



Standing Firm, Moving Forward

By **Rea Carey**
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Over the past few weeks, the nation witnessed an outpouring of emotion and determination from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in the wake of both a historic and painful Election Day. The outcry by LGBT people at having a fundamental right taken away in California is understandable and our demand to participate fully and equally in society is inspiring.

The LGBT community played a significant role in the election of our first African-American president. According to exit poll data, 69 percent of lesbian, gay and bisexual voters cast their votes for President-elect Obama compared to 53 percent of the general electorate. In doing so, we saw how far the nation has come in its struggle to honor the dignity and contributions of all Americans.

Yet in the passage of multiple statewide ballot measures targeting LGBT equality, we experienced firsthand just how far we still have to go.

After Nov. 4, LGBT people juggled a sense of exhilaration in closing a particularly ugly chapter in our nation's history, while finding ourselves the target of vigorous, well-funded, dehumanizing campaigns.

America voted decisively to break the racial barrier but also drew a line in the sand when it came to the right of LGBT people to marry the person they love and form their families.

During his acceptance speech, we took President-elect Obama's remarks to heart: "What we have already achieved gives us hope for what we can and must achieve for tomorrow. ... America, we have come so far. We have seen so much. But there is so much more for us to do."

Yes, so much more to do.

Despite losses in Florida, Arizona and California on same-sex marriage, the LGBT community can draw strength from how far our struggle has come in just four years. In 2004, same-sex marriage lost on the ballot in 13 states, by margins that ranged from largely the mid-70s to as high as 88 percent. This year the margins were much, much closer: in Florida it was 62 percent to 38 percent, in Arizona it was 56 percent to 44 percent, and in California it was 52 percent to 48 percent. In short, the point spread is bending toward justice.

In California, millions voted against Proposition 8 and tens of thousands gave up their evenings and weekends to canvass their communities or participate in No on 8 phone banks. From grandparents to college students to everyone in-between, Californians worked passionately and tirelessly for LGBT equality because it is a principle they believe in. Proposition 8 passed because it was among the most vitriolic anti-LGBT campaigns in our nation's history. But the progress being made cannot be disputed, and one day, in the not-too-distant future, we know that our families will be accorded the same dignity, respect and recognition as all other families in America.

After coming so close, it's hard to accept these defeats, to analyze what we did right, what we might have done better, and to roll up our sleeves and get back to the daily work of making a case for LGBT and marriage equality. But, as the president-elect told the crowd in Grant Park: "This victory alone is not the change we seek; it is only the chance for us to make that change. And that cannot happen if we go back to the way things were."

We will never go back.

As has always been the case, the simple fact of LGBT people living our lives and contributing to our communities continues to build the support we need to strengthen our partnerships, our families and our case for equality.

In vast numbers on Election Day, Americans expressed great hope in Obama's life story of rising from humble origins and crossing many cultural and racial divides to form himself and to create both the family and a life's path he passionately believes in. We are buoyed by his belief in the inherent worth of all Americans, including those who are "gay [and] straight," as he noted only moments into his acceptance remarks.

It is up to LGBT people and our allies to insist on the recognition of our humanity, to continue to press for the lives we dream of and for the safety and well-being of our families -- families we are stretching to support and protect, against all odds -- against even the disapproval and disdain of our very neighbors, every day.

We saw this insistence at full force on Nov. 15 in rallies from San Diego to D.C., from Boston to Seattle, and we inspired each other in the process.

I truly believe that one day, and within one generation, we will all look back and wonder what all the fuss was about. We will simply be able to get married and create our families without having to go door to door, asking for permission.

What we'll remember better, I hope, is that we stood firm despite our grave disappointment, took up the charge President-elect Obama put before us, and quickly got to the business of reshaping this country after a defining moment in American history.

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