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Record budget set for HRC, new 5-yr. plan

by Wayne Besen
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC—The Board of Directors of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation approved a record \$15.1 million budget for the institution's next fiscal year beginning in April 1999. The board, which met in Washington, DC, also approved a five-year strategic plan for the organization and modified the criteria used to endorse federal candidates.

"By every measure, the dynamic success and growth of the Human Rights Campaign is a testament to the leadership of Elizabeth Birch," said HRC Board Co-Chair Jeff Sachse of Chicago. "The organization has experienced sustained growth year after year, and we are in the healthiest position of our history."

"We are a highly motivated team and the strategic plan has given us a fresh and exciting glimpse into the possibilities of the next century for our community and HRC," said Co-chair Candy Marcum of Dallas.

Since 1995, HRC's revenue has nearly tripled from \$5.5 million to \$15.1 million, while the membership has grown to a record 303,000. In addition, HRC's membership renewal rate is at historic highs.

"This year's budget and our five-year plan highlight the dynamic partnership between HRC's boards and staff," said Elizabeth Birch, HRC's executive director. "We have fantastic boards and board leadership who represent the



HRC Exec. Director Elizabeth Birch

solid foundation from which the organization operates. We are particularly gratified by the membership retention and growth this year. We made some tough decisions in 1998, and these results show our members, old and new, judging the institution and its programs as a whole and not on whether or not they agree with every decision."

The meeting also gave board members a chance to review and approve a modified criteria for endorsing federal candidates — a sore spot with many donors after HRC endorsed New York Senator Alfonse D'Amato over his more gay-supportive challenger. D'Amato lost and HRC received a storm of criticism.

"We have enhanced the endorsement process...to further measure whether a candidate has provided leadership within his or her party on issues of concern to gay and lesbian Americans," said Winnie Stachelberg, HRC's political director. "The criteria also create a

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Fed. hate crimes bill readied

by Karen Adelman
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC—Members of Congress announced the upcoming introduction of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HCPA) at a bipartisan press conference on Capitol Hill. The HCPA would extend current federal hate crimes protection to cover gender, sexual orientation and disability. In the wake of several high-profile, brutal hate crimes in the past year, the Hate Crimes Prevention Act will help send a clear message that hate-motivated violence is unacceptable and un-American, according to the Human Rights Campaign (HRC).

"The Hate Crimes Prevention Act is a key component of the effort to reduce hate crimes and it sends the message that hate-motivated violence against minorities has no place in America," said HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birch. "The murders of James Byrd, Matthew Shepard and Billy Jack Gaither highlight the need for Congress to pass this legislation and make it clear that our nation must no longer ignore this growing problem."

"We hope that Congress will have the will and the conscience to do what many state lawmakers this year have failed to do: help addressing hate crimes by passing legislation that is of great importance, both symbolically and practically," said National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) executive director Kerry Lobel. "We ask our elected officials in Congress, if not now then when? The time for the Hate Crimes Prevention Act is now."

Thus far this year, a number of state legislatures, including Wyoming, Idaho and Montana voted down hate crime bills. The New Mexico legislature passed a measure, only to have New Mexico Governor Gary Johnson veto it.

The press conference featured nine congress-

sional co-sponsors: Sens. Edward Kennedy (D-MA); Ron Wyden (D-OR); Charles Schumer (D-NY); Arlen Specter (R-PA); Gordon Smith (R-OR); and Reps. Michael P. Forbes (R-NY); John Conyers (D-MI); House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-MO); and Constance A. Morella (R-MD).

Members of Congress pointed out that while crime continues to decrease nationally, hate crimes based on sexual orientation were up eight percent in 1997, according to FBI statistics. Sexual orientation was the third highest category behind race and religion and represented 14 percent of all hate crimes reported.

Calls for passage of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act accelerated in the aftermath of three brutal murders that rocked the nation. Last year, white supremacists dragged James Byrd to death behind a pick-up truck in Jasper, TX; University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard was killed in Laramie, WY last fall in part because he was gay; and in February, Billy Jack Gaither was lured from a bar by two men, beaten to death and burned in Sylacauga, AL.

Currently, hate crimes monitoring and enforcement consists of a patchwork of laws that offer citizens varying levels of legal protection depending on where they live. Twenty-one states and the District of Columbia have hate crimes laws that include sexual orientation. Twenty-one states have laws that do not include sexual orientation. Eight states have no hate crimes laws at all.

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act will also allow local law enforcement authorities to utilize federal assistance in the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes. This key aspect is why it has broad support from notable law enforcement agencies and state and local leaders,

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Gays lobby in state legislature

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

RALEIGH—The statewide GLBT community responded enthusiastically to NC's first-ever General Assembly Lobby Day on March 23, sending more than 100 citizens to the capital to canvas the offices of state legislators and raise their awareness of GLBT issues.

