

## Exclusive interview: Outgoing Executive Director Matt Foreman reflects on Task Force, South Florida's LGBT community

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BY STEVE ROTH AUS

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force for five years, is stepping down this month to lead the Gay & Lesbian Program at the Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund in San Francisco.

"They give more money to the gay community than any foundation that is not gay," said Foreman, who joined the Task Force in 2003.

When the Gay Foundation of South Florida went out of business a year later, the Task Force bought its biggest assets: the fundraising Winter Party Festival and fall recognition dinner.

The events still are primarily staffed by local volunteers and two-thirds of the profits stay in South Florida, helping fund the many LGBT groups in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties.

"The majority of the money we raise stays here to build our grassroots strength. That's a Task Force value," Foreman said. "Every dollar we raise in California stays in California. Outside of New York, there is not one state that we take more money than what we put in."

During the past four years, Foreman has gotten to meet and work with dozens of South Florida activists.

"One of the highlights of my tenure at the Task Force, and there have been many, many, is becoming involved with the Miami-Dade LGBT community and meeting so many involved, dedicated people," Foreman told me recently. "You see 30 or 40 people who give so much of their lives to keep these events going. It's something I hope the people in Miami-Dade know -- that it's a unique treasure. I travel all around the country and the dedication and devotion so many people have is really inspiring."

Foreman said that attendance at this year's Winter Party in March was up. "Given what people were saying about the future of the event a few year's ago, and the [national] economic downturn, it speaks to the spirit of the event."

Having served longer than any other Task Force executive director, Foreman reflects on his greatest disappointments and accomplishments.

First, the low points:



- "The loss of 13 anti-marriage amendments in 2004," he said. "It wasn't just that we lost them, but so few of our allies came to our assistance."
- The division, the breakdown around ENDA was profoundly disturbing. We were utterly betrayed by our allies in Congress, by other civil-rights organizations," Foreman said. "It was the most painful, but it was not a complete loss. The grassroots community flexed its strength like never before. Congress will never again think that one organization or person speaks for our community.

His greatest accomplishments:

- "We've beaten the Right's attempt to overturn nondiscrimination laws in Maine, Oregon, Washington state, Topeka, Cincinnati to name a few. That's one area of work I'm very proud of."
- Another area is the work of our policy institute in focusing public attention on issues including the epidemic of homelessness among LGBT youth, understanding the challenges faced by same-sex African-American and Latino families."
- "I'm very proud that the Task Force is the only national gay-rights organization that focuses on racial and economic justice, reproductive choice and sexual freedom."

Foreman thanks the Task Force board for giving him the freedom to speak out on controversial issues.

"Because of our donor base, I felt so privileged to speak the truth about these issues. Many other organizations can't speak bluntly or have the freedom to speak bluntly. Our board and our donors go for it," he said. "When Jerry Falwell died and Ronald Reagan died, we said we feel sorry for their families, but these people caused enormous harm and pain to our community and we're not going to be quiet about it."