

# GUARDIAN

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See Inside for Candidate Responses to School Board & County Commission Questionnaires

## HRCNCF Hosts Alachua County School Board Candidate Forum

The Human Rights Council of North Central Florida (HRCNCF) hosted a forum for Alachua County School Board candidates on July 28 at the Pride Community Center of North Central Florida. Ten of the 12 candidates were able to attend.

At the same time, HRCNCF received written responses to its candidate questionnaire from 9 out of 12 School Board candidates. Four out of six county commission candidates also responded to the HRCNCF questionnaire. (*See inside for candidate responses.*)

Primary Election Day is Tuesday, August 24, with early voting running daily from Monday, August 9 to Saturday, August 21 at three voting sites.

At the July 28 candidate forum, each School Board candidate was asked about safety, bullying and discrimination in respect to LGBT youth and those perceived as such, about Gay-Straight Alliance clubs, and about age-appropriate sex education including HIV/AIDS.

"We were frankly surprised and gratified at the excellent answers we heard," said HRCNCF Secretary Abby Goldsmith, who was moderator for the forum.

In the District 1 seat, Bonnie Burgess, April Griffin, Rick Nesbit and David Palpant all came out strongly against discrimination of any sort. Bonnie Burgess, former mayor of the city of Alachua, was dynamic and forceful. April Griffin took note of the Gay-Straight Alliance Club at Buchholz High School, and said she was supportive as long as it followed guidelines outlined for any school club. David Palpant, a local businessman and school volunteer, initially opposed the idea of Gay-Straight Alliance clubs in his questionnaire response, but said that after talking with a gay teacher friend of his, he changed

*(continued on next page)*

### Craig Lowe Elected as Gainesville's First Openly Gay Mayor

On May 20 Craig Lowe was sworn in as Mayor of Gainesville, but not before winning two election cycles, a mandatory recount, and a legal challenge to the election results.

Lowe becomes Gainesville's first openly gay mayor, and only one of a handful of openly gay mayors around the country. Lowe is also a long-time Board member and a former President of the Human Rights Council of North Central Florida.

"Craig's election as Mayor is just one more achievement he's accomplished through his civic and political activism on behalf of LGBT rights in Gainesville and Alachua County over the past two decades," said Bob Karp, an HRCNCF co-founder and Board member.

Lowe became HRCNCF president in the mid-1990s, after working to oppose the county's ballot measures that overturned Alachua County's sexual orientation nondiscrimination ordinance. He worked on many pro-LGBT candidates' campaigns, and was elected in his first run for office in 2003 to Gainesville's District 4 city commission seat. He earned the moniker "Landslide Lowe" after winning that seat by 16 votes.

After two successful re-election campaigns to that seat, Lowe ran for Mayor this year and led the pack by 40% of the vote in the March 16 election. In the runoff election against conservative tea party candidate Don Marsh, he squeaked out a 42-vote lead which triggered an automatic machine recount. The recount achieved the same result.

Marsh and his supporters challenged the results in court and lost their case just one day before Lowe's swearing in as mayor on May 20.

Starting in 2008, Lowe was chair of Equality Is Gainesville's Business, a political committee that opposed the discriminatory charter amendment that sought to eliminate the city's LGBT anti-discrimination protections. The ballot measure was defeated by 58% of Gainesville voters in March 2009. The loss undoubtedly continued to provoke the ire of social conservatives, including the posting of a sign at Dove World Outreach Center, declaring "No Homo Mayor", alongside their "Islam Is of the Devil" signage, said Karp.

Addressing Dove World's anti-Muslim statements, Mayor Lowe said: "As mayor of Gainesville, I condemn the offensive behavior that has been directed at our Muslim neighbors and those of the Islamic faith worldwide... We may be of different religions, sexual orientations, races, genders, national origins, or ages, but all are welcome here in our efforts to build a better community both locally and globally... Gainesville values a sense of community and innovation which necessarily requires the contributions of people of good will from a myriad of backgrounds. Please join me in continuing to assert our community's true character."

