



Creating Change 2004 - Keynote Speech by Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman

November 12, 2004, St. Louis, MO

I don't know about you, but in the days leading up to the election I was really optimistic and I kept playing this fantasy in my mind. It came, naturally for me anyway, from the Wizard of Oz - it went something like this.

[insert video clip here]

Now, with the wicked witch very much alive, 11 states adopting anti-gay state constitutional amendments, and foes, friends and pundits blaming gay people for Kerry's loss or demanding to know why we engaged on marriage at all, I'm seeing another scene from Oz ... [insert video clip here]

In reality, it's not a bad analogy. What do we do now? Surrender and cower? Fight on? Or take a new course?

Before giving my thoughts on that, a few things need to be said. First off, there's no putting lipstick on this ugly pig. The Bush Administration and its frontal assault on our community will go on for another four painful years. Sadly, on November 2, fourteen million people – 67% of the voters in 11 states – affirmatively acted to enshrine our second class citizenship in their state constitutions. Everywhere there is hurt, bewilderment, and trauma. So, here, in this room our movement's best and brightest fighters, our leaders and activists, let's not pretend it doesn't hurt. Let's not pretend that it doesn't feel like we are all walking targets, more than ever.

But at the same time, let's not pretend that we are not mad as hell. I am – you are -- angry that our lives, our rights, and our families were defamed, insulted and used as political fodder by evil hypocrites from the White House right on down to the pulpits of thousands of so-called "Christian" preachers.

I am sick that as all this was going on, so many of our "friends" in high places looked the other way, slightly embarrassed.

I am furious that some of my own in-laws refused to take a stand for me, my family, our people – they just "couldn't do it." And they want me to come down to visit for the holidays. Hell no.

And while I'm on the subject of family – don't you just love the family values of the Cheneys? When Alan Keyes calls Mary Cheney a selfish hedonist it's fine; John Edwards states the fact – that she's a lesbian – they're all terribly offended. You know what offended me – seeing Mary Cheney and her partner beaming up there on the stage when President Bush announced his victory. There's a word for that, I'd use it, but we – unlike Mary and her partner – are in decent company.

And hey, folks, enough with the BS charge that gay marriage cost Kerry the election or won it for Bush. It's a homophobic lie, with not one shred of empirical evidence to support it. Enough said.

I am disgusted that almost no political leaders seemed to understand let alone denounce the fact that it is always wrong to put a fundamental right up for a popular vote.



And last, I am appalled that so many in the media were co-opted, and sold this as being just about “gay marriage” never bothering to look under the sheets – or as Urvashi Vaid said – to pull off the hoods of the leaders opposing us to see what this is really all about. You would have thought that the fact that nine of the 13 state amendments that passed since August went beyond marriage to prohibit *any* form of relationship recognition would have been some tip off. But no. I know it. You know it. But the truth has not been exposed, namely that marriage is being used as a hot button wedge to stay in power AND to stop any gains *whatsoever* for LGBT people.

Angry? You bet we're angry.

But having said that, we do need to take a step back, reflect, and process why the margins of loss in most of the states were depressingly large, where we should go from here and how we are going to get there.

Let's face up to and talk about the reality that the legal strategy behind the push for marriage equality is at least 10 years ahead of our political and public education work. If the “movement” had been thinking clearly, we would have had a political and public education strategy that *preceded* the legal strategy. That obviously didn't happen.

Let's be honest folks that no one that I know in the states that fought amendments this year – and no one in the states that will be under attack in 2005 and 2006 -- and I can assure you no one at the Task Force either – said hey, “let's give up our lives for months on end, divert our community's resources, and engage our enemies on anti-marriage ballot initiatives because it will be a really great thing for all of us.”

No, events – both those that our people initiated -- and even more so – the ways in which our opponents have used marriage to fan the flames of homophobia, fear and intolerance – have quite literally swept over all of us.

Yes, couples and families facing terrible injustices sought redress by going to court and asserting their constitutional rights – the way Americans are supposed to do things. And the pious response from the other side – this is an attack on Christianity, Western Civilization, and the fabric of our society and we must crush it. And how, we all ask them – how does helping some of the most vulnerable in our community hurt you, your family, or society in any way? Of course, they have no answer other than to resort back to crusading language and attack. This is the exact mentality that led our nation into war in Iraq. There are no weapons of mass civilization destruction hidden in gay families, they know it, but they still went to war against us. We had no choice but to defend ourselves.

I am proud that the Task Force helped with the fight. Since July 1, we contributing \$1.1 million in cash to the states – that's more than one quarter of our annual income -- and every staff resource we had. And I wish it could have been more, I wish there was more to give – because our state allies need it and deserve it.

But again, let's be honest folks. Our side simply did and does not have the time, the local infrastructure or the money to mount competitive campaigns against the forces unleashed against us.



Why was our side so outgunned? Because for the last 25 years, our community's resources have been focused on federal politics while state and local leaders and grassroots work often have been ignored and frequently denigrated. Was it realistic to expect these valiant souls to suddenly be able to raise the millions it takes to wage a full-scale campaign? Was it realistic to expect to win a popular vote on marriage when in 13 of those 13 states we still have not been able to pass a comprehensive, straightforward non-discrimination law? Of course not.

If nothing else, November 2 must be an atomic wake up call: the number one priority of our movement – let me say it again – the number one priority of our movement must be to support, nurture, embrace and build our state and local grassroots infrastructure. That's what the right has been doing for 25 years and results were plain for all to see in the election results.

I can say for the Task Force's part, that is precisely the mission our Board of Directors adopted last spring and that is where will focus everything we have going forward, namely, building grassroots political power – among ourselves and in conjunction with other progressive causes. But this is going to take time and even more hard work from everyone in this room.

Does this mean the situation is hopeless now? Of course not. We've lost battles before and still pressed forward.

A lot of people are telling me that we need to take marriage off the table and let the issue cool down.

First off, as far as I know, there is no great omnipotent gay cabal that could decide to switch marriage on or off. However, if one does get formed, please let me know because I want to be queen.

But, love it or hate, marriage is on the table now and there's no taking it back. Thanks to the extraordinary work of Gay & Lesbian Advocates and Defenders and amazing state activists marriage is a reality in Massachusetts and MassEquality is going to be sure it stays that way. Pro-marriage litigation is moving forward in at least 5 states. California activists will be pushing a marriage bill through the legislature this year.

And on top of all of that, it wouldn't make any difference if we all were struck by lightning and decided to wave a white flag and go groveling to the repulsive likes of people like of James Dobson, Lou Sheldon, and Pat Robertson begging for mercy. Gay marriage is their new abortion. It's the fattest cash cow they've ever had and they're going to ride it as hard and long as they can to trample us into oblivion.

Given these realities, is, what should we do now? That's a question I am getting everyday from the media – where do you go from here?

Let me say that the answer is not and cannot come from me or any other national organization – it has to come from you, from the people who will lead the charge and bear the brunt.



Right now, in this extraordinary moment in time, we deserve, we must have a community wide discussion about where we go and how we get there. Every point of view, every strategy deserves to be heard without being shut down or labeled. And this Creating Change is the crucial starting point of those discussions.

But there are three things that I do know.

First, we need to be able to say that marriage equality a goal, but not the only goal of the LGBT community or our movement for liberation. We believe in and will fight for racial and economic justice. We believe in and will fight for a woman's right to choose and an end to a society that demands gender conformity. We believe in and will fight for new ways for people – gay and straight – to gain legal recognition and protections for their families.

Second, as we fight on, the first, overriding and most important goal of everything we do must be building our grassroots infrastructure over the long term. Focusing on one election or one campaign after the next is short sighted, and it is never been the way rights have been won. The anti-amendment campaigns waged by many states over the last few months showed us the way to win long term gains even if we lose at the ballot box. So let me say it again, no campaign can be initiated or pursued unless it is specifically designed so that on other end, our community institutions will be stronger, not weaker and our statewide organizations energized, not demoralized.

And finally, our opponents, some allies, and even some in our own community are saying we need to keep quiet, get in line, and straighten up or it will be even worse.

I say the opposite – if you have been loud in the past, go home and be louder now.

If people think you've been pushy about equal rights in the past, let them know they ain't seen nothing yet.

If you've been having great sex – have more of it – that really drives them crazy. And if you haven't been having great sex – go out and get some – that really drives them crazy.

And above all, stay out, stay in the fight. Surrender Dorothy? Never!

Founded in 1973, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Foundation (the Task Force) was the first national lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) civil rights and advocacy organization and remains the movement's leading voice for freedom, justice, and equality. We work to build the grassroots political strength of our community by training state and local activists and leaders, working to strengthen the infrastructure of state and local allies, and organizing broad-based campaigns to build public support for complete equality for LGBT people. Our Policy Institute, the community's premiere think tank, provides research and policy analysis to support the struggle for complete equality. As part of a broader social justice movement, we work to create a world that respects and makes visible the diversity of human expression and identity where all people may fully participate in society. Headquartered in Washington, DC, we also have offices in New York City, Los Angeles, and Cambridge. The Task Force is a 501(c)(3) corporation incorporated in Washington, DC. Contributions to the Task Force are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law. <http://www.TheTaskForce.org>

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Inc. ("NGLTF, Inc."), founded in 1974, works to build the grassroots political power of the LGBT community to win complete equality. We do this through direct and grassroots lobbying to defeat anti-LGBT ballot initiatives and legislation and pass pro-LGBT legislation and other measures. We also analyze and report on the positions of candidates for public office on issues of importance to the LGBT community. NGLTF, Inc. is a 501(c)(4) non-profit corporation incorporated in New York. Contributions to NGLTF, Inc. are not tax-deductible.