



Working Toward a Real Economic Recovery

By Rea Carey
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President Obama just signed the stimulus bill, which holds promise for at least beginning to alleviate some of the hardship inflicted by the economic turmoil enveloping the country.

It will likely create and save more than 3 million jobs, strengthen state safety nets, and provide for the neediest among us during this crisis.

The administration and many others hope this action will serve as a critical first step toward greater stability and economic recovery. But no one is wearing rose-colored glasses; clearly, an arduous road lies ahead.

Economic justice has always been a philosophical underpinning of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. We know that when there is an economic downturn, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people suffer the same risks as others, and then some.

Beyond the myth of large incomes and large living are the real stories of our lives. LGBT people, already vulnerable and unprotected by most anti-discrimination employment laws and marriage laws, take multiple hits as large and small employers cut jobs, community-based nonprofits are forced to eliminate services and programs, and small mom-and-mom and pop-and-pop businesses shut doors.

All of this places LGBT people at a severe disadvantage in an economic climate such as the one we are currently in. The Task Force understands that stabilizing the economy stabilizes our opportunities -- indeed, the opportunities of all people -- to live decent lives and take care of our families.

That's why the Task Force Action Fund has joined with other progressive organizations to support these recovery efforts. We are working with our partners under the leadership of Americans United for Change, Campaign for America's Future, USAction, People For the American Way, AFSCME and many others as part of the Campaign for Jobs and Economic Recovery coalition to support the president's economic stimulus efforts. We know how critical it is that there be an LGBT organization and voice in this coalition.

The stimulus plan signed Feb. 17 by President Obama will go far to promote the economic stability of Main Street, support working families, and bolster those who live at or below the poverty line.

As layoffs have piled up by the hundreds of thousands, state-based, federally funded programs like unemployment insurance, Medicaid, health care for low-income people, and other safety-net programs have been strained beyond capacity and are now threadbare. This new plan will at least start to provide some much-needed relief.

This is just the beginning of a long haul back to a healthy, robust economy and society. Over the weeks and months ahead, the Task Force will continue advocating for an economic recovery that is fair, humane and inclusive. We will also continue advocating for passage of a fully inclusive Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) and other legislation that gives people a fair shake and fair shot at keeping our jobs.

This means working for health-care reform and improved access to affordable quality health care. We know this must remain a core component in the president's economic recovery plan. LGBT people often cannot obtain health-care coverage on a partner's plan, and even when we are eligible for partner/spouse health-care coverage, we are penalized by being taxed on the cost of the benefit. This particularly cruel kind of economic discrimination against our community must end.

We believe a true economic recovery means that all people are given an equitable chance to thrive and contribute their full selves, talents and skills to their families, communities and country.

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