



# The Task Force in the News

Media Highlights

May 1 – 15, 2006

Roberta Sklar, Director of Communications

## Quote of the Week:

“We need for Governor Dean to demonstrate real leadership on our issues, not to equivocate depending on the audience.”

– Matt Foreman, commenting on DNC Chair Howard Dean’s appearance on *The 700 Club*

Associated Press

May 11, 2006

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## CALENDARS | Best Bets This Week

*May. 05, 2006*

### COMMUNITY

**TASK FORCE LEADERSHIP AWARDS:** This year, honor Food & Friends and Pulitzer Prize winning author of "Brokeback Mountain" Annie Proulx for their outstanding achievements within the community. Senator Russell Feingold is the keynote speaker this year. Zion Hill Gospel Choir will present a special performance. Saturday, May 6, 7:30 p.m. The Omni Shoreham Hotel, 2500 Calvert St., NW. \$250 general admission, \$350 VIP. RSVP to Janice Thom, 202-393-5177, ext. 1467, or [jthom@theTaskForce.org](mailto:jthom@theTaskForce.org). [www.thetaskforce.org](http://www.thetaskforce.org).



## **National News Briefs**

Compiled by Dawn Wolfe Gutterman

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### **NGLTF to honor John Conyers May 6**

**WASHINGTON** - The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force will honor Michigan U.S. Rep. John Conyers, Jr., U.S. Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.), "Brokeback Mountain" author Annie Proulx and Food and Friends, an organization that provides support to people facing life-challenging illnesses, at the 17th annual D.C. Leadership Awards on May 6.

For more information visit [www.thetaskforce.org/dcla2006](http://www.thetaskforce.org/dcla2006).



## Task Force Titans Politics, literature and community service share annual honors

by Will O'Bryan  
Published on 05/11/2006

From enthusiastic political polemics to impassioned calls for GLBT activism to make its home both in the city and on the range, **the stage at last weekend's National Gay and Lesbian Task Force awards dinner buzzed with energy as the group raised a couple hundred thousand dollars, just in time for this year's mid-term elections.**

The Task Force played host to more than 450 people Saturday night, May 6, at the district's Omni Shoreham Hotel overlooking Rock Creek Park. The event, a dinner marking the Task Force's 17th Annual Leadership Awards, paid tribute to three people and an institution: Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.), a longtime ally of the gay community; Annie Proulx, author of the gay-themed short story *Brokeback Mountain*, which garnered much attention as a film a few months ago; Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wisc.), a possible contender in the 2008 presidential race, and a supporter of same-sex marriage; and Food & Friends, the metro area's non-profit provider of groceries and prepared meals to thousands of ill clients and their families.

As one of four such Task Force award events around the country, Saturday's was notable as the format has moved to a dinner, rather than a reception. Presumably, introducing armies of "table captains" -- and their requisite talent for drafting attendees willing to pony up the \$250 admission -- will measurably aid the Task Force's bottom line as it prepares for a slew of upcoming elections. Claire Lucas, a D.C. board member of the National Stonewall Democrats and bronze-level sponsor of the Task Force event, set a stellar fund-raising example Saturday night, offering a check for \$5,000 to ensure the D.C. bash was more fiscally successful than April's award dinner in New York. Organizers said the D.C. event raised about \$200,000 for the Task Force.

While the dollars will fuel the Task Force's work in coming months, leadership plays its invaluable part in the political fight for GLBT equality. The evening's honorees offered their contributions in rhetoric, both fiery and subdued. Emcee Karen Allen, a lesbian comic, offered humor: "I don't want special rights. But I would like discounts."

Conyers, a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus and ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, has long been associated with social justice issues. In keeping with that reputation, his remarks tended toward the big picture, rather than the gay civil-rights struggle in particular.

"There ought to be some way we can have an excess-profit tax, [and] transparency to see where all of these millions and millions in bonuses are going to these executives," he said, pointing to the recent spike in gas prices. He also touched upon slavery reparations, universal health care, the war in Iraq, and impeaching President Bush.

