



**“State of the Movement” Speech Given by Matt Foreman, Executive Director
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
Creating Change Conference, Kansas City, Mo., November 10, 2006**

Thank you. I can't tell you how privileged and humbled I am to be here speaking to you again — you are the heart, the soul, the brains, the brawn, and the past, present and future of our movement.

Today, I'm going to talk about the state of our movement 37 years after Stonewall — our accomplishments, our challenges and our agenda — yes, the fearsome “gay agenda” for the coming year and years ahead.

But first — what a difference an election makes! From coast to coast, in governors' races, in Senate races, in House races and in state races, pro-LGBT candidates defeated those aligned with the forces of political and religious intolerance. In fact, not a single pro-LGBT elected official lost to an opponent of equality, while plenty on the other side did.

One great example was that charmer from Pennsylvania [Rick Santorum] who told America that marriage equality for our people would lead to marriage between people and dogs.

On Tuesday, the anti-reproductive rights ballot initiatives in California, Oregon and South Dakota were all defeated. And, in another hopeful sign, Minnesota voters elected Keith Ellison as the first Muslim to serve in the U.S. Congress, and in Hawaii Kim Coco Iwamoto became the highest-ranking transgender elected official in the nation.

On Tuesday, for the first time, voters elected governors who were not only pro-LGBT in the usual sense, but unequivocally and unapologetically pro-marriage.

And closer to our home and hearts and friends, our community and our allies waged smart, tough and courageous campaigns against the eight state anti-marriage, anti-family constitutional amendments with extraordinary results.

As you will remember, in 2004 there were 11 of these immoral attacks on the ballot and in only two of them were we able to persuade more than 40 percent of the voters to oppose them. On Tuesday, there were eight on the ballot and our side got more than 40 percent in five of them. Overall, support for us went up from 33 percent in 2004 to nearly 40 percent on Tuesday — that, folks, is a sea change in public support in just two years.

We have with us today many exhausted heroes of those eight campaigns as well as the extraordinary campaign to pass statewide domestic partner rights in Colorado and the local ballot initiative campaigns in Ferndale and Corvallis, and I'm asking everyone who helped with these campaigns to please stand as I call them out, and remain standing.

First, everyone who helped with the two campaigns in Colorado — Coloradans for Fairness, managed by Sean Duffy, and Say No to 43, managed by Lisa Moreno, please stand. All you Coloradans please stand. All of you who helped in the Corvallis, Oregon, campaign, managed by Clinton Downs, please stand up.

And Ferndale, Michigan, managed by Derek Smiertka; all of you who helped in Idaho, managed by Andrew Yoder; how about South Carolina, managed by Asha Leong; and South Dakota, managed by Jon Hoadley; and Tennessee, managed by Randy Tarkington; and Virginia, managed by Claire Guthrie Gastanaga; and Wisconsin, managed by Mike Tate.

Thank you, thank you.

And finally, for the first time, one state — Arizona — defeated an amendment, and anyone here from Arizona, please stand up — we thank you and salute Arizona Together, managed by Steve May and Kyrsten Sinema, and No on 107's chair Cindy Jordan.

To top it off, yesterday, thanks to the incredible work of thousands of people led by MassEquality and Marc Solomon as well as Marty Rouse and Josh Friedes, who led the charge for the past three years, the Massachusetts Legislature killed, killed, killed a proposed constitutional amendment to end marriage in the Bay State.

And, the ultimate twist: The presence of the marriage amendment on the ballot in Virginia and the great get-out-the-vote work of Claire Gastanaga and the Commonwealth Coalition is now being credited with the defeat of Sen. George Allen and handing control of the Senate to the Democrats!

So, with all of this we can feel new hope and optimism, so, so different than so many years in the past.

But it's important for us all to remember that our community has never stopped, regardless of who's been in office, regardless of the results of any election.

So today, let's also take pride in our extraordinary accomplishments over the last 37 years:

In 1970, not a single law protected lesbian, gay and bisexual people from discrimination. Today, 18 states — representing 40 percent of the U.S. population — protect LGB people from discrimination, including Washington state, which was added to the roster this year.

And these figures do *not* include the many municipalities in other states that have passed nondiscrimination laws... places like Kansas City and Indianapolis and Covington, Kentucky. And when you include these local jurisdictions, 49.9 percent of the population lives in a place where anti-LGB discrimination is prohibited.

