

JAMES RC THATCHER

MAY 10, 1956 - JANUARY, 1993

by Glen Brown



James RC Thatcher died at his home Jan 2 from AIDS-related complications. Four days prior to his death, James had videotaped a dramatic appeal to the Ontario government to fund HIV and AIDS drugs. The video, shown Jan 6 at an AIDSAction Now press conference, generated unprecedented media attention to the drug funding issue.

James was born in Bermuda and attended high school in Quebec. While studying business at the University of Western Ontario, he was a founding member of the Western Gay Association. In Toronto, he was active in the Liberal party.

Diagnosed with AIDS in 1988, he became a full-time AIDS activist and advocate for the last three years of his life. He was recently re-elected for a second term as co-chair of the Toronto-based activist group AIDS Action Now!

James worked extensively to pressure the Ontario government on HIV and AIDS policies. In the fall of 1991, he participated in an AIDSAction Now! occupation of Ontario Health Minister Frances Lankin's office. Shortly thereafter, he was one of several people living with HIV appointed by Lankin to the Ontario Advisory Committee on HIV and AIDS (OACHA).

On OACHA he chaired a sub-committee that drafted a strategic plan for AIDS in Ontario and participated in a committee which designed and launched a comprehensive needs assessment of Ontario's HIV-positive population. In an interview shortly before his death, James expressed pride in his contributions: "The strategic plan and the needs assessment will play a critical role in allocating resources and focusing efforts in the fight against AIDS in the years to come." He also called on Lankin to move promptly to appoint more people living with HIV to OACHA.

James served on several projects coordinated by the Ontario AIDS Bureau, such as the evaluation of Ontario's new anonymous testing program. He played a key role in the AIDS Bureau's committee to develop an HIV Ontario observational database proposal. The proposal has just received funding through an agreement between the province and pharmaceutical company Burroughs Wellcome. The database will monitor volunteer patients to compare treatments disease conditions and other information.

Fighting discrimination was one of James's primary concerns. He helped lobby Attorney-General Howard Hamp-

ton to fund a legal clinic to help people living with AIDS and HIV battle discrimination. With AIDS Action Now!, he pressured the Ontario Human Rights Commission to accelerate handling of complaints from people living with catastrophic illnesses.

In a farewell speech delivered to a celebration service held Jan. 8, James wrote: "I have lived a charmed life. Although it would have been nice to be around longer, I really have been around the world. I have had tremendously rewarding times as a gay activist, political hack and AIDS activist, and at various points I hope that I have had an impact and made a difference."

James requested that any donations in his memory go to AIDS Action Now!, Suite 324, 517 College Street, Toronto, Ontario M6G1A8.

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