



**Welcome from Matt Foreman,
Miami Recognition Dinner
November 4, 2006**

Honorees: NAACP Chairman Julian Bond, Bob Coles longtime activist and *TWN* publication

Thank you all for being here tonight and thank you Hope and Peter, your committee and our ambassadors for your tremendous leadership in making tonight such a success.

This year, we acknowledge and commemorate a terrible anniversary — 25 years ago this July, the Centers for Disease Control reported the first cases of a rare pneumonia and a skin cancer among gay men — the worldwide epidemic we now know as HIV and AIDS.

I would ask everyone to stand for a moment of silence in honor of those we have lost and all those still fighting the disease.

Thank you.

Each of you made a personal financial sacrifice to be here tonight and I want to tell you just a few of the things your generosity made possible since we were here last November.

The Task Force played an essential role in defeating a drive by the right wing to overturn Maine's new law protecting LGBT people from discrimination. Not only did we win last November, we won by 10 points.

We also took the lead in defeating efforts to overturn hard-won nondiscrimination laws by ballot initiatives in Washington state and Cincinnati — again by dispatching staff to take key campaign roles, sending money, organizing hundreds of volunteers and going door-to-door to thousands of households.

Our Policy Institute unmasked the lies and hypocrisy of the “ex-gay movement” here in Florida and across the country.

Just a few months ago the umbrella organization for the welcoming and affirming movement in eight Protestant denominations representing over 1 million pro-gay straight people of faith — the Institute for Welcoming Resources — became an official program of the Task Force.

And when Congress votes on a budget before the end of the year, because of the Task Force's work, that budget will contain more than \$1 million in new money for social service programs for our community.

And tonight, while we are gathered here, Task Force staff is on the ground in Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Californian and New Jersey working in campaigns to defend or preserve our rights.

You are making all of this possible and I thank you for that and urge you to take real pride in all you're making possible.

But beyond taking pride in all the accomplishments our community has made over the last three decades here in Miami-Dade and across the nation, and beyond the pride we can all take in celebrating the first decade of this amazing Recognition Dinner, I think we need another emotion too to carry us through Tuesday and beyond, and that is anger.

I want to talk about anger because, as our hero Coretta Scott King said, you cannot fight for justice unless you are angry about injustice.

I have the privilege of traveling all across this country and talking with LGBT people and virtually everywhere I go there is wrenching injustice: high rates of suicide, homelessness and violence and bullying among our young. Rampant discrimination in employment keeping closet doors slammed shut and the homophobia that is fueling the immoral rates of HIV infection among African-American gay and bisexual men. And the daily heartbreaking injustices our families face almost everywhere because they are denied legal recognition and protection.

All of this makes me heartsick and angry at the root causes of these scourges.

Angry that an entire industry has been built around demonizing, defaming and dehumanizing gay people.

Angry that we now live in a nation where lying about a blow job is an impeachable offense, but lying that leads to the literal blowing up of thousands of human bodies is not.

Angry that homophobia is once again polluting the political discourse in this election — at this very moment in time — in both subtle and crass ways.

Over the last few days, for example, the president of the United States has been out campaigning trying to whip up voters about the “sanctity of marriage” at the very same time one of his best buds and the principal advisor in Karl Rove’s years-long campaign against marriage equality, the married father of five and the most outspoken proponent of the proposed marriage ban in Colorado — the Rev. Ted Haggard — has admitted to buying meth and a “massage” from a male prostitute. Just a “message” nothing more. Please. Rank hypocrisy. You just can’t make this stuff up.

Tonight, as we are here, there are TV ads running in congressional districts across the country; voters are being threatened with the specter of a “San Francisco liberal” becoming speaker of the House. Not just a liberal, but a San Francisco liberal and we all know what that means.

Let’s see, you choose — a San Francisco liberal or a speaker who ignores repeated complaints of sexually inappropriate behavior by a congressman of his own party with congressional pages, and then — with no sense of irony — engages in a carefully orchestrated campaign to blame gay people for the problem. Whether you’re a Democrat or a Republican, is this a hard choice? Not for me.

While I’m on this, let me just say one thing to Mark Foley — Mark, whenever you re-emerge from wherever you are, please don’t come crawling to us looking for acceptance — there’s no toaster waiting for you here, that I promise. And according to a story in the *Herald* this morning, it seems like there’s other closet problems right here in Florida. Is it the water?

And finally, tonight, as we are here, your brothers and sisters in eight states are being barraged with ugly rhetoric and fear-mongering about marriage equality for gay people.

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I ask each of you who is from or has friends or family in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia or Wisconsin to phone home and ask you those you know to be sure to vote against these ugly amendments on Tuesday. And, there's one thing I can promise you, we are going to do a lot better than anyone expects.

I don't know about you, but I feel like the political pendulum is about ready to start shifting back towards freedom, justice and equality. Given how much ground we lost over the years, it's going to take a while.

But there are two things I know for sure: First, thanks to your support, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force will be there for the long haul and the hard fights, just like it's been for the last 34 years.

And second, because of the commitment, anger and pride of the people here tonight, winning is not only possible, it is inevitable.

Thank you.