



**Speech by Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman at the  
10<sup>th</sup> Leather Leadership Conference on April 9, 2006**

Thank you for giving me the honor of being with and speaking to you today. As I said at IML a couple of years ago, the LGBT community owes a tremendous debt to our leather brothers and sisters for so many things, including 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; and for pushing the envelope and making it so much easier for those of us work on the inside to press forward for equal rights.

I am proud to be here on behalf of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the oldest national LGBT rights organizations, which has always held sexual freedom and liberation as core values. Unlike some other organizations in the “mainstream” LGBT movement, we don’t look the other way when it comes to leatherpeople. Just the opposite, over the last two years, for example, we have contributed \$10,000 to the Leather Archives and Museum, worked on a joint project with Woodhull to analyze sex laws in the country, established an annual leather leadership award that is presented at our Creating Change Conference — our first award was presented in honor of the memory of Tony DeBlase — and we co-sponsored a roundtable at last year’s IML.

What I’d like to talk about today is fantasy — not sexual fantasy, but the startling and appalling discord between reality of sex and family in this country and what drives public policy and discourse. I’d like to talk about how this affects the way the LGBT movement is fighting for its rights, and to suggest some things that we, collectively, can do.

If you read the paper or watch the news, the chasm between the “official” view of what’s going on compared to reality is huge and growing wider.

The administration tells us things in Iraq are getting better. It must be so. Leaking classified information isn’t a crime if the president does it. It must be so.

Growing the deficit by hundreds of billions to pay for the war is no problem, but we have no money for education or health care. It must be so.

Not telling the truth about a blow job is an impeachable offense, but lying that leads to the literal blowing up of thousands of human bodies is not. It must be so.

But — as you know better than anyone — there is nothing quite as profoundly surreal as the way sex and the family is “supposed” to be in America and the way it really is.

The president and his right-wing allies, for example, speak incessantly about the supposed fact that marriage is a sacred institution between one man and one woman and it hasn’t changed for thousands of years.

I'm always unclear about what Bible or history books they're reading. Deuteronomy dictates how property is to be divided among multiple wives; Solomon didn't have a few, he had hundreds. And, even in the last 50 years here in the U.S. there have been profound changes to legal framework of marriage:

- Until the 1960s, women were still essentially the property of men and interracial marriage was illegal in dozens of states.
- Divorce was virtually unobtainable in many places, and married couples could not obtain contraception even in Connecticut.

The forces of political and religious intolerance still proclaim the fiction of marriage “until death do us part” when the reality is that 43 percent of all first marriages end within 15 years, and the rate goes up to 52 percent for women under 45.

All across the country, there are divorced, remarried, divorced, remarried politicians demanding that the federal and their state constitutions be amended to save marriage from the gay desecrators. The chief sponsor of the Missouri amendment, for example, was on her third marriage when she put that state's amendment forward.

These same forces have succeeded in getting huge amounts of tax dollars to be spent on “promoting marriage” — specifically within the African-American community — and tying government benefits to marriage, deliberately and cruelly ignoring the reality that nearly 30 percent of all children and nearly 70 percent of African-American children are now born “out of wedlock.”

And it's around sex that the hypocrisy and the delusional thinking and speaking are just as stark.

The façade is that adultery is an aberration. In reality, according to a study from the University of Chicago and a Time/CNN poll, 69 percent knew of husbands who had committed adultery, and 60 percent knew of wives who had committed adultery.

The façade is that people who are into so-called kinky sex and porn are small, twisted minority. But according to an ABC news poll, the reality is that two-thirds of sexually active Americans sometimes “wear something sexy” to enhance their sex lives, 60 percent have had sex outdoors or in a public place, 30 percent say they and their partner have watched sexually explicit videos, one in five — around 40 million people — say they've looked at porn Web sites, and nearly one-third of all single men have been involved in three-ways. Seeking the services of a “prostitute” is supposedly way on the fringe. In reality, 30 percent of single men 30 years or older have paid for sex.

And these numbers only reflect those who had the guts to admit all this to a stranger. I suspect the all these figures would double if everyone told the truth.

These facts and figures would be mildly amusing or entertaining, but for the fact that it is the fiction, not reality that is driving public policy, with profoundly harmful consequences. Here are just a couple of small examples:

Look at tens of millions of dollars spent on “abstinence” only programs. Wasted is a better word. Eleven states have evaluated their abstinence-only programs and the results have been dismal. In Kansas and Texas, for example — states where I'm sure

there was overwhelming pressure for good results, evaluators could find no changes in students' actual or intended behavior. In Texas, more students reported having had sex after taking an abstinence-only course than they did beforehand.

