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Trans group to hold 'initiative' at HRC Gala

Activists upset with HRC's stance on trans-exclusive ENDA

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

CHARLOTTE — For several years, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Carolinas Gala has attracted about 1,500 people to the Queen City for the Carolinas largest LGBT fundraising event. While this year will offer the usual mix of exciting activities before and after the extravagant dinner on Saturday, Feb. 16, attendees will notice one thing that is very different from previous gatherings.



Unlike this National Transgender Advocacy Coalition protest of the national HRC dinner in Washington, D.C. in October, It's Time-North Carolina plans to hold a non-confrontational educational effort.

Many transgender, former HRC supporters won't be attending the main event this time. Instead, they'll be standing outside the Charlotte Convention Center.

In what they are calling an "educational initiative," members of the informal activist, news and networking group It's Time-North Carolina will be passing out fliers and other materials to inform Gala attendees about HRC's history and actions regarding the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) and their treatment of the transgender community.

Last October, transgender activists and their allies in national, state and local LGBT advocacy organizations banded together in the United ENDA Campaign to confront what they saw as HRC and U.S. House leadership's attempt to write a portion of the community out of protections guarding against employment discrimination.

When Q-Notes first covered this situation, we spoke to activists, spokespeople and congressional offices to get a sense on where

everyone stood.

At the time, U.S. Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA) had proposed a new strategy for ENDA, splitting protections into two different bills. The first of those bills (H.R. 3685), protecting only lesbian, gay and bisexual members of the LGBT community, passed the House on Nov. 7. HRC came out in support of the bill after hundreds of other organizations had condemned it.

The second bill (H.R. 3686), including protections for transgender citizens, still sits in committee. It is an unfortunate reality that transgender activists said would happen.

According to It's Time-North Carolina organizer Angela Brightfeather, there is plenty of historical evidence that these "We'll come back for you later" bills are never enacted.

"If you are going to come back for us like you say, then point to some place where you were actually able to do that," Brightfeather told Q-Notes. "We have a number of states that had bills changed to be non-inclusive [of transgender people] and they never came back. One of the best examples is New York's *Sexual*

Orientation Non-Discrimination Act. Thirteen years later, we're still waiting on people to come back for us."

While acknowledging that all the blame for this ineffective strategy can't be placed on HRC, Brightfeather said the group has a responsibility to do what is right because of their role as a powerful and influential national organization.

"HRC not only sets a standard for themselves, they also set a standard for groups across the states," she said. "The idea of 'we're coming back for you' has propagated all the way down to local grassroots movements. Even in Winston-Salem, N.C., we just recently saw a non-trans inclusive employment policy pass."

HRC President Joe Solmonese told Q-Notes in an exclusive pre-Gala interview that his organization is doing all it can to educate members of Congress.

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On the issues

HRC's Joe Solmonese speaks with Q-Notes

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

exQlusive

Q-Notes got the chance to speak to Human Rights Campaign (HRC) President Joe Solmonese in an exclusive pre-Gala interview. Discussing issues from "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) to youth involvement and the state of rural, "red" America, Solmonese gave us a view into the direction of our national movement.

Matt Comer: Now that white collar jobs are getting more wide-ranging protections from corporations, what can be done for middle and lower class workers?

Joe Solmonese: The first target for us were the Fortune 500 companies. Going into big companies which already have human resources infrastructures and policies, we knew that we'd have somewhat of a start. That was just step one for a few years. Now we are starting to take it out to medium- and small-sized businesses and trying to figure out how we can be a resource for these smaller companies.

There are very few things that small businesses can't do. The same policies large, multinational corporations have regarding employ-

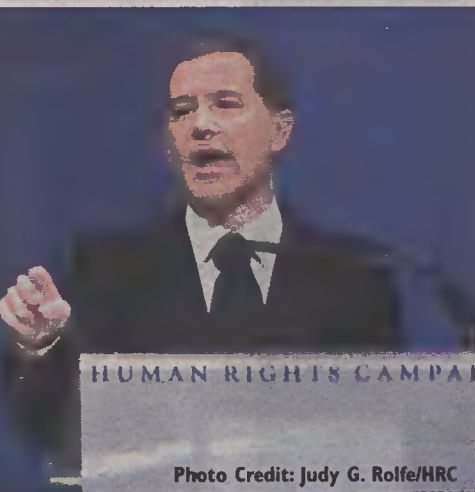


Photo Credit: Judy G. Rolfe/HRC

ment and healthcare, can certainly be created. You can do all the things big businesses do, with perhaps the exception of the large amount of philanthropic activities many corporations engage in, especially considering their scope and volume of work. HRC certainly wants to be a resource and way for small businesses to start navigating toward creating more equitable experiences for our communities.

How does HRC invest in youth and the future of our movement?

GLBT youth really are our most important resource. Young people in general, gay and straight alike, present a great opportunity for us in terms of their support and compassion surrounding GLBT issues. Also, our greatest challenge is that youth are the most expensive

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Carolinas Black Pride honors two

Youth, transgender performer receive MLK Day honors

by Will Billings . Contributing Writer

CHARLOTTE — Scores crowded into the Afro-American Cultural Center (AACC) the



Saturday after the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday to celebrate the visionary leader's life and legacy, and to honor two members of the LGBT/Same-gender loving (SGL) African-American community.

Bishop-elect Tonyia Rawls of the Unity Fellowship Church waited in the wings and happily greeted those who came to participate in the Carolinas Black Pride Movement's (CBPM) Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Leadership Honors and Gala Reception.

In her opening invocation, Rawls stressed diversity, unity and strength. She praised her fellow LGBT/SGL brothers and sisters for all their organizing and work in the community.

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CBPM Martin Luther King, Jr. Gala award winners DeArcy McVay and Dorae Saunders.

Photo Credit: Moyé/moyephoto.net

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