

Gay Movement Charts Future at Creating Change



Surrender? Never!

Creating Change Keynote Speech

By Matt Foreman
Guest Contributor

I don't know about you, but in the days leading up to the election I was really optimistic and I kept playing this fantasy in my mind. It came, naturally for me anyway, from the Wizard of Oz — it went something like this. [photographic image on screen]

Now, with the wicked witch very much alive, 11 states adopting anti-gay state constitutional amendments, and foes, friends and pundits blaming gay people for Kerry's loss or demanding to know why we engaged on marriage at all, I'm seeing another scene from Oz... [photographic image on screen here]

In reality, it's not a bad analogy. What do we do now? Surrender and cower? Fight on? Or take a new course?

Before giving my thoughts on that, a few things need to be said. First off, there's no putting lipstick on this ugly pig. The Bush Administration and its frontal assault on our community will go on for another four painful years. Sadly, on November 2, fourteen

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First and largest post-election lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) gathering draws more than 2,500 participants

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) held its 17th Annual Creating Change Conference November 10-14 in St. Louis, MO.

This year's conference followed the presidential election by eight days — as intensely watched an election as most of us will ever experience. LGBT equality leaders gathered at Creating Change to chart future resistance to four more years of the most anti-gay administration in history.

"Our movement needs to regroup and buckle down," said Sue Hyde, director of the Creating Change conference.

"There's a lot to figure out." It's tough when "the vast majority of citizens in your state not only do not understand you but take hostile steps to change the constitution to take away rights we never even had," Matt Foreman, executive director of NGLTF, said.

Foreman said the gay rights movement cannot retreat from working for social and legal rights, though the battle is "extremely uphill."

He and other organizers at the conference said they may not be able to change political leaders, and they see no point in talking to what they call "Anti-Gay Inc." — to them, a right-wing, anti-gay leadership whose mission is "to demonize us."

Hyde said organizers believe the state measures passed by voters will be interpreted very broadly to prohibit recognition of gay and lesbian relationships and families.

"Our movement has short-sightedly focused its efforts in Washington, DC, while the state and local organizations who are on the ground changing hearts and minds and winning the concrete victories that move us forward have been badly under-resourced," said Ian Palmquist, co-executive director of Equality NC.

"The hard lessons of this election have made it clear that we have work to do in every state."

"We have to engage our neighbors



Phyllis Lyon is presented with a birthday cake as her partner of more than 50 years, Del Martin, and Task Force staff Rodney McKenzie, Jason Cooper and MO Representative Jeanette Mott Oxford look on. Photo by Linda Kliever

and co-workers in a deep conversation about our humanity, and the need to be able to take care of our families," Hyde said.

She said they also need to build stronger relationships with other groups working for social change.

Building Infrastructure

Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, lesbian pioneer activists and together for more than 50 years, were the featured opening night speakers and the recipients of the Creating Change Award, which read, "You spoke the unspeakable, you wrote the unthinkable. You lived openly and proudly as a loving couple long before a movement would stand with you."

Lyon and Martin founded the legendary Daughters of Bilitis, published the country's first lesbian magazine, *The Ladder*, and served as the first openly lesbian delegates to the White House Conference on Aging in 1995.

The award was preceded by the Women's Educational Media film, "One Wedding and a Revolution."

Lyon and Martin told the crowd it was only a matter of time before federal law recognizes the rights of gays and lesbians, and added, "we must keep in mind how hard we must work to create

change."

City of St. Louis Ward 18 Alderman Terry Kennedy ignited the crowd in his welcoming remarks by calling on the commonality of traditionally marginalized community's struggles saying in part, "The same mentality that will bomb innocent people, will also discriminate against women and people of color. They will discriminate based on someone's sexual orientation or based on economics. We must perceive a progressive movement that does not allow us to isolate each other."

Task Force board of directors co-chairs Beth Zemsy and Jeff Soref started the conversation about our community thinking and taking action together.

Soref said in part, "We will not allow them to drive a wedge between us or deny our families rights — we must think strategically to create and bring about change."

Zemsy added, "The movement of social change is about building infrastructure — for life and for love, we are not going back."

Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman made remarks honoring the campaign leaders in attendance from the eleven states that faced anti-gay bal-

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