

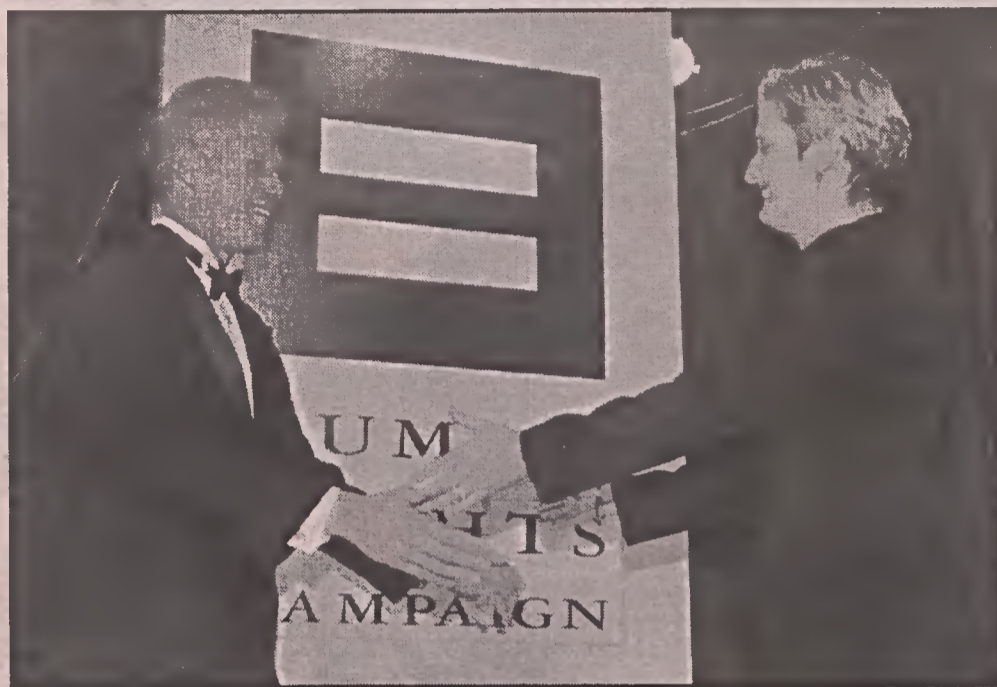
Q Notes

The Carolinas' Most Comprehensive Gay & Lesbian Newspaper

Author isn't buying
at the malady market Page 5

NC youth group hosts
training conference Page 14

Published Every Two Weeks On Recycled Paper • Volume 12, Number 14 • November 29, 1997 • FREE



President Clinton is greeted by HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birch

Clinton makes historic appearance at HRC National Dinner fundraiser

ACT-UP heckles pres. over needle exchange

by David M. Smith
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC—Community leaders applauded President Clinton's unprecedented appearance at a gay fundraising dinner at which he vowed to work toward an America where gay men and lesbians "will no longer be bashed or banished to the closet, or told to betray their own identity."

"President Clinton, you have done so much to challenge all of that and you can be certain that we will ask you to do more," responded Elizabeth Birch, executive director of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the nation's largest GLBT political organization.

Birch's remarks came at HRC's first National Dinner, held November 8 at the Grand Hyatt Hotel, where Clinton delivered the keynote speech, marking the first time a sitting president ever addressed a lesbian and gay civil rights event.

"We anticipated your first term as president

with utter hope and joy," Birch said in introducing Clinton to the sold-out crowd of 1500. "We stood nearly alone against the worst epidemic in this century.... Through the first decade of AIDS your predecessors offered only a wall of stony silence as countless died around us."

While acknowledging that the gay and lesbian community has suffered some disappointments under Clinton, Birch said, "I can honestly say: You have played a brave and powerful and indispensable role in the march toward justice for us, and all Americans."

She singled out the president's endorsement of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), a bill that would outlaw job discrimination based on sexual orientation, as an example of his efforts.

During his address, Clinton reiterated his support for the landmark legislation. "All America loses if we let prejudice and discrimination stifle the hopes or deny the potential of a single American. All America loses when any person is denied or forced out of a job because of sexual orientation. Being gay, the last time I

See APPEARANCE on page 10

Two courts support visitation rights for openly gay fathers

by Peg Byron
Special to Q-Notes

CHARLOTTE—In two separate cases, before two separate courts, gay fathers gained visitation rights with their children. While the battles are not over, the tendency is for higher courts to overturn lower court rulings that ban gay parents from seeing their children.

Victory in North Carolina

Michael Marshall and Lisa Sizemore were married for less than two years and separated before daughter Gloria was born. Now, Sizemore wants to cut off all contact between Gloria and her father because he lives with his gay partner.

On November 4, in a 2-1 ruling, the NC Court of Appeals upheld Mecklenburg District Judge Yvonne Mims Evans' order that allows Gloria to stay at Marshall's home in Cleveland, TN, one weekend a month. Sizemore's attorney, Richard Harris of Charlotte, said she plans

to appeal to the NC Supreme Court.

