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Gay domestic abuse: Our little secret comes out of the closet

by Brian M. Myer
Q-Notes Staff

Gays in America, for all the progress that's been made, still remain victims of prejudice, discrimination and hate crimes. Matthew Shepard was beaten to death for his sexual orientation. One of the targets of alleged serial bomber Eric Rudolph was a gay nightclub. And more gays are being ejected from the military than ever before, despite President Clinton's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

Discrimination from the outside, along with the destructive force of the AIDS epidemic, has tended to obscure an internal problem that plagues the gay community: domestic violence.

An article about domestic violence may seem out of place in a gay newspaper, but, unfortunately, it is not. For example, were you aware that several recent studies suggest that same-sex domestic violence may be occurring at a similar rate — approximately one-third of all relationships — as heterosexual domestic violence? A six-city survey conducted by gay activists turned up 1566 reported incidents of gay domestic violence, several hundred more than reported incidents of anti-gay harassment and violence.

Or were you aware that the cycle of same-sex domestic violence is very similar to heterosexual domestic violence? Tension-building, actual violence, and then a renewed honeymoon phase where the cycle starts all over again. Like heterosexual domestic violence, the underlying issue is power and control, and that's regardless of gender or sexuality.

Unlike heterosexual episodes, there are aspects of same-sex domestic violence that are unique to our community. For example, the closet plays a role in cases where the batterer is

out and the person who's being battered is not. In that instance, the victim has no one to turn to because no one even knows they are in a homosexual relationship. Using children as a weapon is another method, where the batterer threatens to "out" his or her partner to their kids or other members of their family.

Also, HIV/AIDS factors into the problem in a variety of ways. A recent study by Community United Against Violence, a gay anti-violence group, revealed that if the batterer is HIV-positive, sometimes the batteree doesn't want to leave them. They feel sorry for them because they might get sick and they want to help them. If the person who is battered is HIV-positive, they may be too scared to leave because they may feel, "I'll die alone," or "He's better than nobody at all." Or the person being battered may be frightened to leave the relationship because of the prevalence of HIV on the dating scene.

Depending on whose figures you believe, up to 10 percent of the US population may be gay, which means there may be much more violence in the gay community than anyone thought. There have been books on the subject, going back to the 1980s, but there has been resistance to the idea. Many activists feel the resistance might be due to the fact that this type of domestic violence does not conform to the traditional models of heterosexual domestic violence — especially as defined by feminists. Oftentimes, the feminist theory is based on gender dynamics and misogyny (men hating women). Bringing male-male and female-female violence into the equation undermines this thinking and disrupts the gender-based power theory of why domestic violence occurs.

There's also resistance from the gay and les-



bian community who don't want their dirty laundry aired in public. Just as straight battered women have tremendous shame and denial, the same thing is felt on a community-wide basis for gay people. Added to that is the sense of not wanting to increase the negative attention the gay community already feels itself under from the outside.

If you are experiencing any of the following forms of abuse from a lover, ex-lover or roommate, you may be a victim of domestic violence:

- Emotional Abuse: Your partner constantly criticizes or humiliates you. This person blames you for things that are not your fault. This person is obsessively jealous. S/He lies to manipulate you and punishes you when s/he gets angry.

- Physical Abuse: Your partner pushes, slaps, kicks, bites, restrains, uses a weapon against, or

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"Gang of Five" sent packing by moderates

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—The "Gang of Five," reviled by liberals and moderates for the past year and a half as the death of civility and centrist politics in Mecklenburg County, has been reduced to a shameful footnote in the history of local government. The only member of the infamous quintet left standing after the November 3 general election is Commissioner Bill James — and as one gay pundit was heard to observe, "Nobody's concerned about an attack dog with no teeth."

Virulent homophobe Joel Carter, who openly referred to gays and lesbians as "queers," lost his District 1 seat to Maggi Markey in an upset. Because he presented himself as the bastion of "traditional family values," Carter undoubtedly took a hit at the polls when his wife filed for divorce less than a week before the election. In her filing, Marlene Carter accused her husband of having an affair with his female campaign manager. Joel Carter dropped out of sight during the last days of the race without responding to the allegations.

When the new Mecklenburg County Commission is sworn in, this is how it will look: Maggi Markey (Dem., D-1); Norman Mitchell (Dem., D-2); Darrel Williams (Dem., D-3); Lloyd Scher (Dem., D-4); Tom Cox (Rep., D-5); Bill James (Rep., D-6); Parks Helms (Dem., At Large); Becky Carney (Dem., At Large); and Jim Richardson (Dem., At Large).

Many are expecting the Commission to move quickly and undo the handiwork of the previous majority.

Openly gay Libertarian Chris Cole garnered 7039 votes (1.56 percent). He expressed mixed feelings about his showing. "I have had only a brief chance to look at the precinct breakdown. One thing I noticed was that some of my best precinct totals were in the Dilworth area of Charlotte, which is where the highest concentration of gay folks live. I take that to mean that my message was at least somewhat successful in getting out to my community."

