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Task Force Executive Director Rea Carey presents State of the Movement address

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by taskforceblog



Task Force Executive Director Rea Carey presented the annual State of the Movement address today at Creating Change.

What follows is the full text of Carey's speech:



After the ups, and the downs, of this past year, I've found myself at times angry, tired and saddened yet also excited and hopeful.

And today, I stand with you, not defeated but rather energized and focused.

Today I am ready for change — and I know you are too.

Peter LaBarbera, president of the right-wing, so-called Americans for Truth about Homosexuality, said in a communication to his members last July, "The gay movement has made significant headway through personal instruction and firsthand training...We're completely outgunned...They've got the Creating Change conference from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force train(ing) thousands of people per year."

Well, Peter LaBarbera, here we are. And, yes, once again you are outnumbered!

You are outnumbered by the over 2,500 people here and the thousands of others who are following this conference online all over the world.

We've been through a lot in the 38 years since the Task Force was founded. We've faced tough times before but we will not stop until we create the necessary change to live our lives freely!

Welcome everyone to Creating Change 2011!

I am so happy to be back in Minneapolis because Minneapolis and St. Paul have led the nation in standing up and declaring that LGBT people are equal. And, Minneapolis is the Task Force's home too, with an office and our faith program staff based here.

We're going to talk a lot this weekend about community. About building a community, about expanding our community, about being a community and about leading as a community.

Our national culture of divide and conquer has taken us to the brink. This year on too many occasions, as a nation, we've looked over the edge. It's time we together take a step back; make that, a few steps back.

We do have a choice.

We can choose change.

We can show this country what real community looks like.

As you've heard, we have with us this weekend many of our brothers and sisters who do their work through organizing in communities of faith. A focus of this weekend will be on building stronger ties with the faith community, bridging the faith and secular worlds, and developing a vision that will enable us to move forward together.



For me, being an activist — a secular activist — devoting myself to the higher purpose of working for LGBT freedom and equality, for human rights, is very much a spiritual practice.

Activism connects us to each other, to those we've never met and those of future generations who will benefit from our actions and our work.

I have faith in social change. Faith in all of us in this room and across the country who will not take no for an answer, who will not tolerate abuses of basic human rights; and who have proven again and again that change is possible.

For many, faith is believing in the unseen.

It is confidence, that what we hope for and aspire to, will come to be.

Now I don't have to tell you, the LGBT community is a group that knows a lot about faith.

We cling to it every day, to the belief in things yet unseen. Despite the barriers, despite the ups and downs, we keep steady on our march, our eyes ever on the prize.

It's our faith in the promise of this country and the goodness of people that keeps us going.

Even when the full extent of that promise remains unseen.

We hold fast.

We still believe.

It's proven a hard march, but one that others have taken successfully before us. It's in their footsteps that we travel — confident that their outcomes can also be ours.

And that in time, our footsteps too will help others.

And that if we persevere, if we keep our faith, if we stay strong and unified, if we stay true to what we struggle for — we will be rewarded.

We've seen it before — right here in Minnesota.

In 1974, 37 years ago, Minneapolis passed a nondiscrimination ordinance covering sexual orientation. Then a year later, that law was revised to include transgender people. Finally, after gaining and then losing protections, St. Paul secured LGBT protections for good in 1990.

Also in 1990, the Task Force held Creating Change right here in Minneapolis.



It helped local organizers galvanize attention, energy and organizing power, and in 1993 the first-ever statewide, inclusive nondiscrimination law was passed.

Thank you, Minnesota, for showing the country what a community can do.

Minnesotans know how to stand up for equality and know how to stand up to those who would deny us freedom — and I can't wait to see what happens after this year's conference.

In the coming months, Minnesota may be called to stand up to those who want to deny our relationships and our families by attempting to ban marriage and to those who seek to make English the state-sanctioned language; and to those who want to repeal fair pay laws for women and to ban state funding for abortion services.

And we will be called to stand with Minnesota — and we will.

It has been quite a year since we last came together.

I'll be the first to admit that this has been a challenging year.

I know many of us come here this week frustrated and angry and perhaps a bit nervous about what this year will bring. Wondering about the direction of our movement.

And there's nothing wrong with being angry.

When a majority denies the basic humanity of a minority, being angry is understandable. More than that, it's to be expected.

