

Q Notes

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The Latest Q-POLL Results

If you could wave a magic wand and make all the members in one of the following pop bands turn gay, which would you choose?

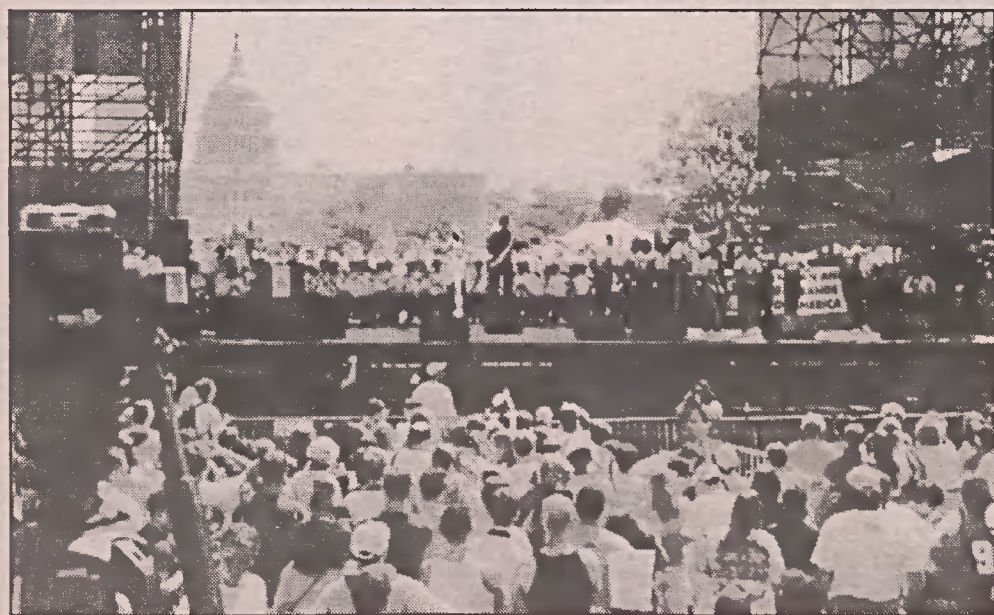
Backstreet Boys
49%

Spice Girls
14%

'N Sync
37%

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The Capitol Building rises in the distance behind the March stage

March brings 300K to Washington

by Cindy Nardozzi
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC—The fourth national march for GLBT civil rights held up to its promise to be one of the largest civil rights demonstrations in recent history. It is estimated that over 300,000 supporters of equality convened in the nation's capital for the Millennium March on Washington for Equality on April 29 and 30.

The Board of Directors for the march, the first such gathering since 1993, released the following statement: "The purpose of the Millennium March on Washington for Equality is to energize and galvanize the GLBT and supportive communities to work for equality at all levels, strengthen the overall movement for equal rights and empower and inspire voters for the 2000 elections."

The two-day festival was surrounded with controversy and turmoil from many of the "movers and shakers" of the national movement. The MMOW board received criticism in areas ranging from the hiring of staff to closed-book budgeting to the "unsettled" status of their tax exempt nonprofit organization.

The Boycott MMOW Coalition accused the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community

Churches (UFMCC), the two groups that initially called the event, of mounting a hostile takeover of the GLBT movement.

HRC was accused of pushing an image of the community as exclusively affluent and white. Opponents said the event was targeted toward people with upper middle-class and wealthy backgrounds, citing the extensive publicity through Internet web site PlanetOut as evidence that poor GLBT members were overlooked.

HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birch countered that organizers were simply trying to stage the largest gay-rights extravaganza ever held in DC.

The idea came to fruition with a first-of-its-kind festival along eight blocks of Pennsylvania Ave. that featured gay-friendly vendors, booths for community groups, food, drink, entertainment, two dance areas, a family area and cyber and wellness pavilions. In addition, there were a number of functions across the city including a variety of dances, numerous conferences and rallies, performances and artist exhibitions.

The weekend also prominently featured a mass commitment ceremony, dubbed The Wedding, and brought together musical artists

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Civil unions approved in Vermont

by Dan Van Mourik
Q-Notes Staff

MONTPELIER, VT—Lawmakers gave final approval Tuesday, April 25 to legislation that makes Vermont the first state to grant gay couples nearly all of the rights and benefits of marriage. The state House voted 79-68 for the "civil unions" bill, accepting minor alterations approved by the Senate the week before. Democratic Governor Howard Dean signed it into law the next day.

"I think the powerful message is that in Vermont, we tend to value people for who they are, not what they are," Dean said. "I also believe that this legislation speaks to the heart of this state and certainly to my heart."

The bill is in response to the Vermont Supreme Court's unanimous ruling in December that gay couples were being unconstitutionally denied the rights and benefits of marriage.

The court gave the Legislature the option to let gays marry or to create some kind of domestic partnership. Lawmakers opted for a parallel system for gays, creating what they called "civil unions."

After the bill takes effect July 1, couples will be able to go to their town clerks for licenses. They will then have their unions certified by a

justice of the peace, judge or member of the clergy. Breakups will be handled in Family Court, just as divorces are, although they will be called "dissolutions."

The more than 300 benefits that the state confers on married couples will flow to same-sex couples, including the ability to make medical decisions on behalf of partners, inherit from each other without hefty taxes, and protection from having to testify against one another.

In addition to all the positive benefits now bestowed on same-sex couples, they will also have to accept the negative responsibilities as well. Same-sex partners will now have to assume each other's debt and pay child support.

