

## ‘Reclaiming Moral Values: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Agenda for 2006’

A keynote address by National Gay and Lesbian Task Force  
Executive Director Matt Foreman

Friday, November 11, 2005

18<sup>th</sup> Annual Creating Change Conference  
Oakland Marriott City Center, 1001 Broadway, Oakland, Calif.



I travel a lot for my job. A lot. I really used to worry if it was going to destroy my relationship. For some reason, though, my boyfriend, Francisco DeLeon, doesn't seem to mind in the least. In fact, I've never seen him happier. Strange, isn't it? Anyhow, he's here with us and as I'm going to be working the whole time, I'm hoping that as many of you as possible will reach out and give him the kind of companionship Creating Change is so famous for. Frank can you stand up so folks can see who you are?

Last night, I talked about some of the victories our community has won over the last year — and there were many — large and small, from coast to coast.

But I didn't talk about our losses, like the one in Texas on Tuesday where voters passed an anti-marriage/anti-any-form-of-relationship-whatsoever constitutional amendment by a margin of 76 percent to 24 percent — and I want to recognize some of the brave folks here from Texas who did their best to stand up to the juggernaut of fear-mongering and slander unleashed by our opponents. In talking last night about our great win in Maine, I didn't talk about the ugly tactics of the other side.

This is one of the things that I've never really understood about our movement's tactics and that is we're supposed to essentially ignore their lies, their distortions, the vile things they say about us. We're supposed to respond to their attacks to the gut with rationality and reasonableness.

Well, not today.

[www.TheTaskForce.org](http://www.TheTaskForce.org)

**Washington, DC**

1325 Massachusetts Ave., NW  
Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20005-4171  
Tel 202.393.5177  
Fax 202.393.2241

**New York, NY**

90 William Street  
Suite 1201  
New York, NY 10038-5047  
Tel 212.604.9830  
Fax 212.604.9831

**Los Angeles, CA**

5455 Wilshire Boulevard  
Suite 1505  
Los Angeles, CA 90036-4204  
Tel 323.954.9597  
Fax 323.954.9454

**Cambridge, MA**

1151 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02138-5201  
Tel 617.492.6393  
Fax 617.492.0175

**Miami, FL**

3510 Biscayne Boulevard  
Suite 206  
Miami, FL 33137-3823  
Tel 305.571.1924  
Fax 305.571.7298

You're on the front lines and you hear them, you see them, you feel their poison seeping into the public discourse and into young and old minds alike.

We see the hierarchy of the Catholic Church continuing to scapegoat gay people for the decades of appalling sex abuse of children and young people that it alone created, nurtured and covered up.

There's Lou Sheldon, who makes his living spreading outright falsehoods about us and our so-called agenda.

There are hundreds more of these extremist "leaders" railing against us day in and day out on radio and television, from pulpits and legislative chambers.

It would, in fact, make sense to ignore them if they were confined to the extremist fringe where they belong. But the sad and appalling reality is that the mainstream media largely give them a free ride and legitimacy.

The sad and appalling reality is that they wield enormous influence over public policy, with Karl Rove in the White House vetting through them everything from HIV prevention policies to the nomination of Supreme Court justices.

The sad and appalling reality is that the president caters to them, and prays with them. They together have the gall to wrap all of this in "moral values."

And we can't pretend like their tactics and this unholy alliance is not working. Let's look at what's happened in just the last 7 years around marriage equality. In 1998, no state constitution specifically prohibited same-sex marriage. But look at 2000, then 2002, then last year 2004, and three days ago, and look what's likely to be on the ballot in 2006.

I don't know about you, but it makes me sick, it makes me mad, real mad.

And, being a gay man of a certain age, I feel like channeling Joan Crawford, picking up something and going at them screaming "No more homophobia! No more homophobia."

But, fortunately, we are not a violent people.

But what can we do? What should we do?

I say it's time to stop running away from the moral values issue, and instead seize it and go on the offensive.

First, let's start proclaiming our moral values — personal liberty and equality for all — not only for those who are white, or rich, or who subscribe to a particular kind of Christian dogma.

We believe that liberty and freedom are more than words, but mean that neither the state nor any church has any right to control our bodies, or restrict our reproductive or sexual freedom.

Because we believe all people are truly equal, and believe in racial and economic justice, we reject a system that blithely and utterly abandons people of color and poor people, as so vividly laid bare by Katrina.

Because we actually value human life, we oppose capital punishment, we deplore, we are sickened and we are outraged by the carnage in Iraq.