**Primary Election Day is August 24; Early Voting is Aug. 9-21**

his mind and now supports GSAs. Rick Nesbit, who described himself as a local businessman, father and grandfather, had excellent questionnaire responses which showed he understood the issues faced by LGBT youth. At the forum Nesbit emphasized his strong commitment to making every child as successful as possible, whatever that takes.

In the District 3 race, Wayne Gabb, Gunnar Paulson and Jodi D. Wood also had good answers on LGBT issues. Wayne Gabb is a teacher and shared his concerns for his gay son and certainly has a handle on children's sexuality and the need for sex education. Jodi Wood has five children and shared fiscal concerns regarding what he considers a top heavy administration with too little money reaching the teachers and the classrooms. Gunnar Paulson, former teacher and former head of the Alachua County Education Association, was not only good on all LGBT issues, but was on top of current policies and why they were or were not effective.

In District 5, Carol Oyenarte, Chris Smiley and Jancie Vinson were also good on LGBT issues.

Carol Oyenarte is a realtor whose love and enthusiasm for children were palpable. Chris Smiley, who worked in Tallahassee as an educational researcher, did a great deal of research on LGBT issues and also advocates for evidence-based teaching methods. Jancie Vinson described herself as an advocate who will fight for human rights as a school board member. The tenth of 11 children, she is a corrections officer and is the product of public education.

Although there are candidates running in three School Board districts, all registered voters in Alachua County are eligible to vote on August 24 in all three races, which are nonpartisan. Early voting runs from August 9-21 at three voting sites: the first floor of the County Administration Building in downtown Gainesville at University Avenue & Main Street, and at the Millhopper and Tower Road branch libraries. Absentee ballots are now available; call the Supervisor of Elections at 352-374-5252 to have one mailed to you. For more election information, visit [www.VoteAlachua.com](http://www.VoteAlachua.com).

## HRCNCF 2010 Alachua County School Board & County Commission Questionnaire Responses

### Responses to School Board HRCNCF Questionnaire

- 1. The School Board of Alachua County's Student Code of Conduct specifically bars discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. As a School Board member, would you support and vote for a similar antidiscrimination policy that would prohibit such discrimination as applies to teachers, administrators and other School Board employees?**

#### School Board, District 1:

GRIFFIN: I would support and vote for antidiscrimination policies that apply to all staff. According to the School Board of Alachua County's Bylaws and Policies an antidiscrimination policy for all staff is currently in place. Policy #3122 states: "The Board does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, or legally-protected characteristic in its programs and activities, including employment opportunities. Policy #5517 states: "It is the policy of the Board to maintain an educational and work environment which is free from all forms of unlawful harassment, including sexual harassment. This commitment applies to all District operations, programs, and activities. For purposes of this policy, "School District community" means students, student applicants, administrators, teachers, staff, and all other school personnel, including Board members, agents, volunteers, contractors, or other persons subject to the control and supervision of the Board." I believe these policies are in place for good reason and should be supported and enforced.

NESBIT: I will support and vote for an antidiscrimination policy that would protect all members of the Alachua County Schools community. I would want specific protection for

people based on sexual orientation and gender identity. I was on the Host Committee for Equality in Gainesville's Business, vigorously supported the No on Amendment 1 Campaign and have always supported antidiscrimination policies in my business and community.

PALPANT: Without a doubt!

#### School Board, District 3:

GABB: Yes.

PAULSON: Yes!

#### School Board, District 5:

DEACHIN: Yes.

OYENARTE: YES!!!

SMILEY: Yes, I would support and vote for a similar antidiscrimination policy. I laud the constituents of Gainesville for maintaining their antidiscrimination policy and I would like to see these types of policies extended to teachers, administrators and other School Board employees.

VINSON: Yes, any type of discrimination is wrong.