You could say this is just another government boondoggle — but for three things. First, the money being wasted on these programs is being taken away from HIV and sex education programs that have been proven to work. Second, there is a growing body of evidence that participants in the abstinence only programs are more likely to get pregnant by accident and more likely to engage in unsafe sex than others. And, third, at the core of this, our dollars are being used to promote a religiously-based dogma that is particularly harmful, isolating and denigrating to lesbian and gay youth: No sex until marriage and P.S. you can't get married.

Here's another example: Merck and GlaxoSmithKline are trying to get FDA approval for a vaccine for the human papilloma virus (HPV), the virus that causes cervical cancer. Ten thousand women in the U.S. (and 300,000 worldwide) get cervical cancer each year, and in the 4,000 here at home die from it. Cervical cancer is almost 100 percent preventable with this vaccine. Yet it is highly likely the FDA will not approve it because of pressure from our friends on the Christian right, who oppose the vaccine because it will, in their eyes, promote promiscuity.

Tony Perkins of the Traditional Values Coalition says, "Our concern is that this vaccine will be marketed to a segment of the population that should be getting a message about abstinence...It sends the wrong message." Perkins said he wouldn't inoculate his own daughter because this would make her more inclined to have sex out of wedlock.

Leslie Unruh, executive director of the National Abstinence Clearinghouse, said "I personally object to vaccinating children against a disease that is 100 percent preventable with proper sexual behavior."

This should give us some sense of how people would react if we ever got an HIV vaccine.

So, women will die because of the Christian's right's obsession with other people having sex and enjoying it and not getting sick or dying from it.

I could go on and on with these kinds of examples — but you know them, too.

So, how did we get to this sorry place? There's obviously the puritanical history of this country, the disproportionate influence of right-wing "Christians" on public discourse, and many other factors. I'm not going to talk about them today, but rather, I'd like to focus on the LGBT community's role in this, and we have definitely had one.

Part of it, I think, goes back to the very start of our modern movement when we — I think in many ways, brilliantly — insisted that we be called gay instead of homosexual — because we were and are complete human beings, not just sex acts, which is what the term homosexual immediately conjures up.

While the terms gay and lesbian have worked amazingly well in establishing us as a people and as a community, we still have a long way to go on this front because thanks in part to the echo-chambering, incessant, obsessive ranting on the right, I think the first

thing that still comes to most people's minds when they meet a gay or lesbian person is what they think we do in bed.

But there's even more to it than that — something I've never really been able to understand — and that is straight men's obsession with gay sex — whether it's watching and thinking and drooling about sex between two women or the utter fascination with anal sex between two men. There's probably something missing in my gay gene, but straight men think a lot more about anal sex than I do. If you ever needed any proof on that score, look at what came out of *Brokeback Mountain*, which is as we all know a profoundly moving and heart-wrenching story — a literal joke industry around gay sex — I think Jay Leno made over 13 jokes on his show alone. Tee hee.

Now back to how we got here. I think our movement shifted very early from a liberation lens to a rights one. At our founding, we were part of a larger social justice/sexual freedom/social change movement, but we quickly moved into one focusing on specific rights — such as the right to be free from discrimination on the job, to be protected from hate crimes, to be able to adopt, and so forth.

I am certainly not saying that we shouldn't have been fighting for those things now or then — because, indeed, anti-LGBT discrimination — from housing to jobs to marriage — remains a pervasive problem that causes untold misery for our brothers and sisters.

Instead, it feels to me that when we moved over to fighting for specific rights, we did three things. First, we essentially sanitized our lives and took the sex out of homosexual. We focused on things that — while very real — are largely sterile when put on paper and in legislative hearings.

Second, I think by taking on discrete rights — like nondiscrimination — we stopped advancing ourselves as complete human beings, the very concept behind the term “gay” and reduced our movement to seeking equal rights, not acceptance and complete equality simply because we are human.

This is so evident in today's fight for marriage equality, where so much of the discussion is about the specific rights that come with marriage that it sounds like we're talking about a better dental plan, rather than our loves and families being seen as truly equal.

And third, the focus on individual rights was a focus on *gay*-specific rights. Now, much of the community sees little connection between gay rights and the right to an abortion, immigrants' rights, or racial and economic justice. In other words, the rights path inadvertently isolated us from other communities and causes, much to our detriment today.

And of course, the plague of HIV/AIDS pressed this shift even more. Here, the very essence of gay liberation — sex and lots of it — was portrayed as killing us. Our opponents and many in our own community saw and still see sex as the culprit, not a virus.