He concluded by turning back to the Task Force. "I'm with you," he said, Leadership Award in hand. "I'm with Sen. Feingold. I'm with [past Task Force honorees, the openly gay Democratic congressional representatives] Tammy Baldwin and Barney Frank. All these great Americans make me proud to be here tonight to accept this award."

Feingold, who delivered the evening's keynote address, took a more focused approach, relating how gay civil-rights issues have been a fixture of his career since he was first elected to office as a state senator when he was 29. At the time, 1983, he voted with the legislative majority in repealing Wisconsin's law against sodomy. "I felt like history was moving in the right direction," he said, adding that his 1993 entry into the U.S. Senate was marked with the so-called "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy for gays in the military. He said he nevertheless remained optimistic that gays were moving toward equality.

"I was still optimistic -- until the [Defense of Marriage Act] came along," he says, pointing to the measure that allows states to deny marriage to same-sex couples, and asserts the federal definition of marriage to be a union between a man and a woman. "I was appalled, frankly, by how many Democrats voted for that," he continued, calling DOMA "awful" and "mean-spirited."

To cheers, he added that the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment, which would essentially write DOMA's restrictions into U.S. Constitution, "belongs absolutely nowhere near the Constitution of the United States of America.... I support marriage equality in all cases. If two people love each other and they want to get married, they ought to be able to."

Proulx did not offer a politician's enthusiasm. Instead, she appeared somewhat bashful as she took the lectern, her soft monotone a sharp contrast to the other speakers' styles. "They never told me I'd have to say something, but I will," she deadpanned.

Proulx, in from Wyoming for the awards dinner, spoke about her stretch of the country as a "mean, spare, hard" place. "It's a tough place. I like it because it's a tough place. Its beauty is hard and subtle."

That hardness comes with a particular challenge.

"People don't really disturb the ancient traditions of rural places, and that's too bad," she said. "You really have to take a look at what's not right, and not support the status quo."

She closed with an invitation, observing that there are many GLBT people from her part of the country, but that they often leave her rough terrain in favor of gay-friendly cities. With an apparent desire to turn that tide, she imparted, "If any of you are contemplating a move to the country, do it."

Though Matt Foreman, executive director of the Task Force, may not have as much celebrity as the other speakers on the stage, he remains the personification of his organization.

"Time is on our side. Because of you, winning is not only possible, it's inevitable," he said. "And it's going to happen in our lifetime."

*For photo coverage of this event, please see our online [Scene coverage](#).*



## **Dean Misstates Party Platform on Gays**

### **Democratic chairman Howard Dean mischaracterizes his party's platform on gay rights**

By CALVIN WOODWARD, Associated Press Writer

May. 11, 2006

WASHINGTON (AP) - Democratic chairman Howard Dean mischaracterized his party's platform on gay rights in an interview courting evangelicals, then set the record straight Thursday when an advocacy group called him on it.

Dean told Christian Broadcasting Network News that the 2004 Democratic platform declares "marriage is between a man and a woman" \_ just one of the points he made in reaching out to religious conservatives who are largely hostile to the party.

**But the platform does not define marriage that way, and his remarks prompted the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to return a \$5,000 donation from the Democratic National Committee.**

**Dean later acknowledged his misstatement, but the group sent back the money anyway. "We need for Governor Dean to demonstrate real leadership on our issues," executive director Matt Foreman said in an interview, "not to equivocate depending on the audience."**

Dean sought to establish common ground with religious conservatives in the interview on Pat Robertson's network, a tall order considering their opposition to the Democratic Party's positions on abortion rights, gay rights and some other social issues.

Dean said that "one of the misconceptions about the Democratic Party is that we're godless and that we don't have any values."

He went on: "The truth is, we have an enormous amount in common with the Christian community, and particularly with the evangelical Christian community. And one of the biggest things that Democrats worry about is the materialism of our country, what's on television that our kids are seeing, and the lack of spirituality."

