

# [***How The Murder Of LGBT Icon Harvey Milk Propelled Dianne Feinstein To Political Fame***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6990-TH21-JBCM-F00X-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 909 words

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**Highlight:** The assassinations of San Francisco s mayor and first openly gay city supervisor influenced Feinstein s advocacy for gun control.

**Body**

**Topline**

Dianne Feinstein, the California Democratic senator who died Thursday night at age 90, was thrust into the mayorship of grieving San Francisco in 1978 after its mayor George Moscone and supervisor Harvey Milk were shot and killed, a position she would hold for a decade before launching a Senate career that would become the longest for any woman in history.

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Feinstein died Thursday night at age 90. (Photo by TOM WILLIAMS/POOL/AFP via Getty Images)

POOL/AFP via Getty Images

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**Key Facts**

Feinstein, then the president of San Francisco s Board of Supervisors, discovered Milk, the first openly gay man elected to office in California, after he had been shot and killed in San Francisco City Hall by former supervisor Dan White, with whom Milk frequently clashed, on November 27, 1978.

White also shot and killed Moscone, which automatically made Feinstein the acting mayor of San Francisco, and she was formally elected as its first woman mayor by the Board of Supervisors the following week.

Just minutes after the murders, Feinstein gave astatementto the press, announcing that both Mayor Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk have been shot and killed to groans and screams from the crowd.

Feinstein would laterconsiderthe murders a formative moment for her political career, which she considered abandoning before assuming San Francisco s mayorship, and her press conference became a staple of her owncampaign advertisementsthat political observersreportedlypraised as effective.

The assassinations made gun control a personal issue for Feinstein: As San Francisco s mayor, she proposed and signed abanon handgun possession in 1982, and in the Senate, sheauthoredthe 1994 assault weapons ban (which expired in 2004) and repeatedly pushed for stricter gun laws,callingherself in 2018 a woman on a mission to ban assault weapons.

Feinstein also moved to support gay rights as mayor: She replaced Milk as supervisor with another openly gay man, Harry Britt, dedicated funding to HIV/AIDSresearch earlyin the crisis and organized the first national AIDS task force through the U.S. Conference of Mayors, though she occasionally clashed with gay constituents, including when shevetoedhealth benefits for unmarried gay domestic partners.

**Key Background**

Milk and White were both elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1978, and Feinstein, who had already served eight years, was elected board president. White would reportedly clash with fellow supervisors in tense debates, including one over a drug rehabilitation centerplannedfor his district that he vehemently opposed. Milk voted for the center, despitereportedlyinitially promising to support White. White was also the only supervisor to vote against an ordinance that banned discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations based on sexual orientation,statinghe feared residents upset by demands of large minorities would react negatively. White, a former police officer and firefighter, abruptlyresignedon November 10 because of financial constraints he could not simultaneously hold his jobs as a supervisor and firefighter and because of hisdisdainfor corrupt city ***politics***. Days later, he asked Moscone for his job back, and the mayor initially agreed, but turned back on his promise after Milklobbiedagainst White s reinstatement. White demanded a meeting with Moscone on November 27, and shot and killed him and Milk. White was charged with first-degree murder but later wasconvictedof the lesser crime of voluntary manslaughter, outraging the local gay community and sparking the White Night riots. Whitediedby suicide nearly two years after being released from his five-year prison sentence.

**Crucial Quote**

"I saw him come in. I said, 'Dan, can I talk to you?' And he went by, and I heard the door close, and I heard the shots and smelled the cordite, and I came out of my office. Dan went right by me. Nobody was around, every door was closed. I went down the hall. I opened the wrong door. I opened (Milk's) door. I found Harvey on his stomach. I tried to get a pulse and put my finger through a bullet hole. He was clearly dead. I remember it, actually, as if it was yesterday. And it was one of the hardest moments, if not the hardest moment, of my life, FeinsteintoldSF Gate in 2008, recounting her experience of the assassinations 30 years later.

**News Peg**

Feinstein died Thursday night at age 90, her chief of staff James SaulsconfirmedFriday morning. Prior to her death, Feinstein who was the oldest member of the U.S. Senate had increasingly come under criticism over whether she was fit for office. Some reportsindicatedFeinstein s mental abilities had faded, frustrating colleagues, and she suffered a bout of shingles that left her out of the Senate for more than two months earlier this year, causingcomplicationslike encephalitis and vision and balance impairments. Feinsteinresistedcalls, including from some fellow Democrats, to resign before the end of her term, butpledgedin February not to run for reelection in 2024.

**Further Reading**

Sen. Dianne Feinstein Dies At 90 Longest-Serving Female Senator(Forbes)

'It was a day of infamy': Dianne Feinstein recounts Harvey Milk, George Moscone killings(SF Gate)

The shocking San Francisco assassinations that forged Feinstein s political path(LA Times)

Gun violence has defined Sen. Dianne Feinstein s career. The issue is more important than ever for her now(LA Times)

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