



## San Francisco Mayor Newsom Honored by Task Force

by Steve Weinstein  
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San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom at the awards ceremony (Source: Peter Lau Photography)

San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom had attendees on their feet at a cocktail reception in New York City on Monday night, April 6. The National Gay & Lesbian Task Force's Leadership Awards went to Newsom for his work furthering gay marriage. Fashion designer John Bartlett was also honored at the reception, held in a New York University tower overlooking Washington Square Park in the heart of Greenwich Village.

"We run a lean and mean machine at the Task Force," said Executive Director Rea Carey in her opening remarks, who emphasized to the assembled donors that the Task Force was "taking steps to ensure financial strength for decades to come."

She pointed to a recent victor in Gainesville as an example of the Task Force's work on the ground. The Florida Panhandle university town overwhelmingly voted to keep LGBT protections in its statutes.

The next battle Carey pointed to was getting the U.S. Census Bureau to amend its policy in time for the 2010 Census to recognize same-sex marriages. Currently, census takers won't list same-sex couples as married--even if they are legally wed (soon to be in four states and recognized in many more).

"For those of us who have children, our children are recorded as children of single-parent families," Carey pointed out. "The Census is about numbers, but it determines who gets money and it determines the electoral map for the next decade." The Task Force is working with the White House to amend the protocol.

Overall, Carey was optimistic, even joyful. "At a remarkable historic moment, I feel lucky to be alive," she said. "There'll be more progress in next few years than past few decades. Winning equal rights is not the end game but rather the floor to transform our culture and society."

Carey then introduced her old college chum, Christine Quinn, now the speaker of the New York City Council and, as such, the second-most powerful politician in the city. "She was out, I wasn't," Quinn revealed about her college days.

Quinn introduced Newsom by admitting, "There's not a lot that can be added about Mayor Newsom to an LGBT crowd." She emphasized that, when he first won election, he didn't have strong LGBT support but that one of his first actions was performing gay weddings.

As a result of his action, there were court cases that eventually led to the landmark decision legalizing gay marriage in California. Although we all know that that ended up on the chopping block with Proposition 8, still, Newsom's initial action and his constant beating the drum for gay marriage has inspired activists in the City by the Bay, the Golden State and far beyond.

"His administration and term have been defined by what is morally right, not politically expedient," Quinn said. "We're in your debt, not just for raising the bar for LGBT civil rights but how politicians should conduct themselves."

Newsom, who's movie-star good looks dazzled even this seen-it-all crowd, responded with gentle self-effacing humor, thanking the Task Force as a "small-town mayor from the West."

But the rest of his remarks were deadly serious. He compared the struggle for gay marriage to the fight against miscegenation laws in the 1960s, which outlawed people of different races marrying. "At the end of the day, it's about people and human beings," he said. "That's what we're fighting for--to live with dignity and respect."

"It's interesting to note, those who say let the people decide," he said. "When the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967 overturned miscegenation laws, people talked in terms of an 'activist court.' Imagine if we did allow the people to decide interracial marriage."

In 1967, 70 percent of Americans opposed race mixing. "Here we are 40 plus years later," he said. "The whole idea of submitting rights of a minority to the whims of a majority--that's the whole why we have a constitution."

He pointed to Iowa with a certain wistfulness: "I thought I'd never say, 'As Iowa goes so goes the nation.' I used to think it was California. But we're the first state in U.S. history, doing what no state had done--stripping people of their rights by amending the state constitution."

The fight will transcend and go on after him. "Politicians come and go," he noted. "But principles transcend the best of our nation. We ultimately do get it right. But we don't get it right by waiting around. Our future is not in front of us but inside of us. We will get there. It's a matter of time. But we will get there."

The actress Lucy Liu, who looked stunning in a black cocktail dress with a boa bodice, introduced Bartlett by speaking of her own immigrant parents and being Aisan. "John never was afraid to stand out," said Liu, pointing to his Ohio origins and unique design sense.

Bartlett expressed surprise at being honored. He used his time at the podium to point to prejudice in nursing homes and other adult situations where gay men and lesbians have been forced back into the closet. "Our gay and lesbian elders in their golden years have to face the fear and the possibility that they have to go into closet to receive the birthright of health care."

He also decried killings of gay men and lesbians in repressive regimes abroad. He thanked his partner and his brother, who was on hand.

The evening ended with an impassioned recounting by a Task Force field organizer, Trina Olson, who has been working in Maine. There, she has been meeting with local activists and politicians before the state decides on gay marriage.

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