With Republicans embracing the traditional definition of marriage in 2004, Democrats sought to appeal to such traditionalists without giving up their support for gay rights.

The result: a platform plank that left the central question about what defines marriage to the states, and specifically rejected President Bush's support for a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage.

It asserted: "We support full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and seek equal responsibilities, benefits, and protections for these families."

Dean stated in the interview: "The Democratic Party platform from 2004 says that marriage is between a man and a woman. That's what it says."

He added that the party differs with some religious leaders in believing "everybody deserves to live with dignity and respect, and that equal rights under the law are important."

After the gay rights group went public with its complaints about his remarks, Dean acknowledged: "I misstated the Democratic Party's platform, which does not say marriage should be limited to a man and a woman," and reasserted the party's commitment to equal protection for all.

Foreman said Dean should be persuading Democrats to fight against ballot initiatives seeking to ban gay marriage, but instead has misrepresented the party's "important and affirming plank" several times.

"There has been a disturbing lack of clarity from Governor Dean about where we fit into the party and the country," he said after Dean corrected himself.

Foreman said the \$5,000 was for sponsorship of the group's leadership awards dinner in Washington last week, and will be missed.

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On the Net:

Account of Dean interview: <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/politics/060510a.asp>

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force: <http://www.thetaskforce.org/>

This story was also picked up in the following outlets:

**StarTribune.com**  
Minneapolis - St Paul, Minnesota



**THE NEWS & OBSERVER**  
newsobserver.com



## Dean Taken To Task For Rewriting Gay History

by 365Gay.com Newscenter Staff

May 11, 2006 - 8:00 am ET

(New York) Democratic Party Chair Howard Dean in an appearance on TV evangelist Pat Robertson's 700 Club this week wiped out what is widely considered the greatest achievement of gays Democrats - a recognition of same-sex relationships in the party platform.

"The Democratic Party platform from 2004 says that marriage is between a man and a woman," Dean told Robertson. "That's what it says. I think where we may take exception with some religious leaders is that we believe in inclusion, that everybody deserves to live with dignity and respect, and that equal rights under the law are important."

But the platform actually supported gay marriage.

This is what the document says: "We support full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and seek equal responsibilities, benefits, and protections for these families. In our country, marriage has been defined at the state level for 200 years, and we believe it should continue to be defined there. We repudiate President Bush's divisive effort to politicize the Constitution by pursuing a 'Federal Marriage Amendment.' Our goal is to bring Americans together, not drive them apart."

It was hailed at the time as the first instance where a major party had endorsed same-sex marriage in its official platform.

Once considered a major friend of the LGBT population Dean has raised concerns more recently as he attempts to draw conservative Christians toward the party with calls to candidates to go slowly in promoting LGBT issues.

Whether the 700 Club remark was one of Dean's famous "misspeaks" or was intentional is not yet known. A spokesperson for the DNC did not immediately return calls.

Gay Democrats issued a tepid response.

"Our founders created a federal system that allows individual states the freedom to develop policy for their own families as they see fit," said Jo Wyrick, Interim Executive Director, National Stonewall Democrats. "Democrats do not believe that the federal government should forcefully dictate family policy for individual states, as championed by congressional Republicans and the Bush Administration. Therefore, we strongly point out that Governor Dean incorrectly spoke when stating that the 2004 Democratic Party platform defines marriage as between a man and a woman."

**The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force was more direct.**

**It returned a recent \$5,000 DNC contribution and demanded that Dean issue a clarification of his remarks.**

**"Disturbingly, this is not the first time he has misrepresented this important and affirming plank, and he has been asked before to correct the record and to cease making these misleading statements," said NGLTF Executive Director Matt Foreman.**

"Governor Dean's record on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues since becoming DNC chair has been sorely and sadly lacking. The Democratic Party chair should stand by and fight for the party's own platform and values. In light of Governor Dean's pandering and insulting interview today with the Christian Broadcasting Network, we have decided to return the DNC's recent \$5,000 contribution to us. We do so with great sadness, knowing that the Democratic Party has long been a champion of our rights."

