

PHOTO BY LINDA KLIEWER



Barbara Willer addresses supporters on Election Night March 10

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GUEST EDITORIAL

BY KERRY LOBEL

Grass roots rallying vs. Capitol Hill crusade

Many believe talk of a march on Washington in the year 2000 should come after action on a state level

There has been much debate in the past few weeks about the possibility of a Millennium March on Washington for Equal Rights in the year 2000. There is another exciting proposal on the table which will more directly effect the lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans people at the state and local level.

Our marches in 1979, 1987 and 1993 focused our country's attention, for good reason, on building visibility and power in Washington, D.C. Since the last march the political landscape has changed dramatically, and with that, our focus must also change.

Over the past several years we have seen the center of gravity shift from action at the federal level to movement at the local and state level. Some leaders believe we should use the dawn of a new millennium as the time to make our activism count at the local and state level.

Our communities have made enormous cultural gains. Despite these gains, most gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people in the United States live in states that allow discrimination based on sexual orientation, that ban same-gender consensual sex, and that do not consider violence directed at members of our community as a hate crime. Many states ban same-gender marriage, even though it is not legal in any state. More and more queer youth find their school groups and clubs the target of right-wing legislators that understand the power that a growing number of gay-straight alliances hold to change communities.

Last year, a record number of bills affecting our community were introduced in state legislatures. Many bad bills were defeated and a record number of good bills were passed. Two states moved bills forward that

banned discrimination based on sexual orientation. Last month, voters in one of those states, Maine, voted to repeal their civil rights bill.

Our movement is growing stronger and more people are involved in their communities than ever before. Today we find ourselves at the brink of making important decisions that will forever affect our futures. At the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, we believe that our communities must be visible in every state capital in the United States.

NGLTF's proposal for 50-state marches and actions to be held in 1999 has been widely distributed. It was first discussed at a gathering of the Federation of Statewide Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Political Organizations attended by representatives of 32 states. The proposal was then distributed in September at a roundtable meeting attended by over 30 executive directors of national queer political organizations and associations. It was also discussed at numerous workshops, gatherings and meetings at NGLTF's annual Creating Change conference held last November in San Diego. It will be discussed again by national and state leaders in March 1998 at our National Policy Roundtable.

The process has been lengthy and not always perfect. But it has reflected the belief that no one organization can control an entire movement's agenda. The road to our freedom is a long one and the process is as important as the result. A national movement is fueled by the collective energy and spirit found in towns and cities across the United States. The future of our movement lies there.

■ KERRY LOBEL is the executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Her e-mail address is klobel@nlgf.org.

PUBLISHER AND EDITOR • Renée LaChance
NEWS EDITOR • Inga Sorensen
COPY EDITORS • Kelly M. Bryan, Christopher D. Cuttone, Will O'Bryan
REPORTERS • Patrick Collins, Bob Roehr, Rex Wockner
CALENDAR EDITOR • Debby Morgan

CONTRIBUTORS • Michael Thomas Ford, Jeffrey L. Newman, Flora Sussely
PHOTOGRAPHER • Linda Kliewer
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR • Meg Grace
ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE • Marty Davis
CREATIVE DIRECTOR • E. Ann Hinds
GRAPHIC DESIGN • Rupert Kinnard

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR • Christopher D. Cuttone
OFFICE MANAGER • Will O'Bryan
OUTREACH COORDINATOR • Marty Davis
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Contact **just out** at PO Box 14400, Portland, OR 97293-0400; (503) 236-1252, advertising: 236-1253, fax: 236-1257; e-mail: justout@justout.com.