But let's use our frustration and anger — and our passion, our creativity, our desire for justice — and channel it for good.

For those of us who have been in this movement for decades, we know that we have seen better times, but, we also know that we've seen worse times.

Far worse times.

Times in this country when we were more isolated than we are now.

Times when we weren't in a place to argue over whether this legislative path or that path is the best way to reach legal equality — there was no visible path.

Times when our thousands of queer youth groups, campus groups, political organizations, social clubs, HIV/AIDS and health service organizations and out elected officials didn't exist.

They just didn't exist.



In the last 10 years alone, we've made significant progress.

In 2000, there were just 700 Gay-Straight Alliances in high schools. Today, there are over 4,000. And, LGBT-inclusion in anti-bullying policies is now considered a "best practice" by the U.S. Department of Education.

In 2000, just about half a percent of Fortune 500 companies protected workers based on gender identity. Today, over 43 percent do. And 89 percent of Fortune 500 companies include sexual orientation in their nondiscrimination policies.

Today, there are now over 1,000 appointed and elected officials around the world — over 700 of them in the U.S. alone.

And just three short years ago, federal policies were littered with discrimination and ignored our lives. But even there we've made progress.

And look around you; this is one of the largest Creating Change conferences ever.

Think we're backing down? Think we're pressing pause?

Not a chance.

Yes, we have more to accomplish, more to push for. But, like those who have gone before us to get us to this place, we must always have a vision for more.

We will never give up. We will never allow our anger to turn into apathy; never allow our frustration to turn into fear.

Yes, this year has been a bit of a rollercoaster.

But, now is not the time to get off the ride. This is it, this is the work, this is the movement forward. And sometimes moving forward includes highs and lows, peaks and valleys.

This last year, we felt the high of repealing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." And we felt the low of our nation's elected leaders failing to pass the DREAM Act.

We experienced the strength of standing side by side with our friends in the labor, feminist and civil rights movements for the One Nation rally, calling attention to the need for jobs and economic justice.

And, we experienced the depths of despair as more LGBT young people were harassed and bullied to death and of hearing that our brother in this work, David Kato, was murdered just last week — violence that has been fueled by U.S.-based evangelicals fanning the flames of homophobia in Uganda. Workers for human rights across the globe literally risk their lives.

To all of our brothers and sisters working for change in Uganda, our hearts are with you and we stand beside you as we all



fight state-sanctioned violence, discrimination and religious bigotry, here and abroad.

Up and down, high and low — it's the nature of the struggle for human rights, for LGBT civil rights.

But the harder we work, the more committed we remain, the stronger we will be and the more peaks we will see in our future.

Consider what we accomplished just this year:

Once again, those opposed to our equality tried to take away basic LGBT nondiscrimination protections in Bowling Green, Ohio. But, once again, like we did the year before in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and the year before that in Gainesville, Florida — we waged a grassroots campaign, faced down attacks, and we won.

Well done, Ohio.

And in over 15 towns — towns like Missoula, Montana; Taylorsville, Utah; and Haverford, Pennsylvania — organizers were successful in passing trans-inclusive nondiscrimination laws.

We've seen again and again that grassroots power, time-tested and increasingly sophisticated campaigning, and neighbors talking to neighbors, always win the day.

As we've long said at the Task Force, "Equality Begins At Home!"

Congratulations to all the local and state organizations and grassroots organizers for the wins this year.

And, on the federal level, the Task Force and our partner organizations in our New Beginning Initiative have succeeded in gaining protections for some of the most vulnerable in our community and at some of the most vulnerable moments we face.

Moments like when your partner goes to the hospital, sick or hurt and needs you at her side. One year ago, we could be barred at the door. Now, because of a presidential order, 90 percent of hospitals must let us in to be with our loved ones.

One year ago, LGBT families in need could be turned away by a homophobic gatekeeper as they applied for public housing or a home loan. But just this month, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced numerous changes that will protect LGBT people as we seek the basic human right of shelter for ourselves and our families.

Now some people call this piecemeal progress.

I say this isn't piecemeal if you are poor, or elderly, or need a roof over your head, or don't want to experience the indignity of contorting our family realities into a government form that once only gave you the choice of mother and father.

This progress isn't piecemeal. It's powerful.



And it moves us forward as a people and a society.

And, of course, we had a big success in the 11th hour of the 2010 congressional session.

