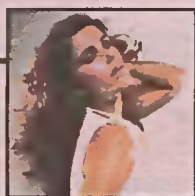


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Victory in N.C. legislature!

For the third time anti-gay marriage bill falls to the wayside; LGBT community gleeful, fundies livid

by Donald Miller

North Carolina's LGBT community celebrated in victory as a homophobic, anti-marriage state constitutional amendment was stopped once again — for the third time in as many years. North Carolina is still the only Southern state to stop such an amendment in the legislature.

The North Carolina General Assembly adjourned its 2006 session at 1:09 a.m., July 28 without voting on a bill that would amend the state constitution to deny equal marriage rights to same-sex couples as well as ban civil unions, domestic partnerships or any other form of relationship recognition for unmarried couples.

"North Carolinians should be proud that elected leaders spent their time this year on important issues like ethics reforms, the minimum wage and the state budget, rather than the politically motivated bigotry of this amendment," said Ian Palmquist, executive director of EqualityNC (ENC). "Equality North Carolina worked closely with legislative allies to block this unnecessary, discriminatory legislation."

According to Palmquist, N.C. House Speaker Jim Black (D-Mecklenburg) and N.C. Senate President Marc Basnight (D-Dare) were instrumental in the failures of the bills on both sides of the legislature. "They both felt it was an attempt to write discrimination into the constitution," he said.

ENC and its supporters led a ferocious charge to keep the bill in check for the third straight year.

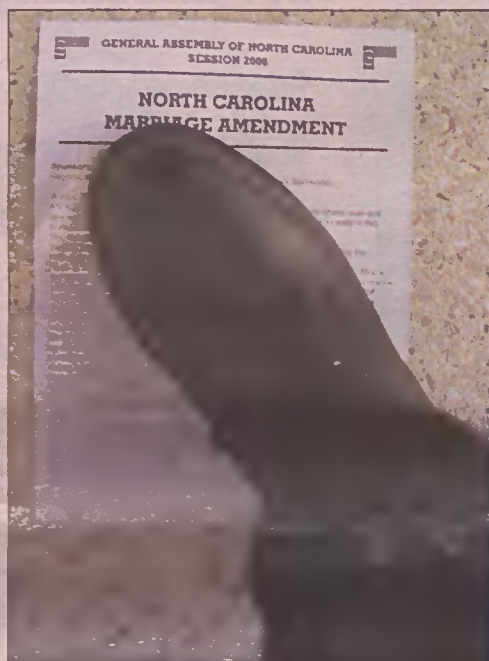
Among the most critical actions taken by the advocacy group was the organization of a lobby day on June 6 in which nearly 100 North Carolinians came to Raleigh to organize against the amendment. ENC supporters arrived from all over the state to lobby their legislators and take part in a spirited rally outside the Capitol building.

"When legislators hear from real people whose lives would be affected by anti-gay legislation, it opens their eyes to the impact of their decisions," said Palmquist. "Our lobby day and other efforts enabled gay and straight North Carolinians alike to speak out against discrimination."

In response to the failures of the House and Senate bills, Sen. James S. Foster (R-

Gaston) issued the following statement on his website:

