



Michaud, Michael H. ("Mike") (b. 1955)

by Linda Rapp

Encyclopedia Copyright © 2015, glbtq, Inc.
Entry Copyright © 2013 glbtq, Inc.
Reprinted from <http://www.glbtq.com>

Michael H. Michaud has had a long career as a legislator, having served in both the House of Representatives and the Senate in his native state of Maine, as well as in the United States House of Representatives. In the summer of 2013 he announced his intention to run for the governorship of Maine. In November of that year Michaud made the decision to come out publicly as a gay man.

Michaud is a lifelong resident of northern Maine. His experiences in his early years were fairly typical for a young man from the area--if not necessarily for a future member of the United States Congress. A Franco-American Roman Catholic, Michaud comes from a large family. The second of the six children of James and Lottie Michaud, he was born on January 18, 1955, in the town of Millinocket and grew up in the nearby community of Medway.

While attending Schenck High School in East Millinocket, Michaud considered going to college to pursue a degree in criminal justice in order to become a state trooper. Upon graduation in 1973, however, he opted for the security of the good wages and benefits of a manufacturing job and, like his father and grandfather, went to work at the Great Northern Paper Mill.

Michaud started off in the "paper room"--where pulp is processed--and, over the course of the next twenty-nine years, worked at a variety of other jobs at the mill, including ones in the finishing and shipping departments.

At the mill Michaud became a member of the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers International Union. He remains a strong supporter of organized labor.

It was concern for the environment that led Michaud to make his first bid for public office in 1980. At the time, he stated to Grace Murphy of the *Portland Press Herald*, the Penobscot River was "so polluted, you could practically walk across it. . . . Rather than sit back and complain about it, I decided to run for the [Maine] Legislature. I knew there had to be a balance between jobs and the environment."

Michaud won the election, and his constituents returned him to the Maine House of Representatives six more times. During his service there, he rose to the chairmanship of the Energy and Natural Resources



Michael Michaud.
Official portrait publish by
the U. S. House of
Representatives.

Committee.

In 1994 Michaud ran for a seat in the Maine Senate and handily defeated a well-funded incumbent opponent. He was re-elected three times, always by wide margins.

In the Senate Michaud became the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, where he made funding for education a priority. He was also concerned with healthcare, and he co-sponsored a bill to establish the "Maine Rx" program to make prescription medications more affordable.

Michaud became the president of the Maine Senate in 2000.

Throughout his tenure in the Maine legislature Michaud kept his job at the paper mill, working when the bodies were not in session and taking unpaid leave or working nights and weekends when they were. He resigned from the mill only after he was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 2002.

Michaud bested five other candidates in the Democratic primary that year and went on to face Kevin Raye, former chief of staff for Republican Senator Olympia Snowe, in the general election. Michaud then stressed his blue-collar roots. One of his campaign ads showed him at work at the mill, driving a forklift.

Paradoxically, some of Michaud's conservative views may have worked to his advantage against his Republican opponent. Raye had declared himself pro-choice, whereas, at the time, Michaud--influenced by the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church--felt that abortion should only be an option when necessary to save the life of a pregnant woman.

Michaud eked out a narrow victory over Raye. Upon taking his seat in the House of Representatives, he was appointed to the committees on transportation and veterans' affairs. Championing the welfare of veterans would become a hallmark of his work in Congress.

When Michaud ran for re-election in 2004, the Republican National Congressional Committee viewed him as a potentially vulnerable incumbent and undertook a campaign to label him as a candidate with "San Francisco values" because he had cast votes that matched those of Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of California in a number of instances, including one against a constitutional amendment to bar marriage equality. (Michaud at the time drew a fine line by voting against the amendment but not expressing affirmative support for marriage equality.) Given Michaud's well-established reputation as a longtime working man and union member, and his high visibility among the constituents in his district--to which he returned on most weekends--the ploy failed, and Michaud won an easy victory over his Republican challenger, Brian Hamel.

Michaud prevailed by extremely wide margins in his next two bids for re-election, but after he won with a lesser--albeit solid--advantage of approximately ten percent in 2010, the Republicans again considered his seat one that they might be able to pick up in the next election cycle.

Some in Maine were anticipating a tight race in the 2012 rematch of Michaud and Raye, but Michaud ran a strong campaign. He touted his support for veterans, including his work to make healthcare more easily accessible and more affordable for them. He also pointed to his efforts to provide loans to small businesses in the state, to support American employers such as the New Balance factories (producers of athletic shoes) in Maine, and to oppose trade policies of other countries--particularly China--that enticed companies to move their production operations overseas.

Michaud also made clear his support for marriage equality. In response to the Portland Press Herald's question about whether he favored same-sex marriage, he said, "Yes. I believe it is up to the states to determine whether or not to recognize same-sex marriage, which is why I voted against a Constitutional Amendment to ban gay marriage during my first term in Congress. Discrimination should not be written into the Constitution."

Michaud's forthright response was courageous. His sprawling Congressional district is Maine's most rural and it voted against the marriage referendum that ultimately brought marriage equality to the state in the November 2012 election.

When the votes were counted, Michaud had an advantage of some sixteen percent over Raye.

During his service in Congress, Michaud was frequently described as a conservative or "blue-dog" Democrat. Yet he has a life-time rating from the American Conservative Union of only 4, while his rating from the liberal group Americans for Democratic Action is 95. His ratings from the Human Rights Campaign and the ACLU have also consistently been high.