So, we fell into line with the rest of society — not only did we stop celebrating sexual freedom we ran away from it.

It was as if people thought the only way to advance was to say, “Look, we’re just like you — the only difference is that we love someone of the same sex. But everything else is just the same.” I do not believe that for one minute.

And, there was clearly a move on the part of many to distance the movement from the so-called fringe — or, I would say the core of our movement — the leatherpeople, butch dykes and drag queens.

I’m sure many of you remember in 1993, when President Clinton met with representatives our community, Billy Hileman from Pittsburgh wore a leather vest — what an uproar it caused. And, that mentality hasn’t let up since.

In my job, I get to travel around the country and everywhere I hear people say we’d be so much further along in everything, including marriage, if we could hide away the “fringe” folks — you people. If only they went away, if only we didn’t have those images of leather harnesses in pride parades, everything would be good.

But what I say and believe is that it doesn’t matter how neatly you keep your lawn or your house, how much you emulate straight society, when push comes to shove our opponents don’t care whether you’re a good gay or a bad gay — they hate you because of who you have sex with, pure and simple. And they certainly don’t care if the sex you’re having is vanilla or kinky. It’s all the same to them.

And now, thanks to the skillful — yes, brilliant — manipulation by our opponents, we are in the marriage equality moment. We are putting forward as *the* face of our community two men or two women in a lifelong monogamous relationship raising children, the white picket fence and the rest. And you know what? I will fight to the end for those people in our community and to end discrimination against our families. And I will fight just as hard because this is nothing more than using us a wedge to foster division, fear and hatred for nothing more than political and cultural power. But this face is not the complete face of our community and to pretend that feels disingenuous and dishonest. In many ways, segments of our own community are playing the same false façade game as those we decry.

But there’s even more here — and that is within us. Just like so much of the rest of America, there is a huge disconnect between the reality of our sexual lives and what we pretend not only to co-workers or neighbors, but even to our good friends. Here again, it’s this false façade.

Let me offer one example, and I know some here will disagree with me. After San Francisco, I can’t think of another large city with a more politically influential gay community than Washington D.C. In D.C., a cluster of gay and sex establishments that have existed in Southeast — a drag club, a sex club, a strip club, a large dance club, and a bondage club — is being dispossessed to make room for a new sports stadium. No alternative location has been identified by the city, and they are likely gone forever.

These establishments have been very successful over the years and I could rattle off the names of other leaders in the LGBT movement who have frequented — and enjoyed — these places. I, sadly, have never been. In any event, there has been virtually no outcry from the organized gay community over this. I am convinced a large part of the reason is

that no one wants to be associated with these “kinds” of places. Clearly, this part of the gay closet remains tightly shut — I think for a majority.

So, what do I think we can and should do? Three things.

First, we need money to push a change in society around sex and to breakdown the façade, and all the ugly laws, policies and hypocrisy that comes with it. I can tell you from working in the LGBT movement, we simply do not have the resources to take this on. That means we need a new source of income, and I think that should come from the industry that profits from sex: the porn industry. We need them to start fueling this fight, not simply cobbling together money to pay lawyers when there’s something like a 2257 attack, but *real* money to organize and educate.

And we know the money is there — five years ago — before the Internet explosion, *Forbes* magazine, in an attempt to debunk the notion that porn was big business, found it was “only” a \$4 billion industry. Other estimates — which I think are more accurate — put the figure at \$20 billion, at least. Clearly, there’s money there, and we must demonstrate why it’s in the industry’s interest to fund the fight, and we should start with the gay porn industry.

Second, we — and I mean as individuals and organizations — must consistently and vigorously call out the hypocrisy of our opponents when it comes to all things sexual. A couple of months ago, when an anti-gay Southern Baptist minister was arrested in a gay cruising area for soliciting gay sex, we put out a statement calling attention to the incident. I heard from many people that we shouldn’t gloat or call attention to these situations. People say the same thing about prominent right-wing politicians getting caught with their pants down with their mistresses, or when prominent spokespeople for the “ex-gay” movement fall off the wagon, or when the man who’s helping promote the right of homeland security to eavesdrop on private conversations gets trapped soliciting a 14-year-old girl with lurid language on government computers.

I say we must highlight these things whenever they come to light. The more those most responsible for propping up the façade are exposed, the quicker it will fall.

And finally, and most importantly, we need to come out for sexual freedom in our daily lives and our daily interactions with people in our lives. This does not — as some people seem to fear — mean that we need to talk about the specific acts, scenes, you name it that we get into. Rather, it’s talking about our lives in a genuine and honest way, because if we can’t, if we don’t, believe me, no one else will.