After generations of hiding pictures of each other and writing love letters in coded language;

After generations of service members' partners not being allowed the dignity to know whether their partners are safe or have died, because the military didn't recognize their love;

After generations of being asked to risk their lives while being forced to lie;

After 17 years of working to overturn an immoral law...

My friends, we succeeded in overturning "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

I would like to ask all service members, veterans and their family members to please stand or raise your hand if you are able.

And, for married couples in the military, we know our work is not complete for you until we overturn the so-called Defense of Marriage Act. For our transgender friends, we know our work is not complete until you too are able to serve.

We also know that our work is not finished until people with low incomes, people of color and young immigrants have other ways to secure their futures than by joining the military.

This is our work too.





This year the LGBT community showed that we care about the many issues that affect our lives — jobs and economic security; social security, immigration; and in health-care reform work — which, by the way, will benefit more LGBT people than any LGBT-specific legislation we've been working on. As you know, health-care reform is under attack and we must let our voices be heard.

When you take a step back, and take a look, this is remarkable progress.

But this is only part of the story, only part of the change.

Every day, there are individual people who are creating change in ways that are truly inspiring.

This year, as I was working on this speech, I asked people across the country to send me a message about how they are creating change.

Hundreds of you responded.

People like the Rev. Judith Hanlon, who along with her friend, attorney Lisa Weinberg, formed a community organization that supports LGBT asylum seekers. So far, they have helped 22 people from countries, including El Salvador, Iraq, Uganda and Cameroon. Judith, who describes herself as “straight, suburban, religious and passionate,” is with us here today.

People like Des Shelton and Sarah Lindstrom who live right here and wanted to walk together in their school's Snow Day



celebration. Des and Sarah had been elected by their classmates to join the royalty contingent at the celebration. School officials quickly declared that no students would walk with other students, breaking a long tradition in order to deny Des and Sarah their request to march together. Des and Sarah, with help from legal organizations and advocates, fought back and the school officials reconsidered, inviting all students to walk with other students, including Des and Sarah. Des, Sarah and some of their classmates are attending Creating Change this week.

People like Lori Buckwalter, a radio programmer in the Northwest, who came out as a transgender woman on the air six months ago. Recently, a woman told Lori that her coming out had “saved a friend’s life” — a trans woman who despaired to come out and was suicidal. Lori wrote to me, “This may not be a huge change — just one precious life — but I’m as proud and happy as I could be to have given hope.”

People like Carole Stoneking, a 73-year-old woman from South Carolina, who came out in 1956 when she was 19 years old. As an OLOCer, an “Old Lesbian Organizing for Change,” she is making sure that women over 60 know there is an organization that cares about them. She has had both hips replaced, both wrists replaced, both cataracts removed, and she keeps on going. Carole is with us here today.

And, people like Tony Perri and his grandson, who shared their experiences through National Public Radio’s Story Corp, of growing up gay in the ‘40s and ‘50s and in the ‘90s and 2000s — both as out gay men. Their stories are now part of the Library of Congress archives. Tony is with us here today.

Judith, Lori, Des & Sarah, Carole and Tony...you are my heroes.

To those here with us and to those elsewhere who create change every day — thank you!

But, what really is our vision for change?

How high can we reach?

That’s up to us.

As for those who oppose us, who want to hold us down and back, they have less to say about what we achieve than we do.

And that means we — right here in this room and listening at home — we can be either the architects of our freedom or the silent witnesses of lost opportunity.

Our path...the vision of our future...we decide.

But we must be careful.

If we decide our movement is about just one issue or a few issues then we will have trapped ourselves with self-imposed



and limited expectations.

We cannot just be about marriage or military service or immigration fairness — we must be about all these things and more.

Our movement must be interconnected with others, not single-issue focused.

Our goal cannot be one issue, nor even a brief checklist.

Our sights must be set beyond what most consider to be equality.

Our goal must be unconditional justice. A transformed society.

And to achieve that, we must work differently.

When there is a victory, yes, we can breathe it, savor it, but then immediately we must ask, “What’s next?”

That must be our vision for the future, and that must become what we expect from ourselves, from each other, from our leaders and from our movement.

I believe that one day we will have a gay president.

I believe that one day we will have a lesbian president.

I believe that one day we will have a bisexual president.

I believe that one day we will have a transgender president.

