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Should gays arm themselves for protection?

. yes . no

Next Issue: Summer Fun Sports

Mecklenburg County okays employment protection for gay employees

Vote 6-3 in favor; followed party lines
by Connie Vetter and Lainey Millen

CHARLOTTE — "It's time to say we need to stop discriminating against people because they may be different," Commissioner Parks Helms announced May 17, as the Mecklenburg County Commission voted to add "sexual orientation" to the county's nondiscrimination policy.

The new policy means Mecklenburg County cannot discriminate in hiring and personnel decisions on the basis of sexual orientation, in addition to race, color, sex, religion, national origin and age.

Democrats who voted for the change, approved on a 6-3 vote, said it was an overdue statement of tolerance. Republican members predicted a backlash at next year's election. GOP commissioner Bill James said the board's action offended God.

Democrats said they were voting their consciences and would accept any consequences.

"My instinct, my political instincts, tells me this community supports the board in saying that discrimination based on sexual orientation is wrong," said Helms, a Democrat.

"They want to say that being a homosexual or lesbian is alright ... state law says it's not," said James.

Supporters of the resolution filled the room with a sea of blue signs that read "equality for all."

Commissioner Jennifer Roberts, a

Democrat, sided with those supporters.

"Clear and simple, this is an issue about discrimination, fairness and respect and protecting people, valuable employees, from hatred," she said.

Many supporters of the resolution spoke out about having the same protections as their heterosexual counterparts. Tim O'Brien, a gay man who has worked in both city and county government, was adamant about the presence of discrimination.

"Someone could walk by in the hall and say all kinds of ignorant comments to me and I would have no leg to stand on," said O'Brien.

He went further to say that he knew many gay and lesbian county employees who would not come out at work for fear of discrimination.

Phil Wells, co-chairperson of the Mecklenburg County Gay and Lesbian Political Action Committee, pointed out the unfairness of a discrimination policy that lacked protection of sexual orientation. "It's legal to discriminate right now in Mecklenburg County," said Wells. "It's not right."

Throughout the evening most of the nine commissioners — Democrat and Republican — made frequent references to their religious faith. While Parks Helms indicated that it was his "strong belief in a Christian faith" that moti-



County Commissioners Parks Helms, Jennifer Roberts and Wilhelmina Rembert (clockwise from left) spoke out in strong support of the resolution which prevents discrimination against gays and lesbians working for Mecklenburg County.

vated him to bring the resolution before the board, James responded to Helms assertion by calling the Commission Chair an "apostate."

"I don't know what Bible Commissioner Helms is reading, but my Bible says homosexuality is wrong."

Commissioner Wilhelmina Rembert spoke at length — insinuating that James had an "unhealthy fixation" on homosexuality and that perhaps he should "consider counseling for unresolved issues."

Democratic Commissioner Norman Mitchell responded to the comments by stat-

see COMMISSION on 16

Charlotte Black Gay Pride just around the corner

New event slated for July 14-17

by Donald Miller

"We're very excited about what's coming up," says Charlotte Black Gay Pride media liaison Monica Simpson. "This is an event that all people are welcome to attend and should. It'll be a lot of fun."

Simpson's sentiments about the upcoming Black Gay Pride are echoed by most in the community — though some have questioned the need for an event they feel is based on racial separation.

In an email sent to Q-Notes in April from an individual who identified himself only as "Chris J," the writer expressed dismay that Charlotte Black Gay Pride was taking place.

"Charlotte barely has the numbers in the gay community to support one gay Pride event, now there are two," Chris wrote.

see CHARLOTTE on 4



Same-sex marriage endorsed by American Psychiatric Association

Statement follows similar measures from American Psychological and Medical Associations

by Steven Fisher

ATLANTA, Ga. — The American Psychiatric Association approved a statement May 22 urging legal recognition of same-sex marriage. The statement supports same-sex marriage "in the interest of maintaining and promoting mental health."

It follows a similar measure by the American Psychological Association in 2004.

The statement was approved by voice vote on the first day of the APA's weeklong annual meeting in Atlanta. It cites the "positive influence of a stable, adult partnership on the health of all family members."

The resolution recognizes "that gay men and lesbians are full human beings who should be afforded the same human and civil rights," said Margery Sved, a Raleigh, N.C., psychiatrist and member of the assembly's commit-

see APA on 16