"SB1288, Defense of Marriage, does not



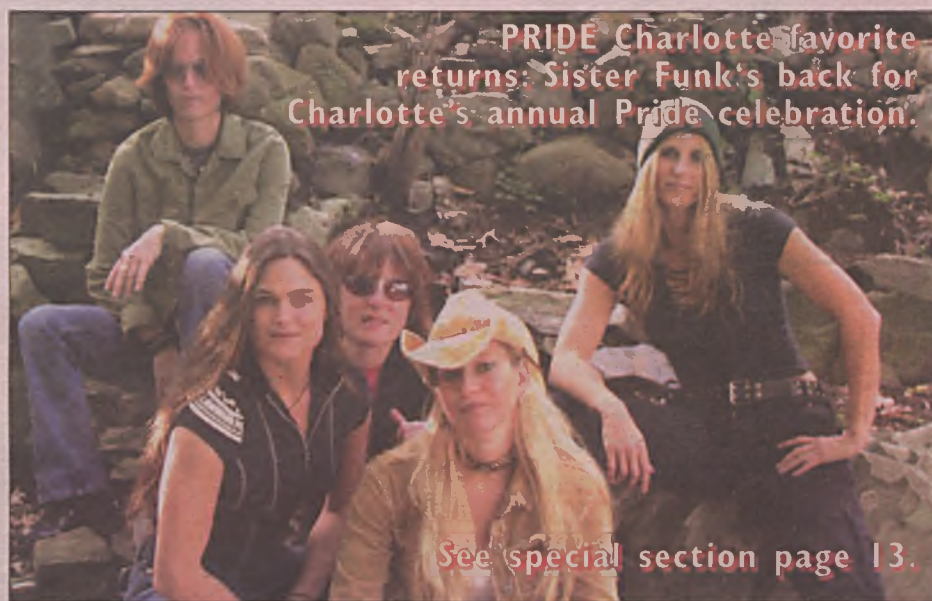
N.C. remains the only southern state to kick the 'marriage amendment' to the curb.

show 'discrimination' as the gay and lesbian communities have claimed. North Carolina needs to join the over 20 states that have passed a constitutional amendment defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman. After three attempts to pass this legislation in N.C., the Democratic leadership in the N.C. Senate has refused to have the bill even heard in committee, even though recent polls show over 75 percent of our citizen's support this type of legislation. A federal constitutional amendment protecting marriage for all Americans would be a permanent solution. The God-ordained institution of marriage is fundamental in our civilization and the 'Lavender Lobby' and liberal judges are trying to destroy it. The homosexual activists will 'judge shop' and challenge our present laws as being unconstitutional."

Despite Forrester's assertions and vows from conservatives on both sides of the legislature to try again, the number of sponsors for the bill demonstrates that a growing number of North Carolina's elected officials see the bill as discriminatory.

"This year there were just 56 sponsors out of 120," says Palmquist. "That's less than half, and six fewer than last year." ▶

PRIDE Charlotte favorite returns: Sister Funk's back for Charlotte's annual Pride celebration.



See special section page 13.

A soldier's story

Editor's Note: These are the thoughts of a gay soldier — a North Carolina native — who has been deployed to Iraq. Because of the military's 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy, he must remain anonymous.

Recently I was able to travel for a short R&R period to the Middle East's equivalent of South Beach: Qatar. It's a beautiful country with great shopping and a wonderful opportunity to be yourself and relax. The best part was having a few drinks, enjoying civilian clothes and the local civilian population.

I got to shop in a great four-story Americanized mall and eat at some fabulous restaurants. Although gay and lesbian sex is still illegal in this country — the laws are rarely enforced. I was told that Qatar is very gay friendly, but from what I could tell, the community largely remains underground. When I was there I didn't meet any local family, but I did get some great shopping in at a couple of stores — one known as the French Connection and another, Banana. I'm only speculating, of course, but my gaydar definitely went off with some of the male sales clerks.

I recently met a few lesbian soldiers. It was great to talk and to openly share our thoughts and feelings about the war. It was relieving to be able to tell someone here I'm gay — and it was no big deal. Listening to all our different thoughts on the war was particularly intriguing. This was a table of very patriotic lesbians and gay men (well one gay man, actually) who love our country, but hate the policy on the war.

When you combine the positions

we fill then you're looking at some pretty high-profile jobs. The higher-ups would say that gay and lesbian soldiers can't perform effectively in the military, but we are. We all support the mission or operation we call Iraqi Freedom. But the policies and the tactics that it took to get us over here are all very unsettling to us. Collectively, the four of us have 45 years of service to our country. We are all ready for some equality as it relates to gay and lesbian service members



serving openly. I know some of our allies allow there service members to serve openly and it doesn't hurt the mission. Australia and England seem to be doing just fine.

During my opportunities to travel the region I have noticed that some of the FOBs (Forward Operating Bases) have amenities that others don't. The workout facilities are abundant, but there are no showers at the gyms. The shopping on post is limited, but they do try to get things you want in due time. "Due time," however, can be forever. The only other major facilities I have seen are a theater

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