Quick, check your reaction to what I’ve just said.

Do you believe me? Do you agree?

I’m sure, even right here in this room, our reactions range the spectrum from, “She’s full of it,” to “Not in my lifetime” to “Yes!” and somebody who’s daring to think “Maybe that will be me.”

I’m not saying being the president is the ultimate in demonstrating freedom. But in this country it does speak to a level of change, of public support, of possibility. It speaks to our expectations.

If we can’t believe it, we certainly can’t achieve it.

If we don’t believe in our power to transform society, it won’t happen.

We must define what is possible, not let society do that for us. Or to us.

So let me say this again — I believe that one day we will have a gay, lesbian, bi or trans president.



I believe this because of what I've seen.

In just the last few years, our movement has made extraordinary progress. We are no longer just an LGBT movement but a broader human rights movement, and that has meant — and will mean — an evolution in both our expectations and our composition.

For many years, PFLAG has shown us that you don't have to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender to fight for LGBTQ rights. In the last few years, we've seen an explosion of straight allies who claim LGBT freedom and equality as their fight too.

And following the recent midterm elections, in the next couple years, we're going to need our friends more than ever.

For us, the next year will be a time when we focus on broadening our community and alliances, when we work together to strengthen our relationships and when we work together with our friends to lift both ourselves and them.

Congress is going to be less receptive, but we've been there before. In what was thought the best of times or the worst of times, we've always made progress.

But, in particular, we've always made progress in building our grassroots power and making positive change happen for LGBT people at the local and state level.

Our movement has been built on more than 40 years of sacrifice and commitment; we've been through too much to ever let one election or one referendum or one Tea Party stop us.

The end of DADT didn't just happen. Its roots can be traced back decades. Its demise was foreshadowed by the racial integration of the military and women being able to serve alongside men.

And that's the way of social change — it stands on the shoulders of and bears the fingerprints of those who came before us.

And so even now, when many think the tide is flowing against us, our progress will not be stopped.

We will set our expectations high and we will pursue them.

We are not only fighting for legal equality. We want to transform society, securing unconditional justice and freedom not just for LGBT people, but for all people.

In fact, long before our movement talked about equality, we (and other movements before us) spoke of freedom and liberation — concepts that cannot be limited.

Freedom and liberation, by their very nature, resist restriction.



And so when we seek equality, when we seek freedom and liberation, we seek it not just for ourselves, but for all people.

Look around the country. While Congress may be slow to change, our country is not.

Our towns, our neighborhoods, our families — change is happening, whether or not the halls of Congress reflect it.

It's just another example of our national leadership being out of touch with the people.

Take marriage equality — a majority of Americans, including more than a few notable Republicans, now state their support for it, even if a majority of Congress and the president state they do not.

Our nation is changing rapidly. Unfortunately, at the moment, our government is not, but it will. We'll make sure of that.

Not only on what are considered to be LGBT-specific issues, but on the broader set of issues that affect our day-to-day lives.

That's why we at the Task Force have been holding meetings with civil rights leaders, union leaders, immigration and other progressive leaders so that we may think together, strategize together and work together to keep the momentum of progress ever forward even as some in government want to move backward.

Yes, we will continue to work on LGBT-specific legislation, to organize for ballot measures, to train leaders and grassroots organizers for the campaigns of the day.

But truly transformative change, change that shifts the very foundations of our society, change that seeks to impact hearts, minds and behavior — this is the change that lasts.

And this is the change to which we are called.

As we seek this change, we must do so recommitted to our common future and to each other's success.

As we move into this new decade, we have the opportunity to make new choices about how we do our work as a movement. Make new choices about who we partner with.

And so as we make decisions about what's next for us, there are a few things we should consider:

- First, we must make our movement one that truly represents the racial, gender and economic diversity of our community. We cannot make the progress we need to make on the many issues that affect the lives of LGBT people with so many of our organizations run by white people. The more diverse and more representative we are, the stronger we will be. And to that end, the Task Force is working through our Academy for Leadership and Action to increase the number and diversity of people skilled at stepping into staff, board and volunteer roles of our movement.

- Second, we must work harder to make gender identity and expression central to our work. We ALL have a



identity. We all express our genders in different ways. Our transgender brothers and sisters are bearing the brunt of discrimination, but it is discrimination that is also an attack on those of us who do not identify as transgender.