In 1990, not a single state law protected transgender people from discrimination. Today, nine states — covering 22 percent of the U.S. population — protect trans people. And this too does not include the avalanche in protections extended by municipalities in recent years ... from New York City to El Paso, to just a couple months ago, after many long years, Cincinnati. Yes, we have a long way to go, but we're catching up rapidly.

In 1970, not a single hate crimes law included crimes motivated by anti-gay hate. Today, 33 states — covering 76 percent of our population — include LGB people in their hate crimes statutes.

It wasn't until the early 1990s that a state passed a hate crimes law that specifically covered crimes motivated by hatred of transgender people. Today, 10 states — representing 26 percent of the population — have such laws. It's not where we should be, but it is progress.

Thirteen years ago, when "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was inflicted upon us, the vote in the House of Representatives was 273 to 135. Today, thanks to the hard work of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network and many others, a bill to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" now has 123 co-sponsors and two-thirds of the population thinks that this wrong-headed law should be overturned.

In the area of partner recognition, look at how much progress we've made in just six years. In 2000, Vermont became the first state to establish civil unions.

In 2001, California expanded domestic partner rights.

In 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to extend the freedom to marry.

And also in 2004, Connecticut enacted civil unions.

In 2005, California created civil unions in everything but name.

And, with the court ruling three weeks ago, New Jersey will — in a matter of weeks or months — have civil unions or marriage.

Amazing.

And how did all of this, and so much more, happen? I can assure you it wasn't legislators waking up one day and saying, "Geez, let's do something good for the gays."

I, and all of you, know it also didn't happen because of big-money, glitzy campaigns. Instead, it happened because of the people here today and those who have come before us who know there's no way around the hard work of pushing, prodding, donating, envelope-licking, meeting and door-knocking day after day, year after year.

And what makes all of this so much more remarkable, astonishing and amazing is that this has been accomplished in spite of hundreds of years of prejudice injected into every fiber of society's DNA...with meager resources, against huge odds and mighty and unrelenting opponents, and while we've been afflicted with a plague that killed a generation of our men.

Let me sum up, we have accomplished more in a shorter period of time than any other social justice movement in the history of the world, and our momentum has been accelerating over the last six years in spite of the fact that so much of our government has been under the hard thumb of reactionary forces.

And now, as Bette Davis would say, fasten your seatbelts.

You want to know the state of our movement on November 10, 2006? We are strong, unbowed, unbeaten, vibrant, energized and ready to kick some butt.

We know that as far as we've come, we still have a very, very long way to go.

We know there continue to be wrenching injustices inflicted on our people: high rates of suicide, homelessness, violence, and bullying against our young. Rampant discrimination in employment that terrifies people from coming out. Homophobia in parts of the African-American community and racism in parts of the LGBT community that, together, are fueling the immoral rates of HIV infection among African-American gay and bisexual men.

And the daily, heartbreaking injustices that our families face almost everywhere because they are denied legal recognition and protection.

And, if anyone thinks homophobia is receding as a staple of American and political life, you only need look at how the last few weeks of the campaign played out.

First, look at the profound, appalling and disgusting homophobia in reaction to the Foley mess.

The leadership of the Republican party, rather than accept responsibility, reverted to form and

went into “blame the gays” mode, including dispatching their henchmen, like Tony Perkins and Pat Buchanan, to offer the blood libel that gay men are prone to pedophilia. And that was just the start.

But here's the consequence for each one of us when this happens: Our sister organization, the Human Rights Campaign, conducted a national poll 10 days after the Foley mess started, and nearly one-quarter of the respondents had a less favorable opinion of gay people as a result of it.

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 pop up looking to us for acceptance and support, or a toaster — there's no toaster waiting for you here.

And then we witnessed the president of the United States out campaigning, trying to whip up voters about the “sanctity of marriage” at the very same time as one of his best buds ... and the principal advisor in Karl Rove's years-long campaign against marriage equality ... the married father of five ... the head of the National Association of Evangelicals ... and the most outspoken proponent of the marriage ban in Colorado — the Rev. Ted Haggard — was admitting he bought meth and a “massage” from a male prostitute.

Please. Rank hypocrisy. You just can't make this stuff up. But even here, look how they tried to turn this around to bash us.

In the letter that was read to his church on Sunday — which I'm sure was written by James Dobson — Haggard said, clearly referring to his same-sex desires, “There's a part of my life that is so repulsive and dark that I have been warring against it for all of my adult life.” I think most of us realize that for evangelicals the word dark means evil.

