



Our Long National Nightmare Is Ending

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A paraphrase of President Gerald R. Ford from his first day in office on August 9, 1974 somehow seems very appropriate right now, even if Tuesday's election did not offer the satisfying finality of Richard Nixon's helicopter ride away from the White House on that perfect summer day.

The radical Republican regime in the U.S. House, stage-managed for much of the past six years by criminal defendant Tom DeLay, is history. The Senate-which wasted endless hours on a hateful federal marriage amendment that went nowhere and provided refuge for Bill Frist, so he could video-diagnose the dying Terri Schiavo, and for Rick Santorum from which he could hurl hideous slander at the LGBT community-also seems headed for Democratic leadership.

Gay advocates have finally beat back a state constitutional amendment barring marriage equality-in Arizona-and even among other losses on that question Tuesday, the pro-gay showing generally improved compared to the wave of ballot initiatives two years ago.

And, for the first time ever, pro-marriage equality candidates for governor have been elected-in both New York, with Democrat Eliot Spitzer, and in Massachusetts, with Democrat Deval Patrick.

Leaders of the nation's two leading LGBT political organizations-Joe Solmonese at the Human Rights Campaign and **Matt Foreman at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** -are both saying they are counting on Democratic leaders, San Francisco's Nancy Pelosi in the House, and Nevada's Harry Reid in the Senate, to make good on long-standing promises to advance goals deferred for the past 12 years, since the GOP seized Capitol Hill in Newt Gingrich's angry white guy putsch in 1994.

With power comes responsibility. The Democrats were talking sensibly today-about raising the minimum wage, delivering true prescription drug coverage to seniors and improved health care opportunities for everyone, curbing the corrosive influence of corporate lobbyists, and bringing the Bush administration to heel, or at least forcing it to accept some measure of what one of the president's men once sneeringly called "reality-based thinking," about the Iraq misadventure.

Donald Rumsfeld's departure is at least an initial hopeful sign.

But the Democrats must also stand and deliver for what the Task Force's Foreman termed "constituencies in the desert for a long time"-a category that certainly includes the LGBT community.

We have an opportunity at long last to go off the defensive nationally a bit, and our Democratic friends may find it unfamiliar, even uncomfortable to have to push affirmatively for our rights, rather than simply denounce the Republican troglodytes for their bigotry. And that responsibility to stand up and not simply stare down will favor the boldest, the brightest, and the bravest among our friends.

In the past couple of months it has been amusing to watch first Democrats, and in the end many Republicans, rush to prove their bona fides as deep and critical thinkers on Iraq-which mostly

amounted to calling for Rumsfeld's head.

On gay issues-as on the broader Democratic agenda aimed at the vast swath of fair-minded Americans-I think the prize will go to those who lead the pack rather than the poll-tested crowd who are more cautious and halting. On Iraq, for example, Illinois Senator Barack Obama might prove more appealing than New York's Hillary Rodham Clinton. On gay equality, New York's Eliot Spitzer ought to get more credit than New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine.

We're now decidedly on the down-slope of the Age of W. It is our nation to re-claim if only we will.