

The Fearsome Gay Agenda, Or, The Floor vs. The Ceiling

What a difference an election makes! From coast to coast, in gubernatorial races, Senate races, House races and state races, pro-LGBT candidates defeated those aligned with the forces of political and religious intolerance.

Our community waged smart and courageous campaigns against the eight state anti-marriage, anti-family constitutional amendments with extraordinary results. Overall, support for us went up from 33 percent in 2004 to nearly 40 percent. That is a sea change in public support in just two years.

And, the ultimate twist: The presence of the marriage amendment on the ballot in Virginia and the great get-out-the-vote work on our side by the Commonwealth Coalition are being credited with defeating Sen. George Allen and handing control of the Senate to the Democrats!

With all of this we can feel new — and unaccustomed — hope and optimism. In that spirit, I think it's an appropriate time to put out an agenda for moving forward.

“So, let’s remember this moment of hope and optimism as the time that, with incredible pride in all we’ve accomplished so far, our movement lifted its head up and re-embraced an agenda where equality is the floor and a transformed America is the ceiling.”

For the first time, one state — Arizona — defeated a marriage amendment thanks to the leadership of Arizona Together, managed by Steve May and Kyrsten Sinema, and No on 107, chaired by Cindy Jordan.

Voters in many congressional districts were threatened with the specter of Denny Hastert being replaced not just by a liberal, but a *San Francisco* liberal (gasp!). They didn't care.

Before getting into that agenda, I need to make two points. First, I don't expect everyone to agree with its breadth and that's just fine. There is a place for everyone in our movement and that certainly includes people who consider themselves conservative on fiscal matters, people who feel they don't want to rock the boat but will write a check, and people who are worried that pushing too hard or too fast will set us back. But successful social justice movements



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are propelled by people who are willing to push the envelope and to embrace a bold vision that encompasses more immediate objectives. That has been the role of the Task Force for the last 33 years and we're proud of it.

Second, we should recognize that — as we've had to fight so hard for every victory, as we've had to spend much of our energy and scarce resources fighting defensively just to survive — our vision has been narrowed to focus on achieving specific statutory *rights*. Don't get me wrong, equality under state and federal law is essential and fundamental. However, I believe our agenda must, as Carmen Vazquez and others have said, view equality under the law as the floor, not the ceiling.

So here's a framework for a fearsome "gay agenda."

The floor of our agenda is, of course, that every lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender person is protected from discrimination — no matter where they live or work. But our vision is a country where, in addition to being protected from discrimination, hard work yields a living wage, health insurance and other vital protections.

The floor is that all of us can serve our country openly in the military. But our vision is a country where none of the lives and limbs of our soldiers — whatever their orientation or identity — are wasted as fodder to advance empire and economic interests.

The floor is a country where a woman's control over her own body is inviolate and people's sexual lives are their own business. But our vision is a country where sexual freedom is seen for what it is: a fundamental human right.

The floor is that LGBT and questioning kids are protected from bullying, harassment and violence in our schools. But our vision is a country where race and class no longer dictate the quality of a kid's education, gay or straight.

The floor is the demise of America's anti-gay industry and putting an end once and for all to its use of us and our families for cynical culture wars and political gain. But our vision is also to put an end once and for all to the scapegoating of any group of people, and that certainly includes people of color and immigrants.

And finally, the floor of our agenda is, of course and unequivocally, fighting for and winning the freedom to marry, with, as Evan Wolfson has said, all its protections, responsibilities and human significance. But our vision is also a country that honors and respects the reality and the diversity of *all* American families and one where a person's health care, support in one's old age, and access to other vital benefits and entitlements are not dependent on a person's marital status.

This, folks, is a big agenda. It requires us embracing and working with and for "other" causes as never before. We think that's imperative not only because it's the right thing to do, but because we will reach the floor of our agenda much more quickly with the help of others than if we keep trying it on our own.

So, let's remember this moment of hope and optimism as the time that, with incredible pride in all we've accomplished so far, our movement lifted its head up and re-embraced an agenda where equality is the floor and a transformed America is the ceiling. ▼