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If you're planning to take a vacation this year, will it be a strictly GLBT vacation? (i.e., gay-only cruise, gay-specific event such as a gay ski week or the gay rodeo, a GLBT festival, etc.)

Yes	No	Undecided
21%	77%	2%

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Published Every Two Weeks On Recycled Paper • Volume 14, Number 19 • February 19, 2000 • FREE



Samantha Gellar

Lesbian honored by NC ACLU

by Dan Van Mourik
Special to Q-Notes

CHARLOTTE, NC—On February 5, the American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina bestowed its most significant award on 18-year-old high school student Samantha Gellar. Gellar is the youngest ever to be so honored.

"This is a young woman who did not cave in to public pressure," said Keith Martin, the man who nominated her. "She was a voice that others attempted to silence and she made sure her voice was heard. To have that kind of fortitude in one so young displays a maturity far beyond her years."

Gellar, a senior at Charlotte's Northwest School of the Arts, wrote a one-act play, *Life Versus the Paperback Romance*, about two women who meet on a bus, fall in love and share a kiss. The play was chosen as one of five winners in the Charlotte Young Playwrights Festival. The winners had their plays performed at the festival — except for Gellar.

The contest sponsors — Children's Theatre of Charlotte and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools — said her subject matter was not appropriate for the festival's middle and high school audiences.

"We have to be sensitive to our audience and in Charlotte sexuality is a sensitive issue," Children's Theatre spokesman Rob Odum said at the time.

By refusing to produce a play with a homosexual theme, the festival sponsors revived the controversy started by the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners regarding homosexuality and the arts.

Gellar called the refusal to perform her play an act of discrimination. With help from Time Out Youth, a support group for gay and lesbian youth, she began a media campaign to draw attention to what had happened.

Her story was printed in newspapers across the country, including *The Village Voice*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. And that began a movement among New York's gay and lesbian theater artists to bring Gellar and her play to New York.

Last March, Gellar's play was given a reading to over 400 people at the Great Aunt Stella Center in Charlotte. And last June, her play was read at the Public Theatre/New York Shakespeare Festival in Manhattan.

Before the New York production, Gellar spoke to the sold-out audience of 270, including Pulitzer-winning playwright Tony Kushner and actress Mary-Louise Parker, who starred in the New York production of her play. Gellar told them one word can make a difference.

"If you want to change the world, society, anything, one word can do it." Gellar said that word is "No." "[I said it] to the Children's Theatre, the school board and the anti-gay atmosphere in Charlotte." Gellar becomes the seventh recipient of the ACLU of North Carolina Award, given only when someone in the state does something remarkable for civil liberties in a given year. ▼

Final report issued on Charlotte Community Center

by Robert Marcus James
Special to Q-Notes

CHARLOTTE, NC—After nine months of conversations, town meetings, site visits and surveys, a final report of the findings of the study of whether or not Charlotte's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community wanted and could support a Community Center has been issued by Naomi Swinton, facilitator of the study.

"The LGBT community expressed overwhelming enthusiasm and support throughout the exploratory process to make us believe they are ready to begin working toward a Community Center," said Swinton. "This is with the understanding that the ongoing planning process itself will require deliberate and long-term teamwork and relationship building."

The study was commissioned by OutCharlotte, which produces cultural programs celebrating the LGBT community, including the Charlotte Gay & Lesbian Film Series and an annual cultural festival in October.

According to Dan Kirsch, OutCharlotte Executive Director, the idea of the study came about as OutCharlotte was developing its long-range plan in 1998. "We surveyed many people about how OutCharlotte could better serve the community," said Kirsch. "Over and over, people stated their desire to have a LGBT Community Center. We decided to make the study

part of our work in 1999 and hired Grassroots Leadership to conduct the study."

Twenty-two committee members were brought together, most representing existing LGBT community organizations, to work on the study from April through December of 1999. The study was envisioned to be Phase I in an ongoing discussion about whether or not Charlotte was ready for and could support a Community Center. If the Phase I study resulted in a positive recommendation to continue, it would be up to the community to pursue Phase II and Phase III planning. The Phase I study was not set up to create a strategic plan, fundraising plan or budget. In all, more than 300 members of the community were involved in the study.

A section of the Executive Summary reads: In order to build widespread support, the Community Center should from the beginning have a visible and public image which presents an engaging, sustainable and inclusive vision to the greater public. The Community Center can be a powerful place for advocacy and change, representative of the LGBT community in our area. If successful, it will educate the general public and affect policy and opinion, provide links to a wide variety of LGBT and non-gay community organizations, as well as serve as a source of energy for arts and cultural expression. Difference and diversity can be celebrated,

and on-going education and experiential programs can help build bridges between constituencies. The Center will also profit from a business-minded, matter-of-fact attitude that does not force or cry out for attention but proceeds with confidence, pride and professionalism.

Phase II of the process began in early February when a Community Center Planning Committee was convened. The Planning Committee is co-chaired by Travis Blackwell and Marcie Rollins. Over the next six months, the Committee will create a strategic plan, programming plan, fundraising plan, budgets, scout locations and incorporate as a not-for-profit organization. Their goal is to seat a Board of Trustees this fall, who will work to make a Community Center a reality.

"OutCharlotte is very proud to have been able to help start this conversation," said Kirsch. "As one of more than 20 LGBT community groups, we will continue to support and participate in Phase II and Phase III planning as requested. We look forward to the day when we can hold film series events and our annual cultural festival at the Community Center."

The Community Center Study Committee's final report is available online at the OutCharlotte web site at www.outcharlotte.org. For more information or referral numbers for the Planning Committee, call Dan Kirsch at (704) 563-2699. ▼

Clinton's budget increases overall HIV/AIDS funding, but again falls short on prevention

WASHINGTON, DC—President Clinton released his new budget for fiscal year 2001 (FY 2001) on February 8, proposing increased spending on key HIV/AIDS programs, but coming up short on funding for crucial prevention efforts. While the overall budget is laudable, more prevention dollars are needed — especially in minority communities where the spread of HIV continues to outpace efforts to slow it down, according to the Human Rights Campaign (HRC).

"We are pleased with the overall funding which will help initiate new research and improve the quality of life for people living with HIV and AIDS," said HRC Political Director Winnie Stachelberg. "Unfortunately, the lack of funding for prevention will ensure that this disease continues to march undeterred and cause even more devastation, particularly in communities of color."

The budget proposes an increase of only \$40 million for HIV prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This increase does not reflect the urgent need to address CDC reports that there are an estimated 40,000 new infections each year.

The problem is especially acute in minority populations, according to HRC. For gay African-American men, AIDS deaths dropped 35 percent in 1997 and 17 percent in 1998, while comparable reductions for whites were 51 percent and 22 percent, respectively. Surgeon General David Satcher reported that AIDS death rates for African Americans remained nearly 10 times higher than for whites.

Adding to these numbers is the CDC finding that young African-American gay men were five times more likely to contract HIV compared to other young gay men.

Clinton's requested eight percent funding increase of \$125 million for the Ryan White CARE Act (RWCA), and an additional \$26 million for the State AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) should be applauded, says HRC. For over ten years, the RWCA has helped more than 500,000 people impacted by HIV

and AIDS who have received care and assistance through this program.

"We are looking forward to working with the administration and Congress on adequate funding levels for the Ryan White CARE Act, as well as ensuring reauthorization without negative amendments," said Stachelberg. "With more and more people living with AIDS, care and assistance programs remain a critical component of caring for families impacted by HIV and AIDS."

The president also proposed an increase in funds for the Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) — a program which provides housing assistance and supportive services for low-income people with HIV/AIDS and their families. HOPWA received a \$260 million increase for FY 2001, about a 12 percent increase over FY 2000.

Clinton also proposed a \$105 million increase in HIV/AIDS research funding at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). This funding would be utilized for HIV and AIDS research, which will bring our nation closer to developing a vaccine or a cure and help in development of new drugs, says HRC. The increase in funding will bring the total funding for NIH HIV/AIDS research to more than \$2.1 billion.

The president's proposed budget has raised concerns about flat funding for the HIV/AIDS programs at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). SAMHSA provides HIV counseling and testing services, health education and risk reduction information.

The president also helped address the international AIDS crises with a \$100 million proposed increase to help developing countries combat HIV/AIDS. Worldwide, there are 33.6 million people living with AIDS and a total of 16.3 million people have died thus far from the disease. In December, a Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS released its "AIDS Epidemic Update for 1999," which illustrates that 95 percent of the global total of



President Bill Clinton

people living with HIV/AIDS are in the developing world.

Worldwide, as in the United States, infections continue to rise, with 5.6 million people becoming infected in 1999 alone. In 1999, 2.6 million people world-wide died from HIV/AIDS, a higher global total than in any year since the beginning of the epidemic.

Last year, the Clinton Administration and Congress again worked together to provide generous funding for some areas of the fight against HIV/AIDS. For example, the budget deal included generous funding increases for vital life-saving programs, including a 13 percent increase for the Ryan White CARE Act and a 15 percent increase for medical research at the National Institutes of Health. The bill also received a last minute modest funding increase of six percent for HIV prevention activities at the CDC. ▼