## Dean slams gay marriage on '700 Club' DNC issues clarification as HRC joins gay groups' condemnations

By JOSHUA LYNSEN | May 10, 9:16 PM

Democratic Party Chair Howard Dean has contradicted his party's platform and infuriated gay rights advocates by saying the party's platform states "marriage is between a man and a woman."

"The Democratic Party platform from 2004 says marriage is between a man and a woman," Dean said May 10 during a "700 Club" program hosted by conservative Christian leader Pat Robertson on his Christian Broadcasting Network.

That statement contradicts the Democratic National Committee's official stance, adopted in 2004. The '04 party platform indicates that marriage is an issue that should be left to the states to resolve, taking no position on whether or not states should marry same-sex couples.

"We support full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and seek equal responsibilities, benefits, and protections for these families," the platform says.

The DNC issued a statement May 11 clarifying Dean's remarks on the "700 Club."

"I misstated the Democratic Party's platform, which does not say that marriage should be limited to a man and a woman, but says the party is committed to full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and leaves the issue to the states to decide," Dean is quoted as saying in the statement.

"The Democratic Party remains committed to equal protection under the law for all Americans. How we achieve that goal continues to be the subject of a contentious debate, but our party continues to oppose constitutional amendments that seek to short circuit the debate on how to achieve equality for all Americans."

Gay organizations were quick to criticize Dean, saying this is just the latest in a series of missteps by the former Vermont governor on gay issues.

"Howard Dean puts his foot in his mouth so often that he should open a pedicure wing in the DNC during his tenure," Log Cabin Republicans President Patrick Guerriero said Wednesday. "Howard Dean's positions on LGBT issues have changed more often than the weather in New England, where he's from."

The Human Rights Campaign refused to accept that Dean's remarks were an accidental misrepresentation of the party's position and issued a strongly worded statement on Thursday, May 11, condemning the remarks.



Democratic Party Chair Howard Dean, appearing on the Christian Broadcasting Network, erroneously stated that the party's 2004 platform says 'marriage is between a man and a woman.' Christian conservative Pat Robertson is host of the program.

"Governor Dean's comments weren't a mere slip of the tongue but a glaring reminder of the governor's lack of leadership on this issue," said Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese.

"As we face a Senate vote in June that threatens to put discrimination in our Constitution, Governor Dean should not only have known better but he should have used the opportunity to speak out about the lack of values involved in the current constitutional debate," Solmonese said, referring to the upcoming vote on the "Marriage Protection Amendment," which would ban states from marrying gay couples.

Solmonese said the DNC's clarification was "a step in the right direction," but that Dean has failed to convey a "commitment to equality."

Jo Wyrick, interim executive director of National Stonewall Democrats, a gay partisan group, also said that Dean was not accurately representing the Democratic Party's views on marriage.

"Democrats do not believe that the federal government should forcefully dictate family policy for individual states, as championed by congressional Republicans and the Bush administration," she said in a statement issued May 10. "Therefore, we strongly point out that Governor Dean incorrectly spoke when stating that the 2004 Democratic Party platform defines marriage as between a man and a woman."

### **Task Force returns DNC donation**

Within hours of the program's broadcast, the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force denounced Dean's misrepresentation.

"Disturbingly, this is not the first time he has misrepresented this important and affirming plank [of the Democratic Party platform], and he has been asked before to correct the record and to cease making these misleading statements," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the Task Force.

"Governor Dean's record on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues since becoming DNC chair has been sorely and sadly lacking," Foreman said. "The Democratic Party chair should stand by and fight for the party's own platform and values."