And, while we proclaim our moral values, we must never shy away from calling out and speaking the truth about the utter and appalling and disgusting *immorality* of the ongoing and escalating attacks against us, our families, and our very beings.

We must say over and over and over again, simply, directly, and unambiguously that anti-gay, anti-lesbian, anti-bisexual and anti-transgender discrimination in all its forms is *immoral*.

As the cascade of lies pours forth from the Anti-Gay Industry over the coming year, morality demands that non-gay people speak out with the same vehemence as they would if it was another minority under attack. We must be direct: Silently bearing witness to this discrimination is as wrong as discrimination itself.

Second, and within this context, we need to stop seeing and talking about this wave of anti-marriage, anti-any-form-of-relationship-whatsoever constitutional amendments as political contests that we ought to be winning if only we did something better.

When you boil it all down, these amendments are about inviting the public to vote on whether they deem us as good as they are, whether our love and our families are worthy of respect — put simply — whether or not we are fully human. This — putting the rights of a minority up for a popular vote — is always wrong. This is not democracy. This is the tyranny of the majority and it's immoral.

Third, recognizing that so much of the bigotry we face is framed around so-called “deeply held religious beliefs,” we are not going to make many inroads unless we advance as a united secular and religious community.

Since the start, our political movement has distanced itself from, frequently denigrated, and quite consistently undervalued people of faith and faith communities. We all know the reasons for this — that so many of us have been profoundly wounded by the religions in which we were raised and our knowledge that the religion has been and remains the foundation of so much homophobia and heterosexism.

Hindsight is 20/20, but it should be abundantly clear to any thinking person that our movement's historic cold shoulder to faith and people of faith was not only a political and strategic mistake, but it was intrinsically wrong in that we have judged and excluded vast swaths of our own people — the very antithesis of the non-judgmental and inclusive values we publicly espouse.

To our demise, we, on the secular side of our movement have been largely oblivious to the extraordinary work going on within faiths and denominations around LGBT equality. Where do you see the straight people fighting the hardest for us? In churches. The Episcopal Church, for example, is prepared to be thrown out of the worldwide Anglican communion and to break apart because of its stand for us. Similar hand-to-hand, congregation-to-congregation combat is going in the Presbyterian and Methodist and other denominations. Not only have we frequently failed to recognize and support all of this heroism, we have not taken advantage of amazing organizing skills of those involved in these struggles or brought to bear the political muscle of the millions of who have come to support us through them.

All of this has to change — because it's plain dumb and, more importantly, it's wrong. We must start with a candid admission by the secular part of our movement, that the course we've pursued in the past caused pain to many, and we will do better.

Now, more than ever, we need LGBT people of faith and their allies to speak to other religious people — mothers and fathers, ministers, imams and rabbis, friends and co-workers, from a personal conviction, morality-based perspective about equality, and demanding — not pleading — for help.

Now, more than ever, we need people of faith — and they are the only ones who can do this — to call upon the religious right to repent, repent from its homophobia.

Fourth, we must — from a morals-based place — demand that candidates and elected officials who take our money and get our votes — and here, I'm largely talking about Democrats — stop running and ducking on gay issues. Enough already. Most of the positions and responses in the last election cycle were spineless and incoherent. Starting now, we need to demand that they stop being on the defensive and go on the offensive about the moral imperative of protecting our people from discrimination and our young people from being harassed and bullied in schools.

Not only is this the right thing to do, which it is, but it's in their political self-interest. Public support for protecting LGBT people from discrimination is off the charts; 77 percent of Christian evangelicals support protections for gay kids in schools. There's virtually nothing in America — not even apple pie — that polls higher than these two issues. If Democrats seize these issues, they will win with them. If they do not, then we will know once and for all what's really behind these years of inaction.

Finally, as we move forward, and the marriage fights swirl around us, and as we press on for basic nondiscrimination protections and to end harassment and bullying against our young people, there is going to continue to be enormous pressure to cut corners, to not be honest about our lives, to leave parts of our community behind. Let's always remember that building our community over the long term is far more important than any quick wins. Let's remember that our moral values demand that we always speak honestly about our lives, without disingenuous whitewashing and sanitizing to make us more acceptable to the "mainstream." Let's remember that our moral values demand that everyone is included and no one no one gets left behind — not people of color, not trans people, not bi people, not Native people, not leather people — not anyone. Together folks, we are going to build, win, and build some more.

Thank you.