In fact, just this morning, we released the report on the [National Transgender Discrimination Survey: Injustice at Every Turn](#). We were proud to have done this in partnership with the National Center for Transgender Equality. Each of you has a copy of the executive summary on your chair. Use it. The survey provides groundbreaking data about transgender and gender non-conforming people. The results show that transgender people — and especially transgender people of color — face devastating levels of discrimination in every area of life — and they show incredible resilience even in the face of such discrimination. The survey is a wake-up call and a call to action for our movement. This must be a shared fight.

- Third, we must be more open and accepting of help from our straight allies and non-LGBT movement colleagues and leaders. Honestly, 20, 15 or even 10 years ago, there were not a lot of non-LGBT progressive groups pounding on our door, looking to help us with ENDA or team with our grassroots activists to help pass protections on the state or local levels. There were some, but not many. But, it is also true that we didn't always ask for help or do the work necessary to make the connections.

We got used to working alone, talking only to ourselves, messaging only to ourselves (yes, some of our campaign ads over the years made us feel good, but they didn't change votes). But now that's changed. We have friends. We have allies. And we need to listen and work with them in a way that acknowledges their commitment and values their partnership.

- And finally, if you work at or volunteer for an LGBT organization, take a moment to identify existing coalitions — or start them — that address economic or tax policy, racial justice, criminal justice or other issues not always considered to be LGBT issues. Join them, share your perspectives from the LGBT community and show or learn about how these issues are LGBT issues. We can't just show up when we want help on marriage or nondiscrimination and expect it from our allies. If we do not see our work in an expansive way, in a way that speaks to the many issues in our lives, partner with progressive organizations and show up on those broader issues, we will be halted in our progress. We will not make progress.

If we could do these things, I truly believe we wouldn't be arguing about whether prison reform, immigration, housing or reproductive justice are LGBT issues.

If we could do these things, I believe we would gain more support from a broader range of society and we will get marriage, we will get federal nondiscrimination, we will have safe schools.

If we could do these things, we would lead like we have never led before.

These are challenging times — for everyone.



These are times when our common struggles ought to be bringing us together rather than tearing us apart.

It's too easy in tough times to look for someone to blame, someone to point a finger at as we ease our own pain by causing pain for another.

It's happening every day, and it's dragging our country down.

Because if we don't believe in each other, if we can't trust each other, if we can't put another's interests ahead of our own, if we can't wish another happiness, if we fear another's success more than we hope for our own, then we are lost.

Let us take this unique moment in our movement's history

- a moment when our elders and others among us remember what it was like to be invisible, to be in the closet in every single area of their lives, to be institutionalized, beaten and denigrated;
- a moment when the young among us have grown up in a society where there are legally married same-sex couples, where there are gay characters on TV and out members of Congress;

Let's take advantage of this moment in which we all expect and demand more than basic legal equality and create lasting, permanent, irreversible change. Just like the runner, exhausted by the race but at the sight of the finish line, runs even harder, even faster, not slower to reach that line we too must run fast, we must push hard.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, many of us have internalized the limitations that have or still do exist in society for LGBT people.

Today, I am asking us to resist with all our will those limitations, to be — as Gandhi said, “the change you want to see in the world.” I ask that we truly feel our power, allow ourselves to envision a new future.

We can gain motivation and inspiration from ourselves and each other if we act as if change is right around the corner — because it is!

Let us act as if one day, no one — not here, not in Uganda, not in Egypt, not anywhere — will be murdered or silenced simply because of who we are, who we love, or because we work for freedom and human rights.

Act as if OUR dream, our vision of freedom WILL come true — and that it will come true MUCH sooner than we'd imagined.

Act as if we will have an LGBT-supportive Congress and president in 2012 — and start organizing the vote now!

Act as if all LGBT people understand that immigration reform, prison reform, disability justice, racial and economic justice are LGBT issues.

Act as if all people know they will be more free to express themselves as we in the



LGBT movement work for sexual freedom.

Act as if you, you are the person who will create the change to set us all free.

When we leave this week, let us inspire each other to lead, to create a society where justice is unconditional, where the strength of diversity is not a goal but a given, and where the concern is not who we love but that we love.

Believe in us.

Believe in yourself.

Believe that the sweetness of freedom will, one day, be on all of our lips.

And let's go create change!

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