On May 2, Dean fired the Democratic Party's gay outreach adviser Donald Hitchcock. The firing came less than a week after Hitchcock's domestic partner, Paul Yandura, a longtime party activist, accused Dean of failing to take adequate steps to defend gay rights.

**Foreman said in response to Dean's "pandering and insulting interview" with the Christian Broadcasting Network, the Task Force would return a \$5,000 donation it received from the DNC.**

**"We do so with great sadness, knowing that the Democratic Party has long been a champion of our rights," he said. "We urge [Dean] to take the money we are returning today and spend it to defeat these attacks on LGBT people and our families."**

**Guerriero applauded the Task Force for taking a principled stand, and said Dean's frequent flubs on gay issues are doing gays more harm than good.**

"It's not good for the movement as a whole," Guerriero said, "and he should be held accountable for these types of actions."

In an interview May 11, John Marble, communications director of National Stonewall Democrats, said that Dean should move forward by rallying Democrats and gay voters.

"I think that Governor Dean has a strong vision for how to move the party forward, and I truly believe that he has a plan to motivate our community to support Democrats," he said. "However, it will be to the benefit of the party for the DNC to proactively present their vision in a public way."

Marble said Stonewall Democrats and other gay organizations, remain ready to partner with the DNC.

"I think it's really important for the DNC to seize this opportunity," he said, "and not let it slip by."

### **Dean and gay Dems**

The blow-up over Dean's "700 Club" appearance and the firing of Hitchcock are only the latest in a series of public confrontations between Dean and gay Democrats, who had been among his strongest supporters.

Last year, Dean upset some gay Democratic activists by eliminating the DNC constituency desk system, including the GLBT outreach desk. He said he replaced the desk system with a new system of integrating constituency outreach work throughout all DNC offices and programs.

Dean said the new system would be an improvement over the previous system, and that the party would expand its gay outreach efforts.

But some gay Democrats were further angered in February, when the DNC released its "Annual Report to the Grassroots," which omitted any mention of gays or the party's gay outreach efforts. Activists pointed to a similar grassroots report issued a year earlier by Dean's predecessor, Terry McAuliffe, which included a detailed account of the party's gay outreach program.

DNC officials insisted then that the six-page grassroots report issued by Dean was intended to be a brief, preliminary account of Dean's plan to rebuild the party by strengthening its field operation in all 50 states.

Then, six weeks ago, gay rights leaders met with eight prominent Democratic senators to air their complaints about the party's "tortuous" positions on marriage and other issues.

Dean's trouble with gay Democrats comes after gays were credited with playing a crucial early role in the former Vermont governor's 2004 presidential run, raising large sums and generating word-of-mouth support based on Dean's role signing into law his state's landmark civil unions law in 2000.

The logo for PageOneQ, featuring the text "PageOneQ" in a white, serif font with a purple outline, set against a black rectangular background.

## **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force slams Howard Dean, Returns \$5,000 gift from DNC**

by PageOneQ

After it was reported that Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean misrepresented the portions of the party platform relating to marriage, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force returned a \$5,000 contribution to the party, **PageOneQ** has learned.

In a release issued by the Task Force, a quote from Chairman Dean was reported as:

"The Democratic Party platform from 2004 says that marriage is between a man and a woman. That's what it says. I think where we may take exception with some religious leaders is that we believe in inclusion, that everybody deserves to live with dignity and respect, and that equal rights under the law are important."

The actual part of the party platform reads:

"We support full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and seek equal responsibilities, benefits, and protections for these families. In our country, marriage has been defined at the state level for 200 years, and we believe it should continue to be defined there. We repudiate President Bush's divisive effort to politicize the Constitution by pursuing a 'Federal Marriage Amendment.' Our goal is to bring Americans together, not drive them apart."

Dean made the statements on the Christian Broadcasting Network during its popular 700 Club program.



## National Gay & Lesbian Task Force Hails Illinois Governor for Extending Domestic Partner Benefits to State Employees

05.10.06

(Washington, D.C.) - Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich this week issued an executive order extending domestic partnership benefits to all state employees under the authority of the governor's office.

