

# N.C. GOP control threatens LGBTs

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Palmquist. "Larry Brown is out of touch with the people of North Carolina, who strongly support programs to care for the most vulnerable among us, and he's out of step with his own party."

Palmquist also pointed out Republican U.S. Senator Richard Burr's long, outspoken support for funding for the AIDS Drug Assistance Program.

"I think it's common sense," Burr said of the program this fall. "The compassionate thing to do is to make sure people get the medications they need. But, if you look at it from a budgetary standpoint, it's much more cost effective to provide medication than it is to treat the devastating effects for individuals who don't receive treatment."

The Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest LGBT civil rights organization, has called on Brown to apologize for his remarks. HRC president Joe Solmonese said Brown's comments were "hysterical, judgemental and inaccurate" and "out of line with the fair-minded people of North Carolina."

Republican members of the House, from Brown's next-door colleague and future House Whip Rep. Dale Folwell (R-Forsyth) to other legislative leaders like Stam, have refused to comment on Brown's remarks. Speaker-elect Thom Tillis (R-Mecklenburg) has spoken out generally, calling Brown's October comments an "unacceptable distraction."

Tillis' office has yet to return *quotes'* requests for an interview. An interview request to Rep. Ruth Samuelson (R-Mecklenburg) also went unreturned.

## Advocates reaching out

Palmquist says his group is well-positioned to build alliances and work with, instead of in opposition to, the legislature's new Republican leadership. Several of the group's heavily-involved donors and board members are Republican including board chair Dan Gurley, a former executive director of the North Carolina Republican Party.

"The Republicans involved with Equality North Carolina have really stepped up in engaging their networks with Republican legislators and staff to help us do everything we can to try and block negative legislation and strengthen relationships we have on that side of the aisle," he says.

Though Palmquist says he's not spoken directly with Tillis, there's a general sense that the new legislature's leaders will focus on some priorities other than those related to arch-conservatives' social agenda.

"There's a recognition that the new majority was elected around the economy and jobs and size of government and not on social issues including LGBT equality," he says. "So, we're going to have to remind them of that and hold them to that as we go forward in this session and hold them responsible to the issues voters care about."

Such a strategy will come in handy if rumors of an impending amendment campaign are heavily supported by monies, ads or other resources from groups like the National Organization for Marriage (NOM).

"I've heard rumors that the National Organization for Marriage or other na-

tional organizations are planning to come in," Palmquist says. "We haven't seen any concrete evidence of that, but we anticipate it could happen."

HRC anticipates similar action, not only in North Carolina, but in several other states as well. In an action alert sent to its members on Jan. 13, HRC President Joe Solmonese called on community members to get involved and said NOM could build up a presence in the Tar Heel State, Indiana, Minnesota, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

NOM's 2010 "Summer of Marriage" tour made a stop in Raleigh. The rally, held on State Capitol grounds, was small but speakers — like Mary Forrester, wife of Gaston County Sen. Forrester — were absolute in their support for a constitutional amendment.

Equality North Carolina says it's ready to ensure the continued safety of LGBT North Carolinians. Part of their strategy includes getting constituents to Raleigh for their Day of Action in February. They expected at least 100-150 people, though they'd like to see more.

The timeline for a constitutional amendment or other anti-equality measures remain unclear, though Palmquist guesses the amendment could be heard as early as this year and placed on the ballot either this November or in 2012. However that timeline progresses, he says this year's legislative session presents both unique opportunities and critical challenges. He's anxious to get as many constituents to Raleigh as he can. "It's more urgent than ever before to have people there from all over the state," he says. : :

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