Rev. Haggard, let me tell you a couple of things. What's been so repulsive and dark in your life is the way you lied to your wife and family, the way you used the Bible to bash LGBT people, the way you warped and damaged young people in your “Jesus Camps,” and the way you shamelessly mixed religion and politics for personal and partisan gain. That, dear reverend, is what is repulsive and yes, evil.

And the last example were the ads in congressional districts in which voters were threatened with the specter of Denny Hastert being replaced by that “San Francisco liberal” Nancy Pelosi as speaker of the House. Not just a liberal, but a *San Francisco* liberal, and we all know what that means. Well, this is how that all turned out: For the first time in our history, a woman, that San Francisco liberal, is third in line for the presidency.

Goddess willing, we've seen the end of a time in our country when lying about a blow job has been an impeachable offense, but lying that has led to the literal blowing up of thousands of

human bodies is not.

And now, to the future. As I said earlier, we still have a very, very long way to go. Our opponents may be down, but they're not beaten, not by a long shot — and you can rest assured they will come back as rabid and as ravenous as ever.

Even now, in these hopeful days, we cannot forget our anger at the harm these forces have and are inflicting on our people.

Instead, we are going to need that anger as we fight on because, as our hero Coretta Scott King said, you cannot fight for justice unless you are angry about injustice.

So here in these hopeful days, I want to offer a vision for moving ahead, our transgender, bisexual, lesbian and yes, gay agenda.

Let me preface it by saying I don't expect everyone to agree with this agenda and that's just fine. There is a place for everyone in our movement.

There's a place for 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. There's a place and a need for those who can work the levers of power on Capitol Hill *and* in state capitol buildings.

But successful movements for social change and justice are led by people who *are* willing to *push* the envelope, to *embrace* a bold vision, to *do* the street fighting, to *demand* it all, without compromise, and then demand more. We are those people, or we wouldn't be here in Kansas City today.

The first thing we need to do with this change in the political climate is lift up our heads and see and think bigger and better. Let's recognize that over time, as we've had to fight so hard for every victory, small and large, as we've had to spend much of our energy and scarce resources fighting defensively just to survive — that our vision has been narrowed in almost every way to focus on achieving specific statutory rights.

Don't get me wrong, equality under state and federal law is critical, essential and fundamental. It is something that we can never stop yearning for or fighting for. And, as I said earlier, we still have a long way to go toward winning equal rights for all of us.

But I'm concerned that because we have been so hungry for so long — especially when it comes to federal legislation — there will be enormous pressure to settle for too little, and then be put off for more and more years because they've "taken care of us."

And speaking of federal legislation, I'm going to make a statement and I want everyone here who agrees with it to stand up or raise your hand.

Here's the statement and its two sentences: To our transgender brothers and sisters, we will not allow a federal nondiscrimination or hate crimes bill to move forward that does not include you. You are us and we will not walk down the path to equality without you at our side.

Thank you, please be seated.

Next, as we lift our heads up to see and think bigger, we have to be sure that our agenda, our vision, is more than editing the existing dry pages of law books and personnel manuals. More than surviving in the way things are, but thriving in a new world.

The agenda and vision that we must proudly articulate is that yes, indeed, we intend to change society.

Our agenda and vision must proclaim, as Carmen Vazquez and others have said: equality under the law is the floor, not the ceiling.

So, here's that agenda: The floor of our agenda is, of course, that every gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender person is protected from discrimination — no matter where they live or work. But our *vision* insists that companies like Wal-Mart — that yes, prohibit discrimination — cannot be allowed to make billions of dollars every year while leaving one out of every six of their employees with no health insurance at all.

The floor of our agenda is, of course, a country where a woman's right to choose 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 of our agenda is, of course, 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 of our agenda is, of course, that queer 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 of our agenda is, of course, the demise of America's anti-gay industry and putting an end once and for all to their 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 for political gain, and that certainly includes people of color and immigrants.

And finally, the floor of our agenda is, of course, unequivocally fighting for and winning the freedom to marry — with, as Evan Wolfson says, all of its rights, responsibilities and social significance.

But our vision is also a country where a person's health care, support in one's old age, or access to other vital benefits and entitlements are not dependent on a person's marital status.

Our vision is a country that not only honors and respects the amazing and wonderful diversity of the families we have built against tremendous odds, but a country that honors and respects the reality and the diversity of *all* American families.

This, folks, is a big agenda. It requires us reaching out and working with and for "other" causes as never before. This is not only the right thing to do, it is critical we do it. It will make achieving the floor of our agenda *and* the vision of our movement possible.

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

Thank you.