The new law will have jurisdiction in Vermont only and will not entitle couples to benefits granted by the federal government. It is also rather likely that most states will not recognize civil unions.

"I think this definitely places Vermont in the forefront in this country; [it] places Vermont on par with Nordic and European countries and Canada," said Beth Robinson, a lawyer who argued the three gay couples' case before the Vermont Supreme Court.

"This is breathtaking," said attorney Mary

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Lesbian asks court to void adoption

by Wanda Pico
Special to Q-Notes

RALEIGH—In what could be an unprecedented blow to gay and lesbian parenting rights, a lesbian mother is asking the NC Court of Appeals to invalidate a second-parent-adoption decree granted to her former partner in Washington state. The biological mother, S.E., is arguing that the Washington adoption should be deemed invalid, based on a NC state law prohibiting recognition of same-sex marriages.

In responses to S.E.'s attempt to dismantle one of our community's most secure legal rights, the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) has joined the Sharon Thompson Law Group of Durham, NC to work on behalf of the Plaintiff-Appellee, A.S.

Having failed three times at the trial court level to dissolve the adoption, S.E. filed a Notice of Appeal on October 1, 1999 with the NC Court of Appeals. "If S.E. succeeds, this case could potentially open the door to third parties, including government agencies, to refuse to recognize second-parent adoptions by lesbian and gay parents," said NCLR Executive Director Kathryn D. Kendall. "This has the potential of making our families very vulnerable to attack."

She continued, "This case is unprecedented for three reasons. First, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first time a lesbian or gay person has sought to attack a second-parent adoption. Second, adoptions always have been sacrosanct and recognized in every state, even if a state does not approve second-parent adoptions for its residents. And third, S.E. is attempting to use an anti-gay law, which has nothing to do

with adoption, to destroy very hard fought rights and protections for our families."

NCLR and the Sharon Thompson Law Group have submitted a brief to the NC Court of Appeals in response to S.E.'s claims. The brief urges the court to affirm the trial court's recognition of the adoption and to dismiss the appeal as clearly contrary to established law. The brief relies on the following points of law:

1. Article IV, Sec. 1 of the US Constitution states, "[F]ull faith and credit shall be given in each state to the public acts, records, and judicial proceedings of every other state." Because they are judgments, it has long been established that adoption decrees are within the protections of the full faith and credit clause.

2. NC General Statute 48-2-205 clearly and unequivocally states that: "A final adoption decree issued by any other state must be recognized in this State." There are no exceptions.

3. NC has no public policy against second parent adoptions.

Once the NC Court of Appeals reviews the briefs from both sides, it will set a date for oral argument and make a ruling.

The second-parent adoption was granted in Washington with the encouragement and consent of the biological mother, when the couple were living together as partners in that state. Three years later, the family moved to NC, where A.S. became the primary caretaker of the child.

Upon the couple's separation, S.E. moved to Georgia, leaving full care and responsibility of the child to A.S., who filed a complaint in NC for permanent custody of the child with

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Meck. voters lose supportive voice

Lesbian candidate wins primary race

by Clay Ollis
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—Democratic primary voters in Mecklenburg County's 4th District unseated four-term commissioner Lloyd Scher on May 2, choosing rival Dumont Clarke by a resounding 60 - 34 percent margin. Scher, who has been a consistent supporter of the GLBT community, was hurt by lingering effects from an ethics investigation.

The State Bureau of Investigation conducted a three-month inquiry into fundraising activities relating to the Scher Foundation dating from November 1999, but found no evidence of intentional wrongdoing. District Attorney Peter Gilchrist declined to file any charges against Scher based on the investigation.

Connie Vetter, co-chair of MeckPAC (Mecklenburg Gay & Lesbian Political Action Committee), expressed disappointment at Scher's defeat, but MeckPAC had previously noted that Clarke's responses on MeckPAC's questionnaire and interview also indicated support for GLBT issues, granting both Democrats an endorsement from the PAC.

Vetter also noted she was "a little disappointed at the low voter turnout, but pleased with the overall results. We are happy to see Margaret Markey win."

Markey, who received a MeckPAC endorsement in District 1, was re-elected in the Democratic primary. She defeated anti-gay "Gang of Five" incumbent Joel Carter for the seat in the

1998 general election. Carter ran as an At-Large candidate in this primary, but did not receive enough votes to advance.

Two additional "Gang" members, each of whom had rated a MeckPAC "warning" for their opposition to GLBT issues, moved forward through the primary. They are Tom Bush in the At-Large race (making a comeback bid) and incumbent Bill James for the District 6 seat. Both candidates were running against opponents who had also received a "warning."

Vetter strongly encouraged everyone in the GLBT community to join MeckPAC and become actively involved in the general election since the possibility of a 5-4 Republican majority on the county commission would "probably not be good for the GLBT community."

In primary races for the North Carolina Legislature, a record number of candidates earned endorsements or recommendations from Equality NC PAC, the statewide GLBT political action committee, and about three-fourths of them

advanced to the general election. In the state House, advancing candidates included Hunt in District 15, McAllister in District 17, Allen in District 22, and Luebke, Michaux and Miller from the 23rd District which has three seats.

Also, Candidates Fields and Nesbitt advanced in District 51, as did Womble and Oldham in Districts 66 and 67, respectively. All state House candidates endorsed by Equality NC were Democrats.

Among Republicans running for the NC House, both incumbent Jim Gulley and challenger Debbie Ware from District 69 (Mecklenburg County) earned a "warning"

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Lloyd Scher