

## Rea Carey, Leading Task Force, Sees Opportunities

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Rea Carey, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's new executive director, promises no retreat from tradition of forcing the tough calls.

**Rea Carey, the new executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, isn't given to superstitious musings, but a telephone interview with her certainly suggested the notion that the gods are smiling on the LGBT movement.**

With appropriate caution, she suggested that the national prospects for the LGBT community are improving.

"We are not being used as a sharp wedge" to cause division and foment suspicion, Carey said. Three months before the election she certainly held back from counting our blessings prematurely, but allowed that "the political landscape will be more positive."

The Task Force is playing an integral role in one key battle on the political landscape, the California referendum on gay marriage. Even before the Supreme Court in that state approved marriage equality, social conservatives had proposed an amendment to the California Constitution barring same-sex couples from marrying.

NGLTF, working in coalition with a range of groups including Equality California and the Human Rights Campaign, will assume the lead on managing the field operation - the voter education and mobilization campaign at the grassroots level. The Task Force places a special emphasis on grassroots organizing so its responsibilities in this fight are a natural for the group.

In California, gay marriage is not proving a lightning-rod issue, dividing even Democrats, that it has in the past. The opposition to the anti-gay amendment is buffered not only by the State

Supreme Court decision, but also by the Republican governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

In Washington, Carey is collaborating with other LGBT organizations to end the "invisibility" of gay issues that became entrenched during the Bush-Cheney years. The federal government simply ignored LGBT concerns. But since Democrats took control on Capitol Hill, it finally became possible to lobby the Executive Branch and to press for federal budget priorities responsive to community concerns.

NGLTF and other LGBT groups are reviewing the budget - in effect becoming a mini-transition committee, regardless of who wins the presidential election- to make recommendations for next year. Seniors' concerns, for example, are being examined with the help of SAGE, Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders. LGBT youth concerns are back on the agenda and programs for homeless youth and HIV prevention are under consideration. The list will not end here. Practical planning for next year's budget is a priority at the Task Force.

Carey is also determined to continue leading the fight to include the transgender community in the pending Employment Non-Discrimination Act, or ENDA, which was passed by the House last fall with protections based solely on sexual orientation. The Task Force, working with academics and researchers, has developed a methodologically sophisticated survey of the transgender community that, when completed, will provide data about discrimination its members face. Carey believes the study will provide critical evidence in educating Congress and the public generally about the problems facing transgendered Americans.

It will also prove helpful in continuing the effort to have more gay and lesbian Americans fully embrace the "T" in LGBT.

Under Matt Foreman's leadership last fall, the Task Force was among the key players in the effort that challenged the Human Rights Campaign and top congressional advocates, most prominently Barney Frank, the gay Massachusetts Democrat, who agreed to move ENDA forward without gender identity and expression protections. The battle proved contentious, with hundreds of groups aligning with NGLTF, and members of Congress recognizing that they were walking on eggshells in considering Frank's narrower version of the bill. Carey made it clear that there will be no change in the group's tough bottom line - include the transgendered in ENDA or don't pass the bill.

Carey rejects the idea that her tough stance is unreasonable, noting that she is fully aware that change often comes incrementally. ENDA addresses employment discrimination alone, and she is willing to pursue a series of steps to add protections for housing and public accommodations, areas earlier swept up in comprehensive civil rights legislation regarding race, religion, and gender.

But, Carey underscored, NGLTF draws the line on "pursuing legislation that leaves members of our community behind."

The Task Force has long emphasized that one of its primary missions is to press allies to make hard decisions, and Carey clearly will continue this approach. Having served for four years as Foreman's deputy executive director, her appointment signals continuity.

Still, Carey makes clear that the rush of events is moving the Task Force into areas where innovation is demanded. George W. Bush will no longer set the national tone. The challenges are growing, but fortunately so are the resources.