(Some Illinois state employees recently received domestic partnership benefits under their new AFSCME contracts.)

Illinois is the nation's 13th state - and the third largest - to adopt domestic partnership benefits for a major segment of its state employee population. The 12 other states are California, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington. The District of Columbia also offers domestic partner benefits to its employees.

In 2005, Illinois became the 15th state to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and the fifth to also protect transgender people from discrimination.

**Matt Foreman**, Executive Director National Gay and Lesbian Task Force released the following statement regarding the executive order:

"We salute Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich for extending essential benefits to the domestic partners of all state employees under the authority of the governor's office. The families of lesbian and gay employees need and deserve the same benefits as all others, including access to affordable health insurance and to be able to take care of family members in emergency situations. This is what the governor's action today is all about - basic fairness.

"This is a particularly powerful rebuke to those forces seeking to place an anti-marriage advisory initiative on the November ballot. We also congratulate Illinois' outstanding lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender civil rights and advocacy organization, Equality Illinois, and its leader, Rick Garcia, for being the driving forces in yet another signal achievement on the road to complete equality. It is now time for similar benefits to be extended to state employees who are under the authority of the state's other constitutional officers and of the state university system."

The mission of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force is to build the political power of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community from the ground up. We do this by training activists, organizing broad-based campaigns to defeat anti-LGBT referenda and advance pro-LGBT legislation, and by building the organizational capacity of our movement.

Source: [www.thetaskforce.org](http://www.thetaskforce.org)



## Illinois offers D.P. benefits to state workers

### Governor's order goes into effect July 1

By DYANA BAGBY | May 8, 5:10 PM

Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich today extended health benefits to same-sex domestic partners of state employees, saying his decision was based on "fairness and equality."

**The governor's administrative order goes into effect July 1. Illinois becomes the 13th state - and the third largest - to offer domestic partner benefits to state employees, according to the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force.**

"This is about fairness and equality. I want the people who work for me to have access to good benefits and good health care and that's what this accomplishes," Blagojevich said in a prepared statement.

There are a total of 57,000 state workers in Illinois, including approximately 37,000 union workers who are members of the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees, said Justin DeJong, a spokesperson for Blagojevich.

Members of AFSCME will also receive same-sex domestic partner benefits beginning July 1.

The governor's office estimated that enrollment in these programs, including union and non-union employees, may grow by one-half of one percent, with an estimated \$2.2 million in increased liability annually, according to DeJong.

Same-sex domestic partnership health benefits were extended to AFSCME members as part of the four-year contract negotiated between Blagojevich and the union in the spring of 2004 and ratified by union members in July 2004, according to the Illinois governor's office. Benefits include health insurance, dental and vision coverage.

A letter offering the option to extend DP benefits to domestic partners of gay employees was also sent today to state Constitutional officers, leaders of the General Assembly, heads of the state's retirement systems and each state university from the state agency overseeing health care and benefits for state agencies, according to the governor's office.

Heads of the agencies have until May 12 to opt into the program.

"By extending healthcare and benefits to domestic partners of state employees, Gov. Blagojevich is ensuring equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender citizens in the state's workforce. This should not be a privilege awarded to just those in a traditional marriage, but also people in committed long-term relationships," Rocco Claps, director of the state's Department of Human Rights, said in a statement.

Rick Garcia of gay-rights group Equality Illinois also praised the governor.

"I commend Gov. Blagojevich and expect the universities and other Constitutional officers to quickly do the same," he said in a statement.

