

Following are National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman's remarks presented on August 23, 2003 at the 40th Anniversary of the Civil Rights March on Washington and Dr. Martin Luther King's historic "I Have a Dream" speech.

"On behalf of an incredibly diverse gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community, I thank you for inviting us to be here today and – in the words of Dr. King – to walk with you on the road to jobs, peace and freedom. It is an extraordinary privilege and honor to stand here.

I'd like to start by lifting up, along with Dr. King, the life and memory of Bayard Rustin – an unsung hero, a dear friend of Dr. King, the prime architect of the 1963 march, and a gay African American man.

We also thank and honor Coretta Scott King, who, for years, has spoken out loudly for equal rights for gay people.

And, we lift up with gratitude the members of the Congressional Black Caucus, who have – time and again – voted against legislation seeking to harm our people.

Let's put something on the table right now: there are differences between parts of the beloved community. That's because we are people of conviction. But what we agree on far outweighs our differences.

We all agree that all discrimination is wrong, that everyone deserves full equality under the law.

We agree that hate violence still stains America. I note with sadness that just one week ago, right here in our nation's capital, Bella Evangelista, a transgender woman, was murdered simply because of who she was.

We agree that centuries of legal racial oppression can only be overcome through forceful and affirmative action.

I could go on, but the proof of our solidarity is in what our communities do when they vote. Time and again, exit polls show the Democratic party's most loyal supporters are African Americans and gay, lesbian, and bisexual people.

There is another thing we all agree on: the hard-won progress achieved over the last 40 years in civil rights and economic justice is in mortal danger.

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But, let's be clear: this administration is in power and the majority in congress is in power and the right wing is in ascendancy NOT because most Americans want what they are inflicting on the nation. No survey anywhere shows that.

No, this minority is in power because they know how to set aside their differences, they turn out to vote, and they repeatedly and successfully drive wedges into the heart of America and into our beloved community.

Over and again, we've witnessed their vicious dehumanizing and demonizing tactics, shamelessly exploiting race, immigrants, choice and poor women – to name only a few. Through this, they convince us and other Americans that we are the enemy. They fracture us. They win.

And mark my words, they are already geared up to make gay people and our relationships the Willie Hortons of the 2004 election cycle. This time, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people will be their chosen prey to distract the nation from the mess they've created at home and abroad.

To all of this evil, let's collectively say, enough!

Dr. King spoke of the “fierce urgency of now” and said that “we are all tied together in a single garment of destiny...an inescapable network of mutuality.” Urgently, then, let us put on the garment we in fact do share, keep it on, and walk together proudly to defeat our common enemies.”