- 2. Do you support the School Board's policy which now offers health insurance benefits to the Certified Domestic Partners of School Board employees?**

#### School Board, District 1:

GRIFFIN: I do support the School Board's policy that offers health insurance benefits to the Certified Domestic Partners of School Board employees. Not allowing this is a form of discrimination and I am glad that the policy supports these benefits.

NESBIT: I support offering all benefits to Certified Domestic Partners that are offered to any married partners. I offer those benefits to employees at my company.

PALPANT: Yes.

School Board, District 3:

GABB: Yes.

PAULSON: I not only support this policy, I am the one as chairman of the insurance committee who recommended to our present Board effective the 2009 calendar year for health insurance. We researched other policies including the City of Gainesville and University of Florida. We feel like we came up with a good policy that was long overdue.

School Board, District 5:

DEACHIN: Yes.

OYENARTE: YES!!!

SMILEY: I absolutely support the policy in place which offers health insurance benefits to Certified Domestic Partners of School Board employees.

VINSON: Yes. Board members must comply with all established policies.

- 3. National studies have shown that harassment and violence toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) youth, and those who are perceived as gay, in public schools leads to higher dropout rates and up to three times the rate of suicide among LGBT teens compared to their straight peers. Would you support implementing an anti-bullying and pro-tolerance policy that specifically protects LGBT students?**

School Board, District 1:

GRIFFIN: The School Board currently has zero tolerance of harassment written in its bylaws. Policy #5517 specifically deals with harassment based on a student's sex, sexual orientation, gender identity etc. I believe this policy does specifically protect LGBT students. Policy #1362 states that the School Board will vigorously enforce these regulations.

NESBIT: Two of the three main objectives of my campaign are to decrease the dropout rate and to provide a tolerant and safe environment for students. I support specific protection against bullying LGBT students and any perceived LGBT students. I believe bullying is a serious problem in our schools and I will work hard to increase awareness and to prevent such activity in our schools.

PALPANT: Yes.

School Board, District 3:

GABB: Yes.

PAULSON: This should have been included when the original policy was approved. The reasons they gave for not including specifically LGBT students did not make any sense. They said that the LGBT students would fall under the umbrella of the approved policy. Making it more precise should have been done. Another excuse given was about a youth committing suicide. I still don't understand this

reasoning as I have discussed the reasons for not being more specific since then with school officials.

School Board, District 5:

DEACHIN: Yes.

OYENARTE: YES!!!

SMILEY: I would definitely support an anti-bullying and pro-tolerance policy that would also specifically protect LGBT students. Sometimes schools have no policy or have a very vague stance on bullying towards LGBT students. I would call for an enumerated anti-bullying policy as it can have positive affects on our schools. GLSEN's *From Teasing to Torment: A Report on School Climate in Illinois* found that 75% of students at schools without enumerated policies reported that they heard homophobic remarks often or very often from other students, versus 54% of students at schools with enumerated anti-bullying policies. So aside from obvious reasons as to why we should have a strong and clear stance in regards to this type of bullying, research show that taking those extra steps can have a significant positive impact.

VINSON: Any form of bullying is wrong and against the law. It is my understanding that there are educating counselors who are proactively meeting with the teens to ensure the policy of anti-bully is observed.

- 4. As a School Board member, would you vote to allow the formation of student clubs known as "Gay-Straight Alliances" which provide an opportunity for gay and nongay students to meet together on school property as do other extracurricular clubs?**

School Board, District 1:

GRIFFIN: My sons attend Buchholz High School and there is a GSA club currently at BHS. According to the School Board Policies, in order for a club to be formed the club must: 1) get approval from the school's administration, 2) have a teacher sponsor, 3) be composed of members of the current student body, 4) hold the majority of their meetings at school, and 5) have established goals that are educational in nature. If students wish to form a GSA club and they follow these guidelines, then the club should be allowed.

NESBIT: Yes, I support open communication between all people. I believe that there is a lot of ignorance about the realities of sexuality and gender. Increasing communication and education about sexuality will help all members of society and will lead to more cohesiveness in our community.