When Michaud was elected in 2003 as a pro-life Democrat, he received only a 10% rating from NARAL Pro Choice America, which supports the right of women to make their own reproductive choices. However, in 2010, the same organization gave Michaud a 100% rating, in response to Michaud's support of stem cell research and his vote against banning abortion from federal health care coverage.

In March 2013, Michaud was among three other members of Maine's federal delegation to sign a letter urging the United States Supreme Court to overturn the Defense of Marriage Act, which denied federal recognition of same-sex marriage.

In a statement, he said, "I don't believe people should be denied the right to marry. However, I've been particularly sensitive to how same-sex marriage initiatives like the one recently passed in Maine would impact religious institutions."

In August 2013 Michaud announced his intention to run for the governorship of Maine the following year. The Republican incumbent, Paul LePage, had won election in 2010 with a plurality of the vote--37.6 percent--over a strong independent candidate, Eliot Cutler, who received 35.9 percent, and a Democrat, Libby Mitchell, who garnered only 18.8 percent.

LePage has not enjoyed widespread popularity with the public but has stated that he plans to run again, as

has Cutler.

Political science professor Mark Brewer of the University of Maine told Mario Moretto of the *Bangor Daily News* that he expects the conservative LePage to receive approximately the same percentage of the vote that he did before, leaving Michaud and Cutler to battle for the votes of more moderate Mainers.

Dan Demeritt, a political consultant who served on the staff of LePage, opined that Michaud would be stronger than Mitchell, noting, "He'll do well with veterans, with core Democratic constituencies, but progressives don't flock to him. His position on social issues is ambiguous."

His stance on abortion has, Michaud declared in 2013, "evolved" after "as a Franco-American Catholic, [he] personally [had] struggled . . . with this issue." He also stated, "In the past, I have taken votes that I would not take today," and added that his more recent voting record had earned him "a 92 percent rating with Planned Parenthood."

Although Republicans had used coded language like "San Francisco values" to try to associate Michaud with the gltbq rights movement, he has not been an especially vigorous advocate for the cause, nor, until November 2013, did he publicly identify himself as a member of the community. He came out in an op-ed piece that was published in several Maine newspapers, including the Portland Press Herald.

Michaud stated that he was motivated to make a public statement because of "whisper campaigns, insinuations, and push-polls" about his sexual orientation. He offered "a simple, honest answer: 'Yes, I am [gay]. But why should it matter?'"

In Maine, a state that enjoys marriage equality, it seems not to matter much. In any event, wrote Nick Sambides, Jr. of the *Bangor Daily News*, Michaud's homosexuality "was, apparently, a sort of public secret: Something respected with silence or tact." It is expected that Michaud's revelation will have very little effect on the campaign.

Bibliography

Catalini, Michael. "Why a Congressman Wants to Take a \$104,000 Pay Cut." *National Journal* (August 20, 2013):

<http://www.nationaljournal.com/daily/why-a-congressman-wants-to-take-a-104-000-pay-cut-20130820>.

"Congressman Mike Michaud." (2013): <http://michaud.house.gov>.

"Meet the Candidates 2012: Mike Michaud." *Portland Press Herald* (Maine) (November 2012): <http://politics.pressherald.com>

/candidates/mike-michaud/.

Metzler, Rebekah. "Ahead of Supreme Court Review, Maine Delegation Differs on Gay Marriage." Bangor Daily News (March 25, 2013):

<http://downeasttodc.bangordailynews.com/2013/03/25/home/maine-lawmakers-weigh-in-on-gay-marriage-ahead-of-supreme-court-cases/>.

Michaud, Mike. "Maine Voices: Politicians Should Not Be Involved in a Woman's Decisions about Pregnancy, Michaud Says."

Portland Press Herald (Maine) (October 16, 2013):

http://www.pressherald.com/opinion/Maine_Voices_Politicians_should_not_be_involved_in_a_woman_s_decisions_about_pregnancy_.html.

_____. "Yes, I'm Gay. Now Let's Get Our State Back on Track." Portland Press Herald (Maine) (November 4, 2013):

http://www.pressherald.com/opinion/Mike_Michaud_Yes_I_m_gay_Now_let_s_get_our_state_back_on_track_.html?pagenum=full.

Moretto, Mario. "Aside from Familiar Names, 2014 Blaine House Race Looks 'Very Different' from 2010."

Bangor Daily News (August 15, 2013):

<http://bangordailynews.com/2013/08/15/politics/aside-from-familiar-names-blaine-house-race-in-2014-will-look-very-different-from-2010-experts-say>.

Murphy, Grace. "Michaud: Stresses His Blue-collar Roots." Portland Press Herald (Maine) (October 21, 2002): 1A.

Sambides, Nick, Jr. "Michaud Beats Raye in 2nd District." Bangor Daily News (November 6, 2012):

<http://bangordailynews.com/2012/11/06/politics/michaud-holds-early-lead-in-contest-against-raye>.

_____. "Spectrum of Reactions to Michaud Coming Out: Shock, Surprise, 'We All Knew It'." Bangor Daily News (November 4, 2013):

<http://bangordailynews.com/2013/11/04/politics/oh-my-god-deep-surprise-among-responses-to-michauds-coming-out>.

Tuttle, Jeff. "Blue-collar Candidate; Michael Michaud, Democrat 2nd Congressional District." Bangor Daily News (October 13, 2004): B1

About the Author

Linda Rapp teaches French and Spanish at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. She freelances as a writer, tutor, and translator. She is Assistant to the General Editor of www.glbtc.com.