

ENDA opponents target HRC

from page 1

"The first and most important action we have to do is education," Solmonese said. "For the first time ever [in fall 2007], House members, especially dozens of freshman members, really had to focus on the many aspects of this bill, like corporate regulation and the religious exemption.

"Now that we have that behind us we have a much better sense of where members are on the passage of the overall bill and we are now beginning the process to get a better sense of the plans we need to put in place with these individual members and their districts, to move them in the direction of supporting protections for gender-identity. If there is a disparity in support for sexual orientation and gender-identity, then we need figure out where that gap is and a way to close it."

Solmonese said that HRC is working toward this through its efforts in states and local communities and particularly in corporate boardrooms.

"We are continuing to explore new ways, new programs and new benefits that are being tried in corporations to make that a better experience for transgender workers," he said. "Obviously, Corporate America is so much further ahead of Congress and America, in general."

But Brightfeather and her colleague Robbi Cohn aren't buying it.

"Solmonese has suggested that we haven't educated society and LGB people about transgender issues," Cohn told *Q-Notes*, "but that just couldn't be further from the truth."

Brightfeather, who first started organizing for It's Time-North Carolina 10 years ago, said transgender groups have for years held educational initiatives similar to the one to take place at this year's Gala.

"This certainly isn't the first educational initiative we have done," she said. "Our first was in Raleigh, four years ago. We were tired of hearing about 'education' when we knew that part of the educational process had to happen with HRC and its own members. We decided to meet with them and talk about the issues. The best place to do it was at the dinners and galas. We started in Raleigh and moved to different cities and states, and then to the national dinner in Washington, D.C.

"We were included in [ENDA]. It took long and hard work from the early 1990s to 2004. And now, it has only taken them three years to figure out a way to take us out of it. The educational process so many say we need to do had been going on for years. Now it's been stopped."

Brightfeather said the transgender community is going back to "square one" with the fight over ENDA. Once again, they'll take up their educational initiatives and re-do the same process they started years ago. Their main point: HRC's theory of incrementalism won't work.

"We understand politically exactly where HRC is coming from," Cohn said, "But expediency isn't made any more palatable or viable just because Solmonese thinks it is. I'd just like to talk about incrementalism and why it isn't a viable option. He needs to show us some good results if it is as viable and successful as he claims."

Members of Brightfeather and Cohn's

group will stand outside the convention center before and after the dinner, speaking to HRC members and supporters. They hope to be able to pass out fliers and informational papers explaining the ENDA issue from their point of view. In the evening, they'll host a hospitality suite in the Westin Charlotte Hotel, giving Gala attendees an extended chance to meet transgender activists, leaders and community members.

"We don't want to invade any space and we don't want to be confrontational," Brightfeather said. "This won't be an active protest and we don't want to be known as 'those radical trannies.' In our own Gandhian way, we want to be able to educate others about our problems with HRC." ▀

About It's Time-North Carolina

It's Time-North Carolina, the informal organization heading up this year's transgender educational initiative at the HRC Carolinas Gala in Charlotte, is a local LGBT organization many community members might not have heard of before.

Although the organization had been established in the Carolinas for a year before current director Angela Brightfeather moved here from New York 10 years ago, there hadn't been much movement or strategic organizing.

"When I took over in the leadership, it was like starting from base zero and on top of that I was a Yankee," Brightfeather said. "Our purpose really is simple. We want to get the transgender community unified and politically active so that we can have the input we need in local and state issues, legislation and policy making."

In New York, Brightfeather was instrumental in fighting against that state's *Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act*, which excluded transgender people from employment protection. Thirteen years later, New York has yet to include transgender protections in state employment laws. Currently, the Gender Employment Non-Discrimination Act is working its way through the New York legislature.

It's Time-North Carolina isn't a support group and neither is it registered as any official political action group. "We don't have any official members and, basically, we serve to be a simple gathering point, a source of news and information. We're just an informal gathering of activists, community members and leaders and organizations. We can be a lot more politically active and aware without being officially organized," Brightfeather said.

It's Time-North Carolina has been successful in establishing informational booths at both Pride Charlotte and the NC Pride Festival in Durham, N.C., and establishing the Connie Sprye Fund at Equality North Carolina. The fund, used to assist transgender community members with travel, room and board for Equality NC events and lobby days, accepts contributions from any community member. ▀

info: It's Time-North Carolina's website is located at itsitimenc.tripod.com.

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