

Local leaders reflect on march

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"Most of our movement's resources have always gone to the federal level and that's still the case. Yet, all of our significant victories have come from the work of state groups, usually on shoe-string budgets," he told *Q-Notes* via email. "Half of Americans are protected from employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. One-third are protected from discrimination based on gender-identity. In the last five years we've gone from no states with marriage equality to six."

Jones said we should take our cues from other nations around the globe. "When we look at those countries on the planet that have full equality for LGBT people, that progress was never achieved by popular votes and rarely even by legislative action, and never by provincial or state action. It came from national action from parliaments or national courts. This is not a matter of opinion. This is simply fact."

And Jones also thinks it is clear to see why state groups are so adamantly opposed to a national action.

"This criticism comes from the state equality groups and the local groups who are deeply invested — and I use that word deliberately — in maintaining a strategy of slow, state-by-state progress," he said.

In California, Jones said, local activists are "in a huge rush" to spend millions on a campaign to repeal Prop. 8, a ballot fight he says won't grant anyone any new rights (California already offers domestic partner benefits equal to those benefits received by married, heterosexual couples).

"There is a certain amount of irony that the ones who talk about diverting resources for a march that will cost less than \$250,000 are quite willing and indeed eager to continue to spend tens of millions of dollars," he added.

Palmquist says a greater impact could be made by volunteering time and contributing financially to ballot fights like those in Maine. "We have a real chance to win marriage equality in a vote of the people for the first time in our nation's history, and they need our help talking one-on-one with voters to succeed," he said. "It might not be as sexy as rallying in D.C., but we know that is the kind of work that makes the greatest difference."

Palmquist understands the emotion behind pushing for a national focus. "It sounds so much easier to just get it all done at once," he said. "But the reality is we have to keep doing our homework in the states if we want to succeed nationally."

It is important, Palmquist said, to understand the history of progressive change in America. "The history of social movements shows us that federal progress on an issue almost always follows victories in the states."

Durham-based activist Mandy Carter, who's spent her entire career tackling issues of racism, sexism, poverty and homophobia, told *Q-Notes* she is neutral when it comes to the march.

"I'm not going to endorse it, but I'm also not going to speak out against it or tell folks not to go," she said in an email to *Q-Notes*.

Like Palmquist, Carter questions Jones' push for a new, national focus and strategy.

"I couldn't disagree more," she said. "With my 40-year movement history as a gauge, I

would say that for me the state-by-state and city-by-city grassroots work being done across the country is why I think we've seen and will continue to see the legislative and 'changing of hearts and minds' wins."

Carter said the community needs a combination of both federally-focused and state- and local-level organizing.

Williams believes national organizing and local organizing can work together. One mustn't be forced to choose between marching in D.C. and volunteering in Maine or at home.

"I don't think it is one way or the other — that is a false and artificial choice," he said. "The folks who are at the march, who have the time to go and volunteer in Maine, will be able to."

Williams said some D.C. residents had "tossed around the idea" of organizing busses to take willing volunteers to Maine after the march. Equality Maine is organizing community housing for individuals taking part in its "Volunteer Vacation" initiative.

The march, Williams said, is a rallying point for the nation's community. He says Equality Across America's longterm organizing goals include supporting and rallying support in each of the 435 districts that comprise the U.S. House of Representatives. In October, activists will be able to march and go to trainings designed to help them build support for equality at home.

"The march is not the destination," he said. "It is the vehicle to get to these broader organizing goals. A lot of folks are starting to see that, and they are going to change the way they are talking and writing about the march."

Still, Ryan Wilson, president of the SC Pride Movement, questions Jones' thoughts on the "old strategy" of state-by-state movement, and creating a new focus on federal action. For Wilson, Jones' and Equality Across America's "new strategy" isn't new at all — federal focus and a lack of local support is par for the course in the work he does in rural, red-state South Carolina.

"It strikes me as odd that whenever our state asks for money or support from national organizations they say, 'Our focus is on the federal and we've gotta get things passed here in D.C., so funding grassroots efforts to change hearts of voters in South Carolina isn't on the top of our list,'" he said. "Then, we are told by others that we should be doing everything in our home state, because otherwise we'll never

see **Activists on 8**

Going to D.C.?

A group of UNC-Charlotte students are hoping to organize carpooling or busses to get people to and from the National Equality March on Oct. 11. For more information or if you are interested in joining them, email iso.charlottenc@gmail.com.

Is your local group planning on carpooling or organizing busses? Let *Q-Notes* know and we will post your information with this story online. Email editor@q-notes.com or call 704-531-9988, ext. 202.



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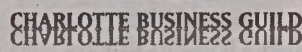

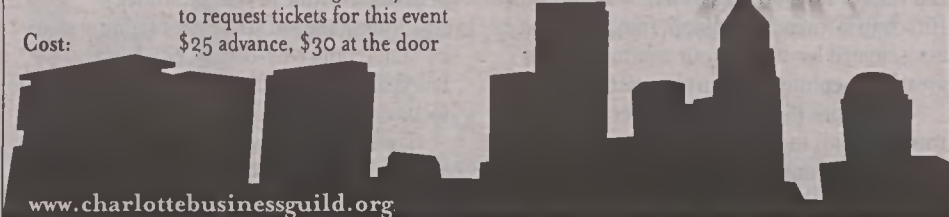
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