The NC Family Council, a Raleigh advocacy group, expects to file legal papers supporting Sizemore. It argues that gay fathers are committing felonies by violating the state's laws against oral and anal sex — and thus are unfit parents. But Sharon Thompson, a Durham lawyer with NC Gay and Lesbian Attorneys, said that would create a double standard. "If it's not applied to straight couples, it should not be applied to gay couples," she said.

In the ruling, Judges Edward Greene and James Wynn said there's plenty of evidence supporting Evans' ruling that the visits are in the child's best interests. Judge Mark Martin dissented. He argued that before deciding the visits, a court guardian should be appointed to investigate allegations that Marshall sexually abused Gloria during the visits. Evans ruled there was no "credible evidence" that Marshall molested his daughter.

See VISITATION on page 12

Myers values gay families

by Gene Poteat
Q-Notes Staff

Before Tom Myers' son came out at age 14, the teenager had become very withdrawn, depressed and self-destructive. Today, the youth has grown into a well-adjusted 25-year-old and Myers, having gone through this process alongside his child, has founded and directs "We Are Family," a non-profit agency in Charleston, SC.

According to their website, the group's mission is "To focus primarily on the plight of gay and lesbian children who often suffer the most because they have nowhere to turn for advice and support; to work by all means available for the acceptance of gays and lesbians as full members of our society; and to promote and distribute educational resources which inspire society to manifest our vision."

According to Warren Gress, the organization's current program director and a former Roman Catholic priest, We Are Family fulfills that mission "primarily through direct mailing of position papers to school system administrators and clergy members; community outreach and educational programs; and running a local support group for youth."

Myers comments that his own life journey took a different turn when he learned of his son's sexual orientation. He says the only support he initially found came from his spouse at the time. "The first part of my reaction was 'thank God' there is a reason for his behavior." Later, Myers discovered PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), going on to found a local chapter of the group, eventually serving as a regional director of PFLAG.

"Early on, I made a distinction that there are two issues involved, the two relating to each

other. One was rights and justice; the other acceptance and understanding. There are numerous organizations on the side of rights and justice. PFLAG is one of the only organizations coming from the position of acceptance and understanding. I decided where I could have more influence is in getting straight people to understand — that's what led me to found We Are Family."

"[Myers] founded the organization as an educational program," states Gress. His own involvement came about because of his personal experiences as a youth.

There seems to be little doubt that gay and lesbian youth are at risk. The group's website (hosted at no charge by Internet service provider pridemail.com) lists some startling statistics: "An estimated 40% of street kids are lesbian or gay. These youth have either run away or been thrown out of their homes. Many bisexual, gay and lesbian youth drop out of school due to harassment or low self-esteem and fear of 'being found out.' Over 25% of gay and lesbian youth have severe drug and alcohol problems. Gay and lesbian youth account for one-third of all teen suicides. Lesbian and gay youth attempt suicide three times more often than their straight/heterosexual peers."

One of the group's most important functions is disseminating the educational mailings it sends to regional organizations. "We Are Family, which receives some small grants from local foundations, but is primarily funded through private donations, publishes *Plain Talk*, a position paper, if you will, which includes articles such as information on suicide rates, survival stories, failure stories, etc. It's usually one page,

See FAMILIES on page 10

Inaugural conference on hate crimes held by administration

New hate crimes bill being readied

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

WASHINGTON, DC—President Clinton initiated what may be seen as one of the most meaningful discussions of his presidency when he convened the first-ever White House conference on Hate Crimes on November 10 and brought together almost 350 participants culled from law enforcement, civil rights, anti-violence, youth, education and religious groups to discuss ways of combating the rising tide of hate violence in America.

National gay organizations represented at the conference included the Human Rights Campaign; National Gay and Lesbian Task Force; National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs; National Youth Advocacy Coalition; Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

At the day-long summit, held at George Washington University, President Clinton endorsed the Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HCPA), a bill that would add sexual orientation, gender and disability to the current federal hate crimes law. The president said the bipartisan measure, soon to be introduced in the US Senate by Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA),

was the first of several initiatives his administration would pursue to get tougher on crimes motivated by hatred.

Clinton unveiled plans to add 50 more FBI agents and prosecutors to work on hate crimes enforcement; announced that, for the first time, the National Crime Victimization Survey used by the Justice Department will include questions about hate crimes so that they can be tracked on a national basis; and indicated that the Justice Department will make its own hate crimes training curriculum available to state and local law enforcement training centers across the country.

Human Rights Campaign Executive Director Elizabeth Birch, who was at the conference, stated, "The Hate Crimes Prevention Act is critical because, when Americans are targeted for hate violence based on sexual orientation, gender or disability, the FBI should be able to investigate and prosecute — just as it is currently able to combat hate crimes based on religion, race and national origin. All hate crimes are pernicious and they should all be punished accordingly."

Until HCPA passes, hate crimes based on sexual orientation, gender and disability are not against federal law. Therefore, they cannot be investigated and prosecuted by the Justice Department like other hate crimes. HCPA would cover anyone victimized because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation,

See CONFERENCE on page 9

Federally Recognized Hate Crimes Classes:

- Race
- Religion
- National Origin

Proposed Additions Under HCPA Bill:

- Sex. Orientation
- Gender
- Disability