



We need an ACT UP for LGBT rights, Foreman says

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by Eric Resnick

“What has hurt our movement for about a decade is the lack of an ACT UP for LGBT rights,” said National Gay and Lesbian Task Force director Matt Foreman in a private interview with the *Gay People’s Chronicle* after his state of the movement speech.

The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power was known in the 1980s and ’90s for direct action demonstrations.

However, “the primary voice in Washington, D.C. has been the Human Rights Campaign, an insider organization,” Foreman said.

“If you’re on the inside, you can’t be beating down the doors,” he noted, adding that there is currently “no LGBT progressive flank pushing the envelope.”

“After the push, the people in suits can walk in and get more,” Foreman said. “That’s how it worked with ACT UP. It was all planned that way.”

Foreman said that during his tenure, the Task Force established a presence on Capitol Hill with four lobbyists in order to bolster the policy work being done there.

“There have only been four earmarks to fund LGBT organizations,” Foreman said. “That’s not enough.”

He noted there are two levels of governmental work that must be done for LGBT rights.

“There’s no disagreement on the statutory part,” Foreman said. “Passing ENDA, ending ‘don’t ask don’t tell,’ passing federal domestic partner benefits, and the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act.”

“If we had a Congress and an administration dedicated to us, this part could be done rather quickly,” Foreman said.

Foreman said a big reason why that hasn’t happened is that LGBT people working in the electoral arena aren’t asking for enough, are asking for the wrong things, or are looking for political appointments and don’t want to make waves.

“They need to ask for attainable, specific things, not just ‘do you support such and such legislation,’ ” Foreman said.

The other piece is policies.

“There are hundreds of things the executive branch could do,” Foreman said, observing that people are not raising these with the presidential candidates.

“For example, every federal agency governs its own minority business procurement policies. A president could, through executive order, say that LGBT people are a minority for procurement purposes.”

“Even if it was only a fraction of money spent,” Foreman said, “imagine the change.”

The LGBT community has been too focused on “marquee issues” and “haven’t picked the low-hanging fruit,” he said.

Foreman said that the LGBT political donor community needs to be more assertive with candidates.

As to why that’s been difficult to do, he commented, “Lots of gays come to this with low self-esteem and low expectations. If the person in power shakes their hand, they substitute that for something tangible.”

“The earlier leaders of our movement had higher expectations than the current ones,” he concluded.