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International News

by Andy Harley . UKGayNews

Praise for Phelps ban

LONDON — British Immigration Minister Phil Woolas publicly thanked the Labour Campaign for Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Trans Rights (LGBT Labour) organization on Feb. 25 for their campaign against the homophobic group Westboro Baptist Church.

The campaign led to a ban on Fred Phelps and his daughter Shirley Phelps-Roper from entering the U.K. by Home Secretary Jacqui Smith.

“The Home Secretary responded to calls from LGBT Labour — and others — to ban the hateful preachers who run the homophobic website, godhatefags.com,” he said in a statement issued at lunchtime by his House of Commons office.

“Thank you to the LGBT Labour — the Labour Campaign for Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Trans Rights — for their persistence and vigilance,” Woolas said. “The lobbying on the Westboro Baptist Church was timely and precise. The Home Secretary has con-

firmed the exclusion order.

“I am grateful to the group whose arguments were strong and convincing. The Labour Government will always oppose homophobia,” he pledged.

Simon Wright, co-chair of LGBT Labour had written to Woolas about the Westboro Baptist Church’s planned visit to the U.K. Subsequently, the group met with Woolas and spoke regularly on the phone about the issues as they developed.

Fred Phelps had announced that his “church,” which is not part of the Southern Baptist Convention, would be picketing a production of “The Laramie Project” on Feb. 20 by a theatre group at a Basingstoke school. In his press release Phelps attacked the Queen, using a derogatory remark.

Following the announcement that the Westboro Baptist Church had been banned from entering the country, Wright said that the ban showed that the government was taking homophobia very seriously.

“We are very pleased that the Home Secretary has barred these preachers of homophobic hatred from our country. It sends a strong message that homophobia,

see next page >

Flurry of events blanket area

from page 7

In recent years, NARTH has come under fire for racist and other seemingly prejudiced positions and statements made by their staff and other leaders affiliated with the group.

Besen said that he witnessed more youth present at the Charlotte Love Won Out conference than he had at any other he’d attended.

“It was heartbreaking to see more young people than I ever had before at this traveling ‘ex-gay’ road show,” he writes in his latest syndicated column (read it in this issue, page 26).

“There was a cardboard sign that read ‘Youth Track’ [inside the conference] and several teenagers — some that appeared not much older than 13 — were being taken inside by their desperate and confused parents.”

That evening, 900 LGBT community members from across the Carolinas gathered at the Charlotte Convention Center for the 14th Annual Human Rights Campaign Carolinas Gala.

U.S. Sen. Kay Hagan (D-NC) was the keynote speaker for the event. HRC President Joe Solmonese also spoke. EqualityNC and Lesbian & Gay Community Center of Charlotte Board Chair Denise Palm-Beck were honored with the 2009 Equality Awards. Volunteer LaWana Slack-Mayfield received the group’s 2009 Volunteer of the Year Award.

HRC Gala co-chair Michael Holmes said they had not yet finalized the numbers for the amount raised at the benefit dinner, but said the group was “on track” with all the other dinners in the nation, “given the state of the economy.”

“We just slightly exceeded what we made last year on sponsorships,” he said. “Overall, we are all very pleased with where we have ended up.”

Outside the Gala, members of the trans-



Lesbian & Gay Community Center of Charlotte board chair Denise Palm Beck accepts the 2009 HRC Equality Award.

gender community protested HRC alongside anti-gay group Operation Save America. Janice Covington, chair of TransCarolina, said her members wanted HRC to know about their displeasure with the group’s decision to exclude them from the Employment Non-Discrimination Act in the fall of 2007.

Covington said she and another transgender activist

were able to meet with HRC President Joe Solmonese the day before the Gala.

The flurry of activity in February — and the combination of several high profile events — sparked intense community discussion and heavy media coverage. Through mid-February, every TV news station and *The Charlotte Observer* covered the LGBT and anti-gay events at least once. ▀

Online extras:

Log on to Q-Notes Online at www.q-notes.com to see photos and videos of the various LGBT and anti-gay events, including the video montage, “Queer February.”