

SHEILA KUEHL

b. February 19, 1941

Sheila Kuehl is the first openly gay California legislator and the first woman named Speaker of the California Assembly. She has authored more than 170 bills signed into law.

"The hardest thing I ever did, coming out, turns out to give me a reputation almost instantly for honesty and courage, which any politician would kill for."

In a 1994 election, Sheila James Kuehl became the first openly gay California legislator. In 1997, she was the first woman in California to be named Speaker pro Tempore. She was a member of the nation's first legislative LGBT Caucus. In 2002, she coauthored a bill that defined marriage as a civil contract between two persons, which passed the state legislature, but was vetoed by the governor.

As a youth she appeared in the television series "The Stu Erwin Show" and "Broadside." While an undergrad at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), she portrayed the irrepressible Zelda Gilroy in "The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis."

Although her character Zelda was popular enough for CBS to plan a spin-off, the pilot was canceled. A network representative later explained she was "just a little too butch." During the same time, Kuehl was banned from her sorority house when letters from her girlfriend exposed her sexuality.

After television roles started to dry up, she transitioned into academia. She became associate dean of students at UCLA. Thereafter, Kuehl graduated from Harvard Law School.

Kuehl went into private law practice specializing in civil rights and women's issues. She advocated for victims of domestic abuse and cofounded the California Women's Law Center in 1989. She taught law at UCLA, University of Southern California and Loyola University.

In 2000, she was elected a member of the California State Senate for the 23rd district of Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. Most significant are her successes in civil rights legislation. As of 2007, she authored 171 bills that have been signed into law.

Kuehl is the recipient of the John F. Kennedy Profiles In Courage Award (2003); the C50 Award, Celebrating 50 years of Women at the Harvard Law School (2003); the Outstanding Legislator Award from the Southern California Public Health Association (2003); the Victory Fund Leadership Award (2005); the Building a State of Equality Award from Equality California (2006); and the UCLA LGBT Center Distinguished Service Award (2007).



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