



Outgoing Task Force head leaves with pride, frustration

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The Coalition of Lesbian & Gay Rights had \$17.31 in its bank account during Matt Foreman's tenure as acting treasurer in the summer of 1979. The group was the largest LGBT organization in New York, but Foreman maintained the CLGR was still able to accomplish its work despite its meager financial resources.

"We didn't think we were doing so badly," he said.

Nearly three decades later, Foreman remains one of the most prominent and outspoken figures within the movement for LGBT rights as executive director of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force. He announced his resignation in late January to head the Gay and Lesbian Program at the Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr., Fund in San Francisco. Foreman took time to reflect upon his five year tenure at the Task Force, his own activism and the state of the movement during a recent interview with EDGE from his lower Manhattan office.

He expressed pride over the Task Force's increased financial and grassroots support to local and statewide LGBT organization. It devotes nearly half of its roughly \$10 million annual budget to these efforts. Foreman further singled out activists in Miami, Topeka, Kan., Tacoma, Wash., Cincinnati, Maine and other cities and states around the country who fought anti-LGBT legislation.

"I have just a sense of pride in our grassroots committees that are making tremendous strides against tremendous odds with virtually no resources," he said.

Foreman conceded the passage of more than two dozen state Constitutional amendments that banned marriage for same-sex couples during his tenure were difficult to endure.

"Those were and will continue to be not only devastating losses, but tremendous obstacles to overcome in the future," he said.

Foreman once again praised activists around the country who unsuccessfully campaigned against these amendments. He also scorned those who either voted for them or did nothing to block them from being placed on the ballot.

"I don't think we can or should ever forget how few people of good will came to our assistance and how the entire country seemed to think it was just fine to put the rights of a minority up for a popular vote," Foreman said.

He was also critical of the version of the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act openly gay U.S. Rep. Barney Frank [D-Mass.] introduced last October without gender identity and expression. The resulting controversy spurred the creation of the United ENDA Coalition - a group of nearly 300 LGBT and allied organizations from across the country - to urge Congress to

back a transgender-inclusive bill. Foreman said he remains proud of the role the Task Force continues to play in United ENDA.

"We didn't have to educate anyone [or] twist arms," he said. "People who do this work get what we're all about. It's not about fancy dinners. It's not about meaningless access to politicians. It's about getting things done."

Foreman took the helm of the Task Force in May 2003. He was previously the executive director of the Empire State Pride Agenda from 1997 and executive director of the New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project from 1990 to 1996. Foreman, who also co-founded Heritage of Pride, was a prison administrator for 10 years. He is also a member of the New York City Commission on Human Rights.

Transgender activists blasted Foreman for supporting New York's Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act without gender identity and expression. SONDA, which never contained trans-specific language, had been before Albany lawmakers for nearly 30 years. Foreman blogged last October he and other SONDA supporters had feared adding gender identity and expression to the bill would have jeopardized its passage.

He added the current debate over ENDA proved his SONDA strategy wrong.

"I should have recognized that SONDA would pass only when we had real contacts and leverage with the Republicans," Foreman wrote. "In hindsight, it's clear that demanding trans-inclusion from the Democrats years back would not have caused either the bill's demise or delayed its enactment, and that not demanding inclusion was wrong."

Former *Washington Blade* editor Chris Crain, Jamie Kirchick of the *New Republic* are among the conservative gay bloggers and commentators to opine against a trans-inclusive ENDA, but Foreman contends the movement continues to expand.

The Civil Marriage Collaborative, the State Equality Fund, the Marriage Non-Discrimination Collaborative and other initiatives have injected millions of dollars into the movement in recent years. Focus on the Family and other anti-LGBT organizations still vastly outspend LGBT organizations. And Foreman concedes he feels the movement has an uphill battle.

"We still have a very, very, very long way to go before straight people see us not only as equal, but fully human," he said. "We still remain second class citizens in the eyes of the law - virtually everywhere. We are still fair game in ways no other minority in America is any longer."

Foreman was quick to point out, however, he remains very optimistic. He added he feels the movement continues to have a tremendous impact.

"The reality is that we're making progress and the progress is accelerating," Foreman said. "A hundred years from now, people will look back and will really appreciate what the gay movement did to foster a better, more just and less oppressive notion of family."