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The Front Page

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Joe Solmonese will take over HRC on April 11

Solmonese Named to Lead HRC

By Bob Roehr
Contributing Writer

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) has hired Joe Solmonese as their next president. Rumors of the decision had been circulating for more than a week and were made official on March 9. He starts on April 11.

Solmonese, 40, has worked for EMILY's List for a dozen years, the last two as the head of that group where he managed a budget of \$40 million and a staff of 85. The organization describes itself as "the nation's largest grassroots political network, dedicated to taking back our country from the radical right wing by electing pro-choice Democratic women to federal, state, and local office."

He is a Massachusetts native who graduated from Boston University in 1987. He began his career as an aide in the office of governor Michael Dukakis and played a significant fundraising role in Rep. Barney Frank's 1990 congressional campaign. He came out in his early twenties and has been a volunteer with HRC.

Vic Basile cochaired the search committee that hired Solmonese. In an exclusive interview he said, "Joe is quite a charismatic speaker...he is a tested political operative with a long track record, way outside the beltway. We're satis-

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California Court OKs Marriage

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A judge ruled Monday that California can no longer justify limiting marriage to a man and a woman, a legal milestone that if upheld on appeal would pave the way for the nation's most populous state to follow Massachusetts in allowing same-sex couples to wed.

In an opinion that had been awaited because of San Francisco's historical role as a gay rights battleground, San Francisco County Superior Court Judge Richard Kramer said that withholding marriage licenses from gays and lesbians is unconstitutional.

"It appears that no rational purpose exists for limiting marriage in this state to opposite-sex partners," Kramer wrote.

The judge wrote that the state's historical definition of marriage, by itself, cannot justify the unconstitutional denial of equal protection for gays and lesbians and their right to marry.

"The state's protracted denial of equal protection cannot be justified simply because such constitutional violation has become traditional," Kramer wrote.

Kramer's decision came in a pair of lawsuits seeking to overturn California's statutory ban on gay marriage. They were brought by the city of San Francisco and a dozen same-sex couples last March, after the California Supreme Court halted the four-week marriage spree Mayor Gavin Newsom had initiated when he directed city officials to issue marriage licenses to gays and lesbians in defiance of state law.

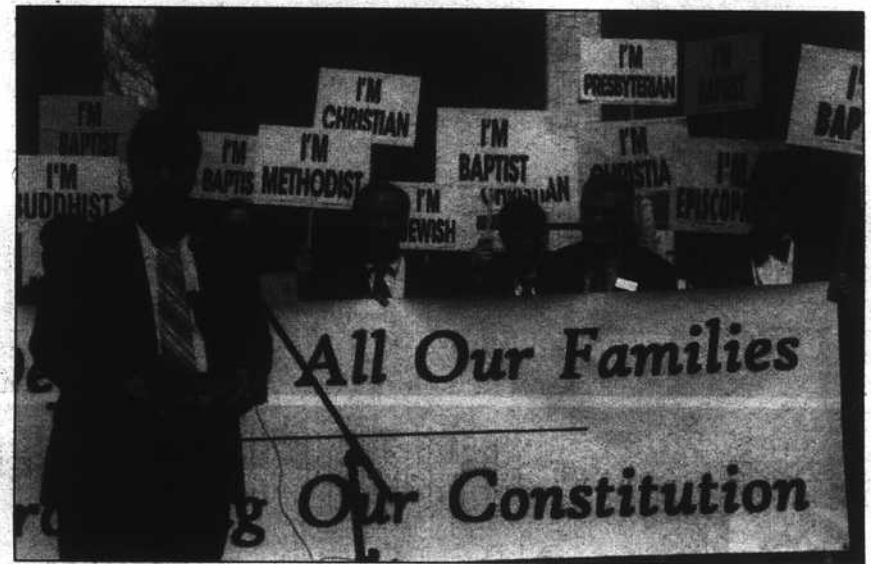
"Today's ruling is an important step toward a more fair and just California, that rejects discrimination and affirms family values for all California families," San Francisco City Attorney Dennis Herrera said.

Robert Tyler, an attorney with the conservative Alliance Defense Fund, said the group would appeal Kramer's ruling.

It could be months or years before the state actually sanctions same-sex marriage, if it sanctions the unions at all. The Alliance Defense Fund and another legal group representing religious conservatives joined with California's attorney general in defending the existing laws.

Attorney General Bill Lockyer has said in the past that he expected the matter eventually would have to be settled by the California Supreme Court.

Therese Stewart, attorney for the city



Marriage Rally in Raleigh

N.C. Religious Leaders Rally To Oppose Constitutional Amendment

RALEIGH — On Tuesday, March 15, 100 religious leaders from across North Carolina will gather to oppose the proposed "Defense of Marriage" constitutional amendment. They held a rally at noon in front of the general assembly building, where speakers from diverse faith-based and secular perspectives explained why North Carolina should not write discrimination into its constitution. Audience members

held signs identifying their denominations and faiths, such as "I'm a Baptist", "I'm a Buddhist" and "I'm an Episcopalian".

"As religious leaders and people of faith in North Carolina, we are standing on the right side of history," said the Reverend Jack McKinney of Raleigh's Pullen Memorial Baptist Church. "In 20 years, our children will look back and be proud of us for taking a stand against discrimination."

The amendment has been a rallying point for people of diverse faiths to work together. Catholics, Jews, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Quakers

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and county of San Francisco said today's decision is historic, setting the framework for future challenges in state appeals courts and at the ballot box that eventually will determine that gays and lesbians should be allowed to marry.

"It's a foregone conclusion that it's going to go up on appeal," Stewart said.

Meanwhile, a pair of bills pending before the California Legislature would put a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage on the November ballot. If California voters follow the 13 other states that approved such amendments last year, that would put the issue out of the control of lawmakers and the courts.

Nevertheless, the plaintiffs and their

lawyers said Kramer's ruling was a milestone for California, akin to the 1948 state Supreme Court decision that made California the first state in the nation to legalize interracial marriage.

The decision is the latest development in a national debate on the legality and morality of same-sex marriage that has been raging since 2003, when the highest court in Massachusetts decided that denying gay couples the right to wed was unconstitutional in that state.

In the wake of the Massachusetts ruling, gay rights advocates filed lawsuits seeking to strike down traditional marriage laws in several other states, and opponents responded by proposing

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