched by any other candidate for public office this year.

Peters immersed himself in the LGBT community, which is the polar opposite approach of his opponent, U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg, an eight-term Republican who has been terrible on LGBT issues. Knollenberg was able to muster just a 38 percent pro-LGBT rating from the Human Rights Campaign, up from zero percent a few years ago.

Peters, by contrast, strongly supports LGBT equality including same-sex marriage rights and adoption rights. In a recent phone interview, Peters talked about why he is so supportive of LGBT rights.

"I think the crux of it is my philosophical belief about equality. Everyone should have full acceptance and be treated with dignity and respect. The U.S. Constitution is about protecting all individuals, and no one should be excepted out of that protection - no one," Peters said. "I have many friends in the gay community and I treasure those friendships, but I think my support is really grounded in my belief in equal rights."

Peters served in the Michigan Senate from 1995 to 2003. While there, he introduced pro-LGBT legislation, such as a bill to prevent discrimination based on appearance and perceived gender, and he supported legislation to include gays and lesbians in Michigan's hate crimes law. His prior support of LGBT issues won him an early endorsement from Michigan's LGBT political action committee.

"One of my strongest, and one of the first supporters when I announced last August, was the Triangle Pride PAC," said Peters, who added that he has always worked with the LGBT community in Michigan. "It's nice to know who your friends are. The ones that are there first are the ones you never forget."

Peters' campaign has hosted several LGBT-focused [advertisements](#) events and fundraisers. Just last week, Gerry Banister and Scott Douglas hosted an LGBT fundraiser for Peters at their Berkley home. "This is our opportunity to make a difference and insure there is another vote in Washington to protect our rights," said Banister.

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Peters said that he would support any effort to repeal Michigan's so-called "Marriage Amendment" that defines a marriage as only that between a man and a woman. Right-wing activists have successfully used the amendment as justification for stripping away domestic partner benefits offered by public employers. "It would require another vote of the people and I would support that, especially since they are stripping the benefits rights," said Peters. "I remember that in 2004, advocates for the amendment promised that would not happen - but lo-and-behold that is exactly what did happen."



When asked about same-sex couples adopting, Peters was emphatic. "I support full adoption rights for same-sex couples. I am very supportive of adoption that allows children to have loving homes, and we should not be standing in the way of that happening," he said.

Peters spent 20 years as a successful businessman in finance as a vice president at both Merrill Lynch and UBS/PaineWebber, and he served as Michigan's Lottery Commissioner in the Granholm administration. Because of his strong business background, he recently received endorsements from The Oakland Press, The Eccentric newspapers and the Spinal Column Newspaper of Oakland County. All three of these usually conservative publications endorsed Knollenberg in prior elections.

Peters is married and has three children. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science at Alma College (Magna Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa), a Master of Business Administration in Finance from the University of Detroit Mercy and he earned a law degree from Wayne State University Law School. He is an officer in the U.S. Navy Reserve and served part of his reserve duty in the Persian Gulf during Operation Southern Watch.

This race for Michigan's ninth congressional district is one of the most hotly contested in the nation. At present, Peters has a slight lead in the polls, and appears to have a good chance to snatch the seat away from the Republicans in this election year that looks to favor Democrats in general.

BTL strongly endorses Gary Peters for the U.S. Ninth Congressional seat. For a complete list of all BTL endorsements go to www.PrideSourceVotes

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