Participants mainly focused on two key areas: reforming the Crime Against Nature (CAN) law and adding "sexual orientation" as a classification to the state's hate crimes bill (the Ethnic Intimidation Act), but increasing AIDS funding and removing restrictions on school discussions of sexual orientation were also addressed.

The historic day of organizing was conducted in conjunction with Equality Begins at Home (EBAH), an unprecedented campaign of actions in all 50 states and Puerto Rico held the week of March 21-27. The brainchild of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, EBAH was created to underscore the importance of grassroots mobilizing and show municipal leaders that many GLBT concerns need local attention.

In NC, rallies, press conferences, concerts, picnics and workshops were some of the methods used to highlight such wide-ranging topics as spirituality, GLBT families, GLBT youth, hate crimes, workplace issues, GLBT people of color and CAN law reform, but the centerpiece

of the state's EBAH efforts was clearly Lobby Day.

Equality NC, formerly known as NC Pride PAC, was the lead organizing agency. During a series of town meetings prior to EBAH week, they helped to plan a number of local activities and coordinated the logistics of a statewide lobbying effort. Communities throughout NC were challenged to send participants for the day and they responded in impressive fashion. Despite the distance, Mecklenburg County fielded a strong contingent of 16.

The day began at 9:45am with a brief registration and training session. Equality NC Executive Director M.K. Cullen gave a "Lobbying 101" speech, ran through the day's schedule and provided a quick overview of the (baffling) layout of the Legislative Building. She also noted that hate crimes and CAN law reform bills were being introduced by Rep. Paul Luebke (D-Durham) and Sen. Ellie Kinnaird (D-Orange), respectively, and needed to be talked up.

Many people were not able to get appointments with their representatives prior to Lobby Day and were forced to catch them on the fly. As a result, impromptu meetings were held in offices, hallways and elevators throughout the building. In cases where officials were unavailable, participants left information packets.

At 11:30am, there was a press conference in
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Ill, elderly may lose their PALS

by Brian M. Myer
Q-Notes Staff

Karen Maxwell had been lying in her hospital bed for two years. A serious car accident had left her drifting in and out of consciousness, moving nothing but her eyes. That is how James, a pet therapy volunteer from Canada, found her when he first took his dog, Bosworth, in to visit her. He put Bosworth on the bed to snuggle up close to Karen. That was all for the first visit. On the next visit, a week later, James did the same thing and soon it became a regular routine. One of the nurses took a picture of Karen and Bozzie and it was placed in a frame by her bedside.

Once when James and Bosworth arrived, Karen's parents were in the room. James put Bozzie on the bed as usual. But this time Karen smiled and very slowly and distinctly said one word, "dog." As James was leaving, Karen's mother came up to him with tears in her eyes. "I never thought I'd ever hear my daughter's beautiful voice again," she said.

A few weeks later, James went downstairs and found Bosworth dead from cardiac failure at the age of four. James dreaded going to the hospital that evening. He went straight to the nurse on duty and told her about Bosworth. Very quietly she told him that Karen had died in the night. James' bloodhound, Bosworth, may have had a short life, but it was a worthwhile one.

Pet therapy is now being used to help with a whole range of medical and emotional ailments. Animals are used to help with stress relief, physiotherapy, depression and short-term memory. They are especially useful to children with behavioral disorders, or those who have been physically or emotionally abused. Patients with heart conditions are often given small pets to look after; this lowers their blood pressure and improves their mood. Therapy animals have

also proven to be beneficial in prisons and institutions and are often brought to senior-care facilities.

Bubba is a large, white cockatoo. His owner brought him to a nursing facility where they met an elderly lady. At first, she did not seem to notice them, but once she did, "It was as though a spark of life came back to her," the owner recalls. "She smiled and stroked his head and back and told him what a lovely creature he was. On every visit after that there has been the same reaction."

In Charlotte, a non-profit group called Pets Are Loving Support (PALS) recognizes how important pets are in healing and maintaining health. For five years, volunteers have helped dozens of elderly and seriously ill people in the greater Charlotte area, including those living

with HIV and AIDS, care for their pets. PALS volunteers do everything they can — from walking dogs to changing litter pans, to providing food to taking animals for check-ups — to keep clients and pets together.

Recognizing the stress that often comes with illness and age, and realizing how that stress is compounded when people feel they can no

longer care for their companion animals, is one of the many reasons founder Karen Williams has been running PALS out of her home since 1994. She believed in the group's mission so much that she quit her job at developer Faison Associates three years ago to work full-time as PALS sole, unpaid staffer.

In the beginning, public interest was high. The initial publicity the organization garnered brought enthusiasm and, in turn, money, clients and volunteers. The new group was an immediate success and the future seemed full of promise.

Unfortunately, the salad days weren't destined to last. Today, PALS has grown into an
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