



## On the Eve of Pride Season 2008

Speech given by Rea Carey, Acting Executive Director  
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

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Good evening, D.C.! I extend my gratitude and congratulations to all of our awardees tonight, each of whom has made important contributions to our communities and our movement for full equality and dignity. Thank you!

We gather tonight having come from different experiences and perspectives. Some of us in this room are deeply immersed in LGBT culture and community; some of us only watch *The L Word* for a dose of lesbian life; some of us are fortunate enough to be "gay for pay" working for our communities; and others of us dedicate hours and hours of volunteer time to make sure people are fed, receive the treatment they deserve or can grow old with comfort and security. Tonight we welcome people who craft the laws of our land and people who work to make existing laws more fair.

Yes, we are all different, but the Task Force believes that it is our *different* experiences that make our movement strong and powerful. And, we believe that we all have one thing in common — each of us here wants to live our lives with freedom and dignity. We want to play, to work, to love, to create meaning for each other. Ensuring that we can live in freedom and dignity — individually and together as a community — is the foundational work of the Task Force.

For those of us who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, there is one time of year when we take center stage — that is Pride season, which is upon us. Now, I confess to having mixed feelings about Pride festivals. They are often too hot or too rainy, exhausting and over-stimulating. But after seeing a few hundred rainbow flags and men in kilts and kids in strollers, signing dozens of petitions, crying when I see the beloved PFLAG contingent in the parades, and of course, repeatedly singing "We are family," I come back to this:

For a people who, for the most part, cannot learn LGBT history or culture from our schools or our families, I marvel at how we honor our past and celebrate the extraordinary beauty of our communities. We pay homage to the brave and the bold who said "enough" when the police raided the Stonewall Bar 39 years ago — the catalyst for our annual Pride celebrations. We honor the drag queens at the Stonewall Inn (most of whom were black or Latino) and the many other people who showed us how to shed our fears and live our fabulousness. We are indeed a creative and resilient people.

On the political front, our progress toward LGBT equality since the 1969 Stonewall Riots is nothing short of astounding.

In 1969, not a *single* law protected lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people from discrimination. Today, over half the nation's population lives in a jurisdiction that outlaws

discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Our work since that time has also resulted in nearly 40 percent of the population living in a jurisdiction that prohibits discrimination against people on the basis of gender identity and expression — these laws benefit me as a lesbian with short hair who likes to wear suits as much as it does our transgender friends.

Marriage equality and family recognition in 1969? Few dared dream it. Today — knowing that the struggle for full family equality is not over — marriage is legal in Massachusetts and one in five of us lives in a place that offers most of the protections for same-sex couples that straight couples enjoy.

Far from being stalled out, our progress is accelerating: 2007 was the best legislative year ever in states across the country on issues of nondiscrimination, anti-bullying, gender identity protections and comprehensive protections for same-sex couples.

I am proud of the work the Task Force has done over the last 35 years to make all of this change happen. Your support of the Task Force supports our work to create durable and enduring change.

Even with all the Task Force has accomplished in 35 years, when Matt Foreman and then I came to the Task Force a number of years ago, we faced the challenge of bringing more cohesion and focus to the work of the organization. We met that challenge by reengineering the Task Force to focus on *concrete outcomes* that benefit our community while staying true to our values.

Let me give you three examples:

As part of the long fight for **marriage equality in California**, we've worked with the Equality for All field campaign to identify pro-marriage voters to defeat an anti-marriage constitutional amendment that could be on the November 2008 ballot in California. Throughout February, March and April, we had eight staff on the ground leading a last-ditch campaign to try to keep the other side from collecting enough signatures to qualify for the ballot. We went toe to toe against the opposition's signature gatherers, wherever they showed up, from strip malls to Wal-Marts. While the other side screamed epithets, pushed and shoved staff and volunteers, our team held their ground and kept going day after day. No matter how long this fight goes on for marriage in California, the Task Force will keep on fighting for victory in California and building tangible, long-term support among voters in the state.

Also, last fall, as many of you may have heard, we led an unprecedented coalition of more than 350 organizations called **United ENDA**, formed to advocate for an inclusive federal employment non-discrimination law that covers all members of our community — including those who are transgender.

Through the United ENDA campaign our grassroots movement flexed its muscle and the Hill took note. We were told repeatedly by House members that they had never, ever heard from our community in such numbers and with such passion. We were relentless and as a result, House leadership had to defer taking action on the broken ENDA not once, not twice, not three times, but on four separate occasions.

Out of the pain and turmoil of the ENDA fight, the powers that be on the Hill now understand that our community is represented by many organizations that all have the power to make a difference — on the ground across the country, and here in Washington, D.C. The power dynamics of our movement have shifted profoundly.

We now have a responsibility to spend this year working district by district to make sure that every member of Congress understands why it's so essential — to transgender *and* to gay, lesbian and bisexual Americans — that ENDA include gender identity protections. There's a lot of work left to do, and the Task Force is ready to roll up our sleeves, and do the hard work to reach our goals.

Finally, our think tank, the **Task Force Policy Institute**, makes sure our publications don't just sit on a shelf. In January 2007, our Policy Institute released a report on the national epidemic of homelessness among LGBT youth. The report has gotten a lot of media coverage, but more importantly, by using the report, we played a key role in increasing federal appropriations for runaway and homeless youth by \$10.5 million — the first increase in six years. Also, with the generous support and partnership of the Fannie Mae Foundation, we provided training on the issues facing LGBT youth to dozens of D.C.-area youth-service providers so that youth under their care can be respected and understood for who they are. We will continue to make sure that vulnerable youth are getting the services they deserve.

And, you haven't seen anything yet!

In the coming year, The Task Force will train hundreds of local and state activists through our **Academy for Leadership and Action**. We will teach our colleagues to raise money, to build campaigns and to increase the strength of their organizations to achieve *specific* political goals.

The Task Force will speak out when elected officials, faith leaders or others in the public sphere defame our lives for their gains.

The Task Force Policy Institute will bring together the greatest minds in our movement and elsewhere to wrestle with the critical issues of our day; put forth new ways of thinking, new ways of talking and new ways of envisioning our future.

And, the Task Force will re-commit to and ask our colleagues to commit to a reinvigorated LGBT effort to combat AIDS and HIV.

We will take leadership in ensuring that the HIV/AIDS and LGBT movements come back together again in the same room to confront the continued challenges we face and that we have neglected.

Here in Washington and around the United States and the world, we look forward to a new presidential administration. Yes, friends, in 261 days, we will have a new president and the most anti-LGBT, disastrous presidency in our nation's history will end. And that will be a very good thing for all of us.

No matter whom is the next president in the White House, our communities come to the table with a specific agenda. So, Madame or Mister President, here is what we expect of you:

- Repeal the Defense of Marriage Act in its entirety and repeal “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.”
- End the funding of abstinence-only programs.
- Focus energy and dollars on HIV education, prevention and treatment programs that work, especially for African-American and Latino gay and bisexual men, and other people of color.
- Repeal all laws and policies that restrict a woman’s right to make decisions about her own body.
- And, clean out every federal agency of ideological lemmings whose actions have worsened the lives of LGBT people, women, people of color, poor people, working people and immigrants.

And, we will go even further as we work with the next administration. As some have said, and the Task Force believes, "*Legal* equality is not the ceiling, it is the floor." Let me say that again, legal equality is not the ceiling, it is the floor. The Task Force won't stop at the ground floor.

This, folks, is a big agenda. It requires us reaching out and working with and for “other” causes such as labor, reproductive justice, civil rights — as never before. This is not only the right thing to do, it is critical we do it. Working together will not only help up to achieve LGBT advances, but also to achieve our shared vision for a transformed America.

We have in front of us an opportunity that we must not squander: to work for a better and more just society, arm in arm with other communities. We gather here not simply to re-write laws, but to improve the society in which we live. We want a world where all can live and all can thrive. Winning complete equality for all of us is not only possible, it is inevitable and together we will make it happen.

The reason we will succeed in improving our society is because of *your* support, and I thank you. I guarantee you — because I sign the checks — that we put every single dollar to good use.

I promise that we will not slow down, we will not pause in our pursuit of equality and social justice, and that you can count on us to well serve *you* and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. So, now, friends, as we head into Pride season and the rest of this election year, let us celebrate the joys in life, the joys of our communities, show our fabulousness and do the most courageous thing of all — live our lives and be true to who we are!

Thank you!