**Matt Foreman, executive director of NLGTF, said he also hoped to see constitutional officers and state university leaders opt into the program.**

**"This is a particularly powerful rebuke to those forces seeking to place an anti-marriage advisory initiative on**



Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich issued an executive order May 8 granting domestic partner benefits to state workers. (Photo by Seth Perlman/AP)

**the November ballot," Foreman said in a statement.**

**In 2005, Illinois became the 15th state to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and the fifth to also protect transgender people from discrimination, according to NLGTF.**

# Challenges of Same-Sex Families Cited in Landmark Event; LGBT Blacks and Latinos Speak Out

BY D. KEVIN MCNEIR

The Mexican Fine Arts Museum, located at 1852 West 19th, was the venue for a revealing forum in April. LGBT Black and Latino same-sex households shared their concerns and the problems they face as they attempt to successfully raise children in a society that still condones and even calls for multiple forms of discrimination.

About 100 men, women and children attended the free event, presented by Lambda Legal and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force with additional sponsors that included *Orgullo en Accion* and the host museum.

The forum also included free guided tours of the museum's newest exhibit, *The African Presence in Mexico: From Yanga to the Present*, which has been described as the most comprehensive project ever organized about African contributions to Mexican culture and also includes two other exhibits: *Who Are We Now? Roots, Resistance & Recognition*, and *Common Goals, Common Struggles, Common Ground*.

Mary Morten, director for the Illinois Coalition for Education on Sexual Orientation, highlighted information gleaned from two recently released reports based on data from the 2000 census: *Black Same-Sex Households in the United States* and *Hispanic and Latino Same-Sex Couple Households in the United States*.

"The data that I felt compelled to discuss illustrates how anti-gay and anti-marriage philosophies in the U.S. disproportionately affect African

Americans and Latinos," Morten said. "We already know America's current policies but with these two reports we can begin to use undisputable facts and point to the implications for Black and Latino same-sex households. We have always said that we [Black and Latino same-sex families] are everywhere—now we have proof. In Illinois, for example,



Panelist David Harris

the report indicates that there are 23,000 same-sex households."

Morten's comments focused on four specific areas: immigration, parenting, age and income. However, the two reports also reveal important statistics about disability, employment, residential patterns, family structure, military

service and educational levels.

Among the revelations from the census reports are that white male same-sex couples report over \$24,000 more in annual household income than Black male same-sex couples. Another facet is that there are 1,138 federal benefits and protections available to married couples that same-sex couples cannot access. For example, same-sex couples must report domestic-partner health insurance as income and pay income taxes on it, while married opposite-sex couples are not taxed on spousal health insurance.

The forum also featured two couples that have either raised or are currently raising children together and were invited to talk about how current policies and some of the data from the two reports continue to affect their lives.

David Harris and Willie Porter are two African-American men who are married and have been together for seven years. Both men were previously married to women and fathered two children and one child, respectively. They raised Porter's son together and he recently left their home to attend college.

Marilyn Morales and Angela Diaz are partners in a Puerto Rican/Columbian same-sex household where they are raising three children. Because their children are younger in age than those of Harris and Porter, they shared different experiences about the challenges of parenting.

"We studied the report carefully and we both agree that our primary concern as a same-sex couple is healthcare," Harris said. "We are fortunate because we both work for companies that provide domestic-partnership coverage, but many others are not. Another challenge that Black same-sex couples face, particularly those with children, is access to housing that is in safe neighborhoods with quality education. Whites can sometimes separate their sexual orientation and their ethnicity but Blacks don't have that option. The majority of us tend to live in our own communities, not gay communities. And it's funny because while we own a home together in the south suburbs, I believe that most of our neighbors probably think we're heterosexual."

"When you have kids you have to be out," Morales added. "Our children are school-age, and so they are part of our everyday lives. It's an education for those around us and being in a home that is Puerto Rican and Columbian makes for a great deal of humor. Our greatest concern is that our children will face discrimination because of their



ABOVE: Mona Noriega, Angela Diaz, Marilyn Morales, and Jorge Valdivia. MIDDLE AND BELOW: folks enjoying the forum.



parents are gay, but often we find that discrimination comes because of our ethnicity."

"We have combined our financial assets and emphasized with those who sold us our cars and our home, that we were a same-sex couple," Porter said. "But we have had to do some much work in terms of putting things together in the event that one of us should die. It is important for both of us that should that occur, that the remaining partner will be able to maintain our current standard of living. It's much more difficult given the current laws in America for same-sex couples to do that."

"I remember one time I had to take our son Eliot [Morales' biological son] to the emergency room and when Marilyn [Morales] showed up, they

didn't want to let her in," Diaz said. "They didn't understand how our son could have two mothers. If we [were] allowed to legally marry, life would be so much more simple."

As the forum concluded, Morten asked each individual to do three things: talk to family, friends, co-workers and religious leaders about the importance of equal protection of the law for all families; host a discussion about the importance of equality for LGBT families for members of one's religious group, business or social network; and contact elected representatives and ask them to support full equality for LGBT families.

Two comments from the floor summed up the views of those who attended the forum.

"Marriage gives a couple almost

[1,200] privileges and we [gay couples] deserve every one of them, just like when we paid our taxes in full yesterday," said Vernita Gray.

"I'm a queer granny with a 32-year-old son," said Donna Rose. "Things are changing; I know that given the challenges I faced raising my son in a same-sex household. Fear is the thing that stopped so many of us from completing the surveys from the Census Bureau. And this discussion we're having tonight is not about the romantic aspects of love and marriage. It's about our deserving rights and privileges. I'm glad that we have made this start in bringing together African Americans and Latinos to share our similar concerns. And it's fitting that we should be in a place like the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum."



Panelist Angela Diaz, Marilyn Morales, David Harris and Willie Porter

# Black, Latino GLBT couples face heightened discrimination

BY GARY BARLOW  
STAFF WRITER

More than 125 people turned out at the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum April 18 for a discussion on discrimination and GLBT black and Latino families.

The discussion was sponsored by Lambda Legal, Affinity Community Services and other groups, and was based on two U.S. Census-driven reports compiled by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute. The reports used 2000 Census data to compare families headed by black and Latino same-sex couples with other families.

"This is the first time we really had concrete data," said the Coalition for Education on Sexual Orientation's Mary Morten, who moderated the discussion.

Two Chicago-area couples

related aspects of the NGLTF reports to their personal experiences and answered questions about their lives heading up families with children.

"When it comes to filing taxes, when it comes to going to the hospital...it just creates this mountain of issues that heterosexual couples don't even have to think about," said Angela Diaz, who parents three children with partner Marilyn Morales. "It's all based because we are not legally married. That would be so much easier."

Diaz and Morales, along with black gay male couple David Harris and Willie Porter, illustrate what the NGLTF gleaned from the Census data—that large numbers of black and Latino same-sex couples are raising children. That leads, the couples said, to dealing with unique issues.

"For me, and for both of us, one of the things that is most

important is probably health care," Harris said, saying he and Porter felt fortunate to have worked for companies that recognize domestic partners for health benefits.

But, Porter said, even that raises issues.

"It just pisses me off that we're paying double tax for our domestic partner benefits," he said.

Morales said that because their children are still in school, she and Diaz have to be out, squiring the children to various school-related functions and being involved with teachers and other parents.

"It's an educational experience for people," Morales said. "A lot of times we don't know if they're discriminating against us because we're lesbians, because we're Puerto Rican or because of Angela's thick accent."

She added that she and Diaz could handle the discrimina-

tion but carefully watch out to ensure that it isn't directed at their children.

"We can take it," Morales said.

The couples disagreed when asked whether they would be happy with civil unions legislation that gave them all the rights—more than 1,400 at the federal level alone—enjoyed by married heterosexuals.

"Call it whatever," Morales said. "I want those protections so call it whatever you want."

But Harris said he was in a heterosexual marriage once and wanted nothing less for himself and Porter.

"I know the power of the public statement," Harris said. "So in the end, marriage is probably the way to go, and that is probably what we should advocate and what we should want."