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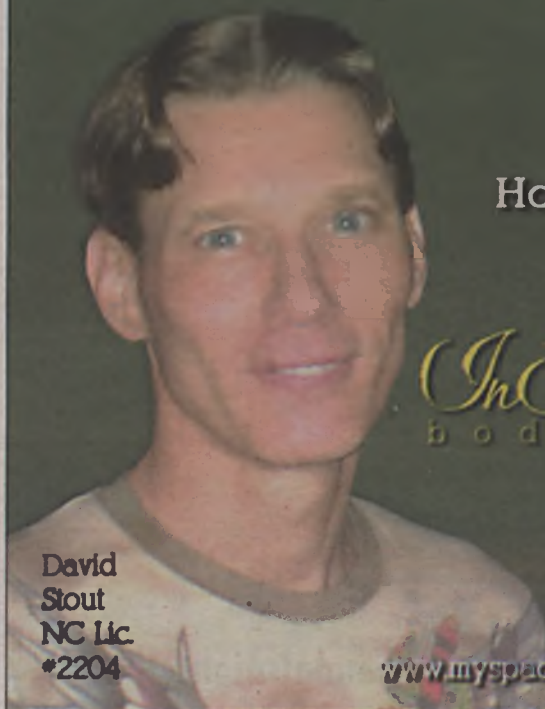
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Editor's Note

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

\$30k for toilets?



This issue's cover story documents a debate brought to the forefront of LGBT activists' minds as Equality Across America plans its National Equality March for Oct. 11.

Some of the most strident opposition to the march comes from those who feel the financial and volunteer hours and resources being poured into the event might have been better used in other ways. It is a view I've shared before, as recently as my trip to Pittsburgh, Penn., for the Netroots Nation conference.

During the conference's LGBT Caucus, I suggested the march's \$200,000 budget would have been better spent assisting local and state grassroots groups attempting to organize at home and change the hearts and minds of voters.

"It doesn't take a lot of money to make an impact in places like Charlotte or in Columbia or my hometown of Winston-Salem, N.C.," I told the group.

While in Pittsburgh, I met and interviewed Equality Across America's director Kip Williams. In a coffee shop a few blocks away from the convention center, he addressed the financial criticisms thrown at march organizers.

"In part, this criticism comes from a mentality of scarcity," he told me. "I think that a successful march pushes forward the whole movement, in both the local and national levels. I think it is true — folks are facing hard economic times. A lot of folks who want to go, won't be able to. We're encouraging people to do fundraising in their local districts, to get people to the march who couldn't go otherwise. You can find resources in the community to help people get there. As far as finding the money, we've got a lot of wealthy folks in our community. I don't think the money isn't there. I think it most definitely is there. I don't think the march takes resources from Maine or California. A successful march pushes all forward."

Equality Across America recently released their budget for their events slated for Columbus Day weekend, including volunteer receptions, a memorial service, a march and a Capitol Hill rally.

Coming in at \$199,550, the budget is modest, at least compared to similar marches in the past.

But one figure jumped out at me: \$29,500 has been set aside for port-a-johns. That's a full 15 percent of the weekend's entire budget.

More than twice that amount — \$64,000, or 32 percent of the total budget — will be spent on delivering, setting up and running the main stage and its related items.

My mind goes haywire thinking about how much good could be accomplished with just half the march's budget for toilets, much less the full budgeted amount.

Famed AIDS Quilt founder Cleve Jones told *Q-Notes* that the most effective lobbying is done at the district level.

"It is important to understand how lobbying works," Jones said. "To really make an impact you have to lobby in all the 435 districts. That is where the most effective lobbying can occur, in the district level by people who live and work and vote in that district and go into those offices and build relationships with the staff."

I couldn't agree more. And that's why — for all the thinking, conversing and debating I've done — I can't figure out how a national march on Washington will accomplish Equality Across America's district-level organizing goals. It makes no sense.

Ed Farthing, a former co-executive director of Equality North Carolina, echoed similar thoughts.

"I think it is wonderful to organize in all 435 congressional districts," Farthing said. "But that is local. All politics is local. If you want to have a meeting in D.C. with several thousand people, that's fine. You can hold a leadership conference or seminar. But, you can't call it a march on Washington. My vision of a march on Washington is several hundred thousand people showing up and wanting something, not several thousand showing up and maybe or maybe not attending some meetings and trainings."

A small march and rally in Washington will accomplish very little. Folks will go to Washington, feel good and get inspired. But when they come back home, they'll be broke. Resources that could have been used to organize at home will have been spent traveling to and from D.C. and Williams' "broader organizing goals" will die before they even get started.

If Equality Across America organizers truly wished to inspire grassroots, district-level lobbying and action, perhaps they could have used their \$200,000 budget to shore up local activists working with locally-elected U.S. House and Senate representatives.

Jones and Williams spend an awful lot of time talking about their "newer" and "better" strategy. But exactly what kind of effective strategy do they have? If they've got one, I'm not seeing it. ▀

'speakout'

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'online q-poll'

Will you be attending the national march on Washington on Oct. 11?

See the options and vote at www.q-notes.com/qpoll