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Unequal Rites

North Carolina joins the anti-marriage bandwagon

by Eagle White
Q-Notes Staff

RALEIGH—The ink was barely dry on the May 20 Supreme Court decision overturning Colorado's Amendment 2 when a North Carolina state senator introduced legislation which has mushroomed into what will probably result in a statewide ban on the legal validity of same-sex marriage.

NC Senate Bill 1302, introduced May 23 by Gaston County Republican James Forrester, has resulted in a flurry of homophobic grandstanding in the General Assembly's short session. The timing of the bill's introduction indicates that its reasons for being are two-fold — conservative backlash against the Supreme Court's Colorado decision, and panic about the effects of an anticipated ruling in Hawaii's Supreme Court, which would uphold the legality of same-sex marriages in that state. The Hawaii decision would potentially affect all states, because under Article IV, Section 1 of the US Constitution, "Full faith and credit shall be given to the public acts, records and judicial proceedings of every other state..." Much like the "quickie" marriages and divorces performed in Nevada, same-sex unions performed in Hawaii would be legally binding in other states.

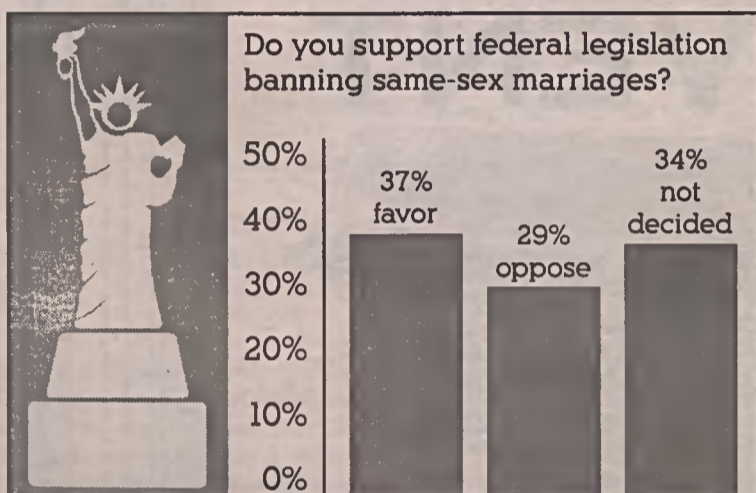
North Carolina is not alone in introducing legislation banning same-sex unions. According to NC Pride PAC for Lesbian and Gay Equality, at least 36 states have introduced similar legislation. In 17 states, the measures have been defeated, while nine states (the most recent being South Carolina) have approved legislation which invalidates same-sex unions. North Carolina already has a law which says marriages may only take place between a man and a woman.

Senator Forrester has used underhanded tactics and a lot of double-talk to get this issue before the General Assembly. To circumvent legislative rules which allow only local legislation to be introduced during the Assembly's short session, Forrester introduced his bill as a measure for Iredell County, a portion of which he represents. Local bills, once introduced, may be adopted by other counties. Other state senators, sensing a high-visibility issue which could prove controversial during this election year, have set upon the issue of same-sex marriage like a pack of rabid dogs. Lawmakers from 11 counties — Alamance, Caswell, Cleveland, Davidson, Davie, Gaston, Lincoln, Person, Rowan, Rutherford and Surry — quickly signed on to the "local" bill.

In a May 23 press release, NC Pride PAC Executive Director MK Cullen said, "This underhanded attempt to prohibit same-sex marriage county by county is offensive to the lesbian and gay community, our supporters and anyone who believes in the Constitution. An attempt to discriminate against gays and lesbians in this calculated manner is a direct affront to the spirit of the ruling the Supreme Court handed down...saying that a specific group of people cannot be denied their rights." Additionally, the American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina (ACLU-NC) issued a written statement which calls SB 1302 "unconstitutional" and "bad public policy."

SB 1302, which Forrester inexplicably says is not intended to discriminate against gays and lesbians, was referred to the Senate Committee on Local Government and Regional Affairs, chaired by Luther Jordan (D-7th District).

On May 30, Forrester, whose seat in the 39th See *MARRIAGE* on page 9



The above analysis reports the findings from a national survey of 1,022 adults who were interviewed by telephone May 31 through June 2, 1996.

