



Foreman's State of the Movement Address: Still progress to be made

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To **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman**, positive change in the LGBT movement always starts locally. At his State of the Movement Address last Saturday at the **Creating Change Conference**, as he shot off detail after detail about the progress made for gay rights in 2007, he made one thing clear: Local activism was the driving force. "Who made all of this happen? You did," he said, addressing the audience.

Foreman, who is leaving the NGLTF in April to lead the Gay and Lesbian Program at the Evelyn and Walter Hass, Jr. Fund, called 2007 one of the most productive years in the movement. From four states passing anti-bullying laws to 20 cities passing non-discrimination laws, it was a big year for local policy changes - even though the national policy has been at somewhat of a standstill. But to Foreman, that's ok, because local support will eventually mean majority support. "Equality truly does begin at home in our towns, cities and states," he stressed.

In addition to those developments, Foreman celebrated the fact that 40 percent of U.S. states now protect gender identity, and 52 percent of the country now supports non-discrimination laws. However, he said, there is still a long way to go. "We've only taken a few steps down the road toward complete equality," he emphasized. "We've only laid the foundation."

Among the issues still needing to be addressed were non-discrimination policies, which are non-existent in 30 states for gays and lesbians and 37 for transsexuals. As for federal law, Foreman noted that not a single law is in place that nationally protects LGBT rights except hate crime laws. One of the largest issues - and, unintentionally, the most controversial that Foreman brought up - was that of HIV/AIDS. According to Foreman, more than 45 percent of black, gay men in urban areas are infected with HIV, while only one out of the 129 federal funding approvals in the past 26 years addressing HIV/AIDS went directly toward that group. Moreover, said Foreman, 70 percent of the people in America infected with HIV are gay or bisexual. "We cannot deny that this is a gay disease," he said adamantly. "We have to own up to it and face it."

Foreman also presented the idea of "the LGBT exception," which proves true in cases like U.S. Senator Larry Craig, who was prosecuted for soliciting sex in a men's bathroom at an airport. Though others who committed adultery were accepted back with into the Senate with open arms, "Larry Craig was shunned when he came back," Foreman argued. "That's the LGBT exception. Foreman spoke at length about the past failures of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which has gone from being an all-inclusive bill to being one that excludes transgender people and exempts religious institutions from following it. The changes made, argued Foreman, were in response to a hypothetical republican maneuver to shoot the bill down that never actually happened. In other words, proponents of the bill took out pieces of it without being provoked by anything but fear that it wouldn't pass. "Is there something wrong with that?" Foreman spat angrily. "You fucking bet."

"What do I say to my trans friends about this?" he continued. "That you're not part of my family? I can't say that. We are one community. We are one people."

Luckily, he said, there is a solution: Unity. By mobilizing and empowering the whole LGBT community and working with other communities, Foreman believes that bigger, more drastic changes are possible.

"We are at a critical movement moment," Foreman said. "This is a moment when we can see the possibility of meaningful change. It feels like we can make it happen."

"What are we going to do with this amazing moment?" he asked. "Are we going to seize it or let it fade away? Are we going to be satisfied with the few crumbs they drop in our laps or are we going to demand more?" The audience's response, an uproarious standing ovation, said it all: We want more.