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**GUEST COMMENTARY**

BY LORRI L. JEAN

**Building an anti-racist movement**

Creating Change will address one of the most divisive and damaging elements in our society and our world

More than 2,000 people from all over the United States and other countries will gather in Portland beginning Nov. 6 for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's 15th annual Creating Change conference. We're immensely proud to be holding this year's conference in Oregon, a state that has long been a leader in progressive movements in this country and is home to a well-organized and vibrant GLBT community that has overcome repeated challenges by organized anti-GLBT groups.

Creating Change is one of the most important gatherings in our political movement. The people who attend include the most experienced veteran activists as well as novices. The conference offers everything from a forum for addressing cutting-edge issues to providing a unique professional development opportunity for those working to advance our cause.

While people come to Creating Change for many different reasons, we all participate in one overriding goal: building a stronger, more highly skilled, more representative movement for freedom, justice and equality. In a nutshell, this is the mission of the task force.

This year, for the first time, Creating Change has a theme: "Building an Anti-Racist Movement: Working for Social and Economic Justice." Never in the history of our movement has such a large, multiracial GLBT gathering focused on this topic.

So, why is the task force doing it now? Institutionalized racism is one of the most significant factors hindering our success as a movement.

If we were unified as a community, we could take better advantage of the strength our numbers afford. Our movement's political agenda would better reflect the priorities of all segments of our community. And we could better engage our allies in joining in our struggle.

But too many things divide us. The discouragingly long list includes racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, transphobia, biphobia, AIDS-phobia, classism, ageism, horizontal hostility and a corrosive lack of compassion and forgiveness.

With such a list, where does an organization like the task force start? This year, Creating Change focuses on building an anti-racist movement.

Racism is one of the most pervasive, divisive and damaging elements in our society and our world. The same is true of our own GLBT communