



## **Creating Change: Notes From the Front Line**

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by Jamie Tyroler

I'm sitting in my hotel room in Detroit watching Countdown with Keith Olbermann and thinking about how the **2008 Creating Change Conference** has gone so far. It has been much different from the 2006 conference at the Westin Crown Center in Kansas City – for one thing, it is in a much larger venue, the Renaissance Center, part of which is the world headquarters of General Motors. The RenGen is a complex of four towers surrounding a 70-plus story round tower. Of the three Creating Change conferences I've attended, two were in tall, circular buildings (St. Louis Millennium Hotel and RenGen in Detroit). In Kansas City, the tall round building was across the street. I'm not saying that there's a tendency for Creating Change to be held in phallic-shaped buildings, but...

In both Kansas City and Detroit, I attended daylong institutes to discuss racism. This year's institute was about building community and solidarity. We looked at white privilege and the tendency of some white-run organizations to try to "help" people who are racial minorities. This makes the assumption that the organization knows what needs to be done without the input of the people whom the group wants to help.

Other differences include the mistress of ceremonies, comedian Kate Clinton, who seems to be having fun – especially when one of the TVs showed the news about Mitt Romney suspending his run for the presidency. The moving opening plenary speech was given by Julian Bond, chairman of the NAACP, the first president of the Southern Poverty Law Center, and one of the organizers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which played a major role in the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. Bond said that "freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation is a fundamental human right."

The second day, I attended a daylong workshop on trans health issues. The presenters included Mara Keisling, the executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality in Washington, who recently spoke at a PROMO Town Hall meeting; Cole Thaler from Lambda Legal in Atlanta; and Lisa Mottet, the Transgender Civil Rights Project director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in Washington.

**On Friday, Matt Foreman, the outgoing executive director of the Task Force, gave his State of the Movement Address.** He prefaced his remarks by saying, "No matter what, in 347 days we will have a new president and the most anti-LGBT, corrupt, lying, disastrous administration in the history of our nation will come to an end."

Since Creating Change was in Kansas City in 2006, four states (Iowa, New Jersey, Maryland, and California) have passed laws to combat bullying and harassment of young people in public schools. Nearly 20 towns and cities passed nondiscrimination laws -- all but one were trans-inclusive.

Three states enacted trans-inclusive nondiscrimination laws – Iowa, Colorado, and Oregon. Two additional states, New Jersey and Vermont, added gender-identity protections to their nondiscrimination laws.

In 2006, the Institute for Welcoming Resources became an official part of the Task Force, and it has helped to double the number of welcoming and affirming congregations.

In spite of all the positive news, a lot of issues still need to be addressed. Discrimination against gay, lesbian, and bisexual people is still legal in 30 states, 37 for transgender people.

Forty percent of all homeless youth are LGBT.

More than 45 percent of African American gay and bisexual men in key urban areas are HIV-positive, with a 33 percent increase in African American gay and bi men under the age of 30. African American men now are 10 times more likely to be diagnosed with AIDS than whites. Almost 130 interventions have been designed and approved by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to address HIV for the African American community, but only one has been designed for gay black men.

Recently in Detroit, a transgender woman was shot in the back of the head and her body was thrown into an alley. Like so many transgender murder victims, she was labeled by the police as a "known prostitute." Foreman used this example to call for supporting a trans-inclusive Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). He also talked about the failure of trying to obtain

Foreman also stated that if we want to pass an inclusive ENDA anytime soon, we have to work with U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi, U.S. Rep. Barney Frank and the Human Rights Campaign. We cannot move forward if we remain divided and engage in sniping among organizations. Over the next year, we need to focus on passing an inclusive ENDA.

According to Foreman, we cannot “go hat in hand, like supplicants on bended knee and be ever so grateful if we finally get one federal law to protect us.” He said that he was “deeply concerned that if we don’t really work hard now and assuming we have a better Congress and administration in 2009 — that the broken ENDA will pass in the spring and there will be a fancy White House signing ceremony in June — in connection with Pride Month, of course — and powers that be will say, ‘We’ve taken care of those people for the next four years.’ ”

Foreman wrapped up with this positive note, “I know now more than ever – winning complete equality isn’t only possible, it’s inevitable, and you’re going to make it happen.”