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ONLINE  
Q.POLL  
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If you were arrested  
and charged with  
violating a sodomy law,  
would you challenge  
it in court?

. Yes . No

Q.POLL RESULTS: 18

## Playing ping-pong with N.C. sodomy laws

Loud debate from a conservative county commissioner and a gay former judge bring the issue to the forefront of the media

by Leslie McKenzie

Charlotte and Mecklenburg County apparently have the dubious distinction of being the first state to openly defy the U.S. Supreme Court decision overturning sodomy laws in 13 states. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg police department has issued statements indicating that police officers will still use the Crime Against Nature (CAN) law to arrest people on suspicion of meeting in public and arranging to perform sodomy in a public place or at an unspecified place.

At the forefront of the ongoing debate are two men: openly gay former Superior Court Judge Ray Warren, who's now working in private practice; and a familiar foe of Charlotte's LGBT community, Mecklenburg County Commissioner Bill James.

James, as most will remember, spearhead-

ed the 1998 movement to suspend arts funding to Actor's Theater because of a presentation of "Angels in America" which included a scene that depicted gay sex.

His belief that LGBT people are a blight on the face of the city continues, unabated. He has actively petitioned Mecklenburg County District Attorney Peter Gilchrist and N.C. District Attorney Roy Cooper to uphold the "Crime Against Nature" law.

"For your office to overturn current state law," James writes, "would be to open the door to



Charlotte-Mecklenburg police say they'll still prosecute potential violators under the state's existing sodomy law.

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## Operation Save America takes aim at Charlotte

Conservative group sets its sights on local LGBT community

by David Moore  
Q-Notes staff

In the early 1990s the Christian-based, politically conservative Operation Save America (OSA) was known as Operation



Flip Benham's Operation Save America (seen here protesting Charlotte Pride - Benham is on the right) has dwindled in size since the original group's founding in 1990.

Rescue, with literally thousands of followers focusing on the issue of abortion.

In 1991, the organization held a convention that lasted for over a month in Wichita, Kan. In their zeal to bring an anti-choice message to anyone that would listen, more than 2,500 members were arrested.

These days attendance seems to have dropped off a bit, with followers numbering only in the hundreds at national meetings. An estimated 600 gathered in 2001 in Wichita. Similar numbers met last year in Dallas.

The group's notorious director, the Rev. Philip "Flip" Benham, moved the organization from Texas to N.C. just this past year. According to Benham, Charlotte and the surrounding area are ripe for OSA.

Despite the dwindling numbers of the group, the area's LGBT community can expect their presence to have an impact — albeit a small one.

"I think the gay agenda, or the sin is a threat here," Benham tells Q-Notes. "As a matter of fact, when you look at Texas vs. Lawrence, you see that America is not long for this world."

Outlandish statements like that are common for Benham. His flair for melodrama leads to such production numbers as what he has planned for a finale to his convention in Charlotte: a demonstration that will include nine caskets — one for each of the U.S. Supreme Court Justices who overturned the Texas Sodomy law.

Benham was also recently arrested for tres-

passing in front of a southwest Charlotte abortion clinic when he stepped over a line that marked where demonstrators were allowed to stand. Instead of posting a \$500 bond, he chose to stay in jail until his court date, apparently seizing the opportunity for publicity.

At press time, OSA's planned protest outside MCC Charlotte on Eastway Drive was the kick-off demonstration for the right-wing, anti-gay, anti-choice and anti-Islam group's convention that continued in Charlotte through July 18.

"There's not going to be anything going on in the building when they're down here," says MCC pastor Mick Hinson, who questions the purpose of the demonstration.

"They're not protesting an event. They're just looking at the traffic going up and down Eastway." During the morning rush hour, it's clear Benham's followers will have quite an audience.

"We're not protesting anybody," says Benham. "We're bringing the gospel, right into the folks that are lost in homosexual bondage and slavery and lust. Those that are lost in a false religion like Islam and into a place where little baby boys and girls are being slaughtered everyday."

"We're gonna' read through the entire Bible on the streets of Charlotte. It's called 'Word & Warfare.' There are 20 different places we're planning on being at."

Members of MCC Charlotte clearly aren't unfamiliar with Benham. He and a group of

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