PALPANT: No. The school is a place to learn. Not clubs of this sort.

School Board, District 3:

GABB: Yes, but at the High School level only!!

PAULSON: My understanding is that it would not be legal to not allow the formation of such a club if others are allowed. Even if it is not illegal I would vote to allow such a club.

School Board, District 5:

DEACHIN: Yes.

OYENARTE: I can't answer due to not knowing how clubs & extracurricular activities are done. Is it school/supt. Issue or Board? Sorry!

SMILEY: I would certainly allow for the formation of Gay-Straight Alliance clubs. It is unjust and hypocritical that some schools do not allow these good willed clubs to form. I would oppose any school that tried to manipulate the system and treat this club unfairly by placing them under 'non-school sponsored' status or something of the like where they would not have the same privileges as other clubs.

VINSON: Any formation of student clubs are legal, of course.

## Responses to Alachua County Commission HRCNCF Questionnaire

Note that Jim Gabriel (Republican in District 2) and Susan Baird (Republican in District 4) did not respond to the questionnaire. The Alachua County Commission races are partisan, so on August 24, only registered Democrats in Alachua County will have a choice: between the two Democratic contenders Jack Donovan and Lee Pinkoson in District 2. The winner of that race will face Republican Jim Gabriel on the November 2 ballot. Also on November 2, in the District 4 race, Democrat Cynthia Chestnut faces Republican Susan Baird and Lloyd Bailey Jr., who is running under the Constitutional Party of Florida.

**1. Do you support amending the Alachua County Code of Ordinances to prohibit discrimination on the basis of "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodations and credit? "Gender identity" refers to not only transgender individuals, but to persons who may face discrimination because they do not fit traditional gender roles.**

County Commission, District 2

DONOVAN: Yes, I support amending the code as above.

PINKOSON: There was a citizens petition regarding this issue back in the late 90s. I do not know how that affects this issue. I know we have supported such language for the library governing board as well as the MTPO. I supported both. Discrimination should not be tolerated.

County Commission, District 4

BAILEY: No.

CHESTNUT: I do not support discrimination against anyone based on race, color, creed or sexual orientation.

**2. Would you support the county government having a domestic partner registry where same-sex and opposite-sex couples could officially recognize their relationships? By registering at a county-sponsored domestic partner registry, couples would be able to obtain documentation that could be used to facilitate, for example, visitation rights for partners at hospitals, better access to private sector domestic partner health insurance, and coverage under the laws of the county where references are made to family or spouses.**

County Commission, District 2

DONOVAN: Yes.

PINKOSON: While I am not sure a "registry" is the best answer (lists are not always a good thing) we should do whatever we can to assure or accommodate all family situations.

County Commission, District 4

BAILEY: No.

CHESTNUT: At this time it appears that a registry would provide preferential treatment of one group over another. I support inclusion of all, not discrimination of one group over another.

**3. Do you advocate diversity training for county employees to include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues?**

County Commission, District 2

DONOVAN: Yes.

PINKOSON: Yes.

County Commission, District 4

BAILEY: No.

CHESTNUT: Yes, the more education and training the better prepared one is in order to effectively handle a job or employment issue.

**4. As a county commissioner, would you support annual proclamations for Alachua County Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Pride Days?**

County Commission, District 2

DONOVAN: Yes.

PINKOSON: We always have.

County Commission, District 4

BAILEY: No.

CHESTNUT: Yes.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL OF NORTH CENTRAL FLORIDA**

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—MISSION STATEMENT—

*HRCNCF opposes discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in the interest of civic betterment and social welfare. HRCNCF also seeks to work in coalition with other organizations working to end discrimination based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, age, religion, national origin, or disability.*

THE NEXT MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IS  
THURSDAY, AUGUST 12, 2010, AT 7:00 PM AT PRIDE  
COMMUNITY CENTER OF NORTH CENTRAL FLORIDA,  
3131 NW 13<sup>TH</sup> ST, GAINESVILLE

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