



**Speech given by Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman
at the 2008 New York Leadership Awards, April 7, New York City**

I feel so incredibly lucky, and so incredibly blessed to have had the privilege of being here in New York for the last 30-plus years, of working with so many extraordinary people over those years, and of being able to not only work in our movement, but to get paid to do that work.

This kind of thanking of me for my work seems wrong and awkward on so many levels. The reality is that I've been the front guy — or the front queen — so I get credit for what others — our board members, our staff, our volunteers — have made possible. And then there are the people in this room who've reached into their pockets, year after year and I know many of you have done so at great personal sacrifice, to fuel our work. There are people here from Heritage of Pride, the Anti-Violence Project, the Pride Agenda and now the Task Force, who have been coming through time and again for me for more than 20 years. It is I who feels so much gratitude for you. Thank you.

There are so many people I would like to single out, but that would take all night and we have dinner waiting, so I'll do just one — the amazing man who's put up with me for the last 18 years: Francisco De Leon.

I want to touch on just four of our accomplishments over the last year that you made possible with your support, and then give you a few examples of why I will always be so proud to have worked here.

First, we played an essential role in preserving marriage equality in Massachusetts. In the final weeks leading up to the June constitutional convention, our side needed nine more votes to prevail. Once again, our state-based allies asked us to take on the hardest cases in the western part of the state, legislators who had repeatedly voted against us. Once again, we dispatched our organizers — the best, hands down, in the movement. And once again our staff — your staff — delivered: When the vote was taken on June 14, the Task Force was responsible for delivering three of the nine votes that put us over the top.

Second, last winter our Policy Institute released a groundbreaking report on the national epidemic of homelessness among LGBT youth. As of today, that report has received more than 700 million media impressions, but more importantly, our lobbying staff, using the report, played an essential role in increasing federal appropriations for runaway and homeless youth by \$10.5 million, the first increase in six years.

Third, over the last year, our staff has led the field campaign gearing up to defeat an anti-marriage constitutional amendment that could be on the November ballot in California.

Right now, we have nine staff on the ground leading a last-ditch campaign to try to keep the other side from getting enough signatures to qualify for the ballot. That campaign involves recruiting and supervising literally thousands of volunteers going toe to toe

against the bigots in shopping centers, Wal-Marts and wherever they appear. They've been pushed, shoved and punched and they keep on going day after day. If the measure doesn't make it to the ballot, the Task Force will have been the key; if it does, you can count on us to keep on fighting for victory in November.

And finally, last fall we led an unprecedented coalition of more than 350 organizations — United ENDA — working to pass a federal employment nondiscrimination bill that will protect all of us.

Through the United ENDA campaign, our grassroots movement flexed its muscle and the Hill took note. We were told repeatedly by House members that they had never, ever heard from our community in such numbers and with such passion. We were relentless and, as a result, House leadership had to defer taking action on the broken ENDA not once, not twice, not three times, but on four separate occasions.

Here in New York, thanks to the work of the Pride Agenda, we should all take great pride that five of the seven members of Congress who voted against the broken ENDA because it did not include all of us were from New York — Yvette Clarke, Jerry Nadler, Edolphus Towns, Nydia Velazquez and Anthony Weiner.

Out of the pain and turmoil of the ENDA fight, the powers that be on the Hill now understand that no one organization and no one person speaks for our community. In other words, the power dynamics of our movement have shifted profoundly, and that's not just a good thing. It's a great thing and the Task Force made it happen.

Since the fall, we've taken the lead in developing a comprehensive, district-by-district plan to make sure that when Congress comes back after the November election, the only ENDA that will be on the table is the right ENDA.

I really could be here all night talking about Task Force accomplishments over the last year but instead I'd like to wrap up by reflecting on things I will always remember about being at the Task Force and the values it will always represent to me.

I will always remember the honor of speaking in front of the Lincoln Memorial on the 40th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream speech." Why was I invited to be there? Because the Task Force is the only national LGBT rights organization that has always held racial justice as a core value.

I will always remember being in Topeka, Kansas, campaigning to defeat a Fred Phelps-inspired initiative to overturn the city's gay rights law. I saw the courage and tenacity of local activists which our staff trained and deployed. That is precisely what the Task Force is about — not black-tie dinners or glitz or glamour — but building the power of our community from the ground up. And, by the way, we won.

I will always treasure working at an LGBT organization that had the courage to take a stand against the war in Iraq — when no one else would. An organization that had the capacity to lead the community in opposing a deal to support the privatization of Social Security in exchange for some benefits for our couples, and an LGBT organization that has never once flinched from the position that a woman's right to choose is, in fact, a gay issue.

I am so proud to have worked at an organization that truly embraces the diversity of our community — everything from hard-left activists at the National Conference for LGBT Equality: Creating Change, to the thousands of dancing men at the Winter Party Festival Beach Party, to the thousands of pro-LGBT people of faith who are part of our Institute for Welcoming Resources program.

But most of all, I will be forever grateful to have worked at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force because it has never stopped pushing the envelope, denouncing the shameless tactics of our opponents, and insisting that our so-called friends and allies in office do more. I thank you — so much — for making that possible.

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