Poll finds no consensus on Defense of Marriage Act

WASHINGTON, DC—There is no clear consensus among Americans on the so-called Defense of Marriage Act, according to a poll conducted for the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). The survey also found Americans overwhelmingly believe this issue should not be a legislative priority, and that it will not be a litmus test for candidates.

According to the national poll of 1,022 Americans conducted between May 31 and June 2 by The Mellman Group, 37 percent of Americans support the bill "defining marriage as only between men and women for the purposes of federal law," while 29 percent said they oppose it.

This lack of agreement was confirmed in another line of questioning. A total of 39 percent of those polled said they think this legislation is unnecessary, while 31 percent termed it necessary; a full 30 percent said they were not sure of the importance of such a law.

"There is no consensus among Americans on the Defense of Marriage Act," said David M. Smith, communications director of the

tween a man and a woman. Further, this legislation is more likely to be viewed as a political ploy than as an attempt to strengthen the American family. More Americans (32 percent) accept the view that "this law is just an attempt to play politics, scapegoat gays, and embarrass supporters of civil rights for gays, and is not really very important" than adhere to the view that "gay marriage is a real threat to the American family and it is important to pass the law" (27 percent). 41 percent would not even venture a guess on this topic.

This issue will not be a litmus test for candidates in November, according to the poll. Only 17 percent said a candidate's vote against the Defense of Marriage Act would be a "very convincing" reason to vote against that person. By contrast, 54 percent said a candidate's vote to cut Medicare would be a "very convincing" reason to vote against that individual.

Another indication of the low political resonance of this issue: Only 10 percent of those polled said they would be very likely to vote against a candidate with whom they otherwise agreed if he or she opposed this law. Six percent said they would be very likely to oppose a candidate with whom they otherwise agreed if that candidate supported the Defense of Marriage Act.

The bill was introduced last month in both houses of Congress, with Republican presidential hopeful Bob Dole as one of its primary co-sponsors.

"It is sad that after a distinguished 35-year career in Congress, Bob Dole will end his Senate career with a bill that is nothing more than cheap election year gay bashing," Smith said.

The poll results are based on a national survey of 1,022 adults interviewed by telephone between May 31 and June 2. The study is based on a random-digit dialing probability sample of all telephone households in the continental US, which ensures that every telephone household had an equal chance of participating in the survey. The margin of error for the sample as a whole is +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. ▼

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Human Rights Campaign. "These results indicate the Republican strategy of using the gay marriage issue as a political strategy is failing to gain traction with voters and has the potential to backfire."

While opinion on this bill remains muddled, an overwhelming majority of those surveyed agreed there are more pressing issues facing Congress than attempting to outlaw same-sex marriage. Only 13 percent said that "passing this law should be an important priority." A total of 73 percent said "there are lots of other issues" that are much more important than creating a federal statute to define marriage as be-

Shelter offers a safe place

by Susan Tedder
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—Her shoulders were pinned to the bed by her lover's knees. The barrel of her own .38 caliber pistol rested between her eyes. "Go ahead, pull the trigger," she said to the woman who had shared her life for two years. "You'll have to scrape my brains off the sheets."

Melodramatic lesbian fiction? Unfortunately, no. But, rather, an all-too-common reality. That was 1981. I survived to tell this story, but every 21 days, another woman doesn't.

Statistics show that domestic violence, while all too prevalent in society at large, is much more pervasive in the lesbian community. One study shows that 52 percent of lesbians suffer some form of abuse at the hands of their lovers. A woman is beaten every 15 seconds. Men suffer, too, but at about one-tenth the rate. These numbers are excessive, particularly when most abuse is never reported to anyone.

For lesbians in particular, there has been a hesitancy to ask for help. United Family Services (USF) Shelter for Battered Women in Charlotte wants the gay and lesbian community to know that help is readily available.

After receiving a phone call from another professional asking where a lesbian could get help dealing with an abusive situation, Shelter counselor Jane Taylor realized that the message



of help and hope was not being relayed to the lesbian community. She wants that to change. Taylor said, "The Shelter serves lesbians, always has, always will. But, evidently no one else knows that. Even if it is known, lesbians are not calling, probably for safety reasons. Just saying we serve lesbians is not enough."

Abuse takes many forms. It can be physical, emotional, sexual, stalking, or even simply destruction of property. If these things are taking place in a relationship, there is a problem, and it should be addressed before it escalates. Abusers do what they do to maintain power and control over their partners. The abused person often feels at fault, alone, isolated and See *SHELTER* on page 30