Many are expecting the Commission to move quickly and undo the handiwork of the previous majority, such as restoring county funding to the Arts & Science Council and lifting a ban that prohibits agencies receiving county money from offering sex education counseling. At a candidate's forum sponsored by Mecklenburg Gay & Lesbian PAC prior to the election, Commissioner Carney noted that she "dream[s] of that first meeting."

Democrats did well with voters statewide. Political newcomer John Edwards beat incumbent Republican Lauch Faircloth for a seat in the US Senate while Mel Watt, an African-American incumbent, won his race for the redrawn, white-majority 12th House district.

NC Pride PAC saw 74 percent of their endorsed and recommended candidates elected to the NC House and 92 percent to the Senate, including stalwarts such as Charlie Dannelly (Dem., Senate D-33); Alma Adams (Dem., House D-26); Ellie Kinnaird (Dem., Senate D-33); and

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Voters send strong message to Republican Party

by Dan Van Mourik
Q-Notes Staff

WASHINGTON, DC—The November 3 national election results once again showed that the gay community is making significant strides in our quest for acceptance while at the same time showing there is much work to be done. Several resounding victories were offset by equally resounding defeats.

Even though our losses were significant, hope for passage of legislation beneficial to the gay community has been given new life. While Republicans retain control, there may be a new attitude in the upcoming 106th Congress. Most analysts agree that voters sent a message of moderation this election year. Voters defeated several conservative Republicans, choosing instead candidates with a more moderate stance on the issues. If Republicans listen to the message, they will have to soften their ultra-conservative stance to regain voter support.

For example, in North Carolina, Republican incumbent Sen. Lauch Faircloth was defeated by political newcomer John Edwards. In New York, Alphonse D'Amato lost his seat to Democrat Charles Schumer. Faircloth and D'Amato were viewed as ultra-conservatives and both lost.

"American voters rejected the mean-spirited, anti-gay positions that have been expressed throughout this election season and registered their dissatisfaction at the polls," said Elizabeth Birch, executive director of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). "In most cases where the voters had a choice, they picked the moderate, fair-minded candidate. This should be a clear message to the Republican leadership: extreme right candidates don't make good candidates."

In a mid-October survey conducted for *Time* magazine and television network CNN, 58 percent of Americans said they would vote for a political candidate who is homosexual and 76 percent favored a federal hate crime law that includes sexual orientation.

The campaign trail

For the most part, gay candidates and their opponents kept sexual orientation out of the campaigns. But we did not ignore them. Our national organizations poured money into these races, notably \$1 million spent nationally by HRC and over \$750,000 by the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund on behalf of 28 openly gay and lesbian candidates.

But in politics, not all goes smoothly. HRC provoked a storm of protest from some of its members with their decision to endorse Sen. Alfonse M. D'Amato (R-NY) in his reelection campaign against Rep. Charles E. Schumer (D-NY). One member of HRC's board of directors, Marylouise Oates, resigned in protest after the board voted to back D'Amato. "I simply cannot be a part of any enterprise that seeks to reelect an anti-choice senator with a long record of hostility and indifference to women's issues and to the fundamental issues of civil rights for African-Americans and other minorities," Oates said in a letter to Elizabeth Birch, HRC's executive director. Most of New York's gay rights leaders endorsed Schumer.

But leaders of the organization defended the D'Amato endorsement, arguing that it was consistent with a long-standing policy to support incumbents who have a good record on gay issues. In an "open letter" to members signed by Birch and HRC's co-chairmen, Jeff Sachse and

Candy Marcum, the leaders stated that "as a Republican in a Republican-controlled Senate, Sen. D'Amato has taken personally and politically unpopular positions in defense of the dignity, rights and contributions of gay and lesbian Americans."

Richard Socarides, White House liaison to the gay community, said "we were disappointed with their decision." "You don't have to be a political professional to know that a vote for Al D'Amato is a vote to make Trent Lott the next Senate majority leader," Socarides added.

"I was not happy with the fact that, even though [D'Amato] has a 75 percent record with us, he has an 82 percent voting record with the Christian Coalition," board member Barry Karas said. "I felt in a way we would be sleeping with the enemy."

Our victories

Wisconsin voters sent the first openly gay, non-incumbent candidate to Congress. Democratic state Rep. Tammy Baldwin defeated Republican Josephine Musser to replace retiring GOP Rep. Scott Klug. Baldwin, 36, made health care a cornerstone of her campaign, saying the United States should adopt a national, publicly funded system like that in Canada.

"History was made when John Glenn proved once and for all that age is no barrier. ...history is being made here on earth as gay and lesbian candidates prove that sexual orientation is not a barrier to election," said Brian K. Bond, executive director of the Victory Fund.

"Tammy Baldwin is a solid representative who happens to be a lesbian," said Birch. "She has broken down a very large door. She has cre-

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