

A sharp awareness of the price of visible gay leadership continued through the mid-seventies. When a closeted delegate to the 1976 Democratic National Convention was asked whether he would ever consider being an openly gay candidate, he replied, "Are you kidding? I want to get something done. If I were to come out that would have to become the main thrust of my politics...any other issue would get buried."¹⁷ Even as the weight of oppression eased over the course of the decade, those willing to be openly gay resisted being stereotyped as "politically gay." An openly gay Carter press aide complained in 1976 that

I only have so much time in my life to be politically gay. The movement has to understand that there are those of us who want to work the establishment side of the street...Sure it's fun to demonstrate when all it takes is one Sunday afternoon. But the way to change things is to work with campaign people on a one-to-one level. It takes more time, but it will produce far more change."¹⁸

Openly gay or lesbian political leadership, thus, remained heavily conditioned by the perceived limits (such as unemployment or pigeonholing) which gay oppression continued to place on those who chose it.

Notorious Or Not Gay Enough

Five gay or lesbian people achieved national prominence in the mid-seventies. None of them came from the ranks of the gay movement, and none of them lingered on the national stage past 1978. Two of these—Army sergeant Leonard Matlovich and football player David Kopay—gained notoriety rather than leadership status. Their notoriety helped push forward the ongoing debate with the dominant society over what gayness was or could be, and was derived in part from the fact that they were, as *Advocate* news editor Sascha Gregory-Lewis put it, people "heterosexual America can swallow."¹⁹ By providing personal testimony that gay could be "normal," in terms of at least some aspects of the male sex role, they encouraged others who did not identify with the early seventies radical image of

gay liberation to consider that the emerging gay identity might include them as well.

Three others gained fame through electoral successes. Allan Spear was elected to the Minnesota State Senate in 1972, where he still serves today. He came out publicly in 1974 shortly after being re-elected. Spear downplayed his homosexuality, commenting that "I don't want to be typecast as a gay legislator. I'm a legislator with concerns in a variety of areas, who also happens to be gay." Aside from stints on the boards of NGTF and Gay Rights National Legislation (GRNL), he eschewed national politics entirely, despite pressure from movement moderates to cut a wider swath.

Elaine Noble parlayed her Boston political connections into a successful bid for a seat in the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1974, making no secret of her lesbianism. She elected not to run for a third term in 1978, citing a House redistricting plan that put her in competition with one of her closest political allies, Barney Frank. (Seven years later, having reached the U.S. House of Representatives, Frank would acknowledge his own homosexuality, but prior to this he was assumed to be, and supported the assumption that he was, heterosexual.)

Movement moderates besieged Noble with speaking engagement offers which carried the weight of imperatives. At the same time, both Noble and Spear came under heavy criticism from activists to their left in their home cities. The attacks on Noble and Spear generally came in the form of "not gay enough." In Minneapolis, former University of Minnesota student body president Jack Baker attacked Spear for not moving fast enough on gay rights and for not including the right to adopt children and civil rights protection for transvestites and transsexuals in his legislative efforts. In Boston, Noble's efforts at backroom lobbying, combined with her failure to get a gay rights bill through the House, brought her the dubious distinction of being the second most criticized public figure by Boston's collectively-run newspaper, *Gay Community News*.

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Madeline Davis

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