



*Speech by National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman at the 2004 International Mr. Leather event:*

Thank you very much. On a personal note, my partner and I have been attending IML for the last three years and are going to Massachusetts on Wednesday to get married – if Gov. Romney hasn't completely shut down out-of-state weddings by then – and I want to thank each one of you for giving us the best bachelors' party anyone could ever imagine.

But I am not here to represent myself. Instead, I am here on behalf of the Board, staff and the one hundred thousand members of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to thank you for giving me the privilege of speaking tonight.

All of us in the United States are living in a moment of incredible promise and incredible peril. Under the guise of the "threat of gay marriage" the forces of religious and political intolerance – from the President on down -- have united against us as never before. They are attempting to enshrine our second class citizenship in the U.S. Constitution and in state constitutions from Oregon to Georgia. In fact, at the polls on November 2, at least one in four will be voting on our lives and our place in society. Not since the civil war has there been such a widespread campaign to deprive a minority of its rights.

But you all know that, and that is not why I am here tonight. Instead, I am here to say how proud and honored the Task Force is to embrace and celebrate our brothers and sisters in the leather community.

I am here to acknowledge other realities that are rarely spoken about, including the enormous debt owed by the larger lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community to leather people -- for all the money you have raised to fight HIV and to support local gay organizations.

For being out front and proud -- when so many others have been and still are cowering in closets --pushing the envelope and making it so much easier for those of us work on the inside to press forward for equal rights.

I want to state the plain truth that leather people have disproportionately borne the scourges of anti-gay discrimination and violence and as well as the burden of caring for people with AIDS.

And, most important is to say that far too many times, so many in the organized, "mainstream" gay community have not only failed to recognize our debt to you, but have denied it, looked away and tried to distance themselves from you.

That is wrong and unconscionable. All I can say is how profoundly sorry I am for that.



We at the Task Force have been and remain committed to changing that – but actions speak much more loudly than words and I very proud to announce some of those actions.

First, we are launching with Woodhull Freedom Foundation a project that came out of meeting with leather leaders a few months ago. Together, we will analyze sex laws throughout the U.S. to educate Americans about the prevalence and abuse of antiquated and unjust sex laws and to give grassroots activists the policy and organizing tools they need to change these laws or the discriminatory ways in which they are enforce. In case you don't know, Woodhull is the first and only national and international organization that focuses on freedom of sexual expression and orientation as a fundamental human right.

Second, the Task Force is making a \$5,000 donation to helping pay off the mortgage on the Leather Archives and Museum.

Third, Woodhull and the Task Force are providing a scholarship, including travel and all expenses to this year's International Mr. Leather and Mr. International Bootblack to attend and participate in the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Creating Change Conference in St. Louis in November. Creating Change is our movement's largest annual conference.

Fourth, at this year's Creating Change conference we will be offering an entire track of workshops about sexual freedom and SM issues, and a speaker at the conference's major plenary session will talk about how our movement is close to losing its sexual freedom agenda.

And fifth, we are working to coordinate a national voter registration and get-out-the-vote drive coming out of our leather bars.

These are small steps, which we promise you will grow into larger ones, year after year.

Thank you.