

NATIONAL news

Massachusetts state Sen. Cheryl Jacques will become the next president and executive director of the Human Rights Campaign. The announcement came Nov. 3, after a unanimous vote by the board of directors at a meeting the previous evening in Denver.

Jacques (pronounced Jakes) graduated from Boston College in 1984 and Suffolk University Law School three years later. The 41-year-old Democrat became politically active at an early age and was first elected to the state Senate in 1992, serving continuously since then.

Jennifer Wade Chrisler, her partner of nearly five years, gave Jacques a gift of attending the Millennium March on Washington for queer rights in April 2000. That experience led to her public coming out as a lesbian in a *Boston Globe* editorial.

Jacques ran for Congress in a 2001 special election when 9th Congressional District Rep. Joe Moakley died in office. She placed second in a crowded field where the liberal vote was divided among several candidates.

In endorsing her for that race, *The Boston Phoenix* said: "Beyond these tangible assets [of her record] Jacques has something else that's hard to quantify: Call it star potential. Although she's been in the campaign just eight weeks, she has grown dramatically on the trail.... She is easily the most articulate candidate on issues ranging from stem-cell research to civil rights to tax reform."

Jacques announced a bid for the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor of Massachusetts in 2002, winning the early support of the Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund. However, she later abandoned that effort to run for re-election to the state Senate.

"I've pretty much been an advocate my entire life," Jacques said during a telephone news conference Nov. 4. As an assistant district attorney she "specialized in child abuse cases and protecting kids."



Jacques (left) with her partner, Jennifer Wade Chrisler, and their twin boys, Timmy and Tommy

JUST OUT

HRC's new leader gets high marks for bipartisanship but loses points for staying closeted until 2000 by Bob Roehr

Those same concerns were the focus of her work in the Massachusetts Senate. She spoke at length "of reaching across the aisle" with "a lot of hard work and a lot of coalition building" to create legislative successes.

Vic Basile, co-chairman of the HRC search committee that hired Jacques, is "really excited about having her here. She has a great deal of presence, she's really smart, she's got political experience."

"One of the things that was very important to us was [selecting] someone who can build bipartisan bridges. With some of the legislation she has passed, she could only do it with bipartisan support, and she got it." Basile cited defeat of the local anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act and passage of gun control legislation.

Patrick Guerriero, executive director of Log Cabin Republicans, worked with Jacques while he was a member of the Massachusetts Legislature. "Cheryl Jacques is a proven leader for a challenging time," he said. "She is a strong and experienced choice to lead the Human Rights Campaign."

Basile acknowledged that raising money is one of the executive director's principal responsibilities for the \$20-plus-million-a-year organization. He said it was a major concern for the committee, which was impressed by her ability to raise \$1 million during the eight weeks of her congressional campaign and thought she could do even better for a cause. "I think she is going to connect with donors; she has a presence thing."

There also was concern that she has been publicly out for only three years. But, Basile said, "Her coming-out experience [at the Millennium March] was so emotional for her. That is when she wrote the *Boston Globe* piece. It was trial by fire for her, coming out to the world because you are in the camera's eye."

"I think she really gets now how important it



politician, a law professor and someone with her own private law practice. "This is a woman who spends lots of time away from home now, and somehow they have found a way to balance it."

Jacques said she wants to continue HRC's leading role in "educating America and helping her to understand why it is important that America fulfill her promise of fairness and equality to each and every citizen." The

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—Cheryl Jacques

expansion of civil rights has been one of the nation's greatest achievements, she added. "Our job is to make sure that America understands she is stronger when she includes everyone."

"The most important tool in our arsenal

appealing to the hearts and minds of Americans is living our lives openly and honestly," Jacques said. Yet when asked how she justified staying in the closet after realizing she was a lesbian and while gay rights were under assault, she wasn't very forthcoming.

Jacques argued that she had been "a fighter and an advocate for civil rights for all, including the GLBT career, long before I was living my life openly." She praised HRC for not judging: "We accept people along their path in life and don't ask why or why not; we just greet them with an open hand."

She declined a request to discuss her compensation package, saying: "One of the things that I'm loving now is that I can have just a little corner of my life be private. My compensation is between my family, HRC and myself."

Jacques seemed unaware that such matters must be filed on the organization's Internal Revenue Service 990 form, which is publicly available, albeit one to three years after the fact, depending on the filing schedule. She said, "We'll cross that bridge when we get there."

She will resign from her state Senate seat and move to Washington, D.C., by the end of the year. She already has begun the transition process with Birch, during which time she will establish her priorities for outreach.

"I'm not going to give up on people who have written us off," Jacques said. "I'm going to continue to extend olive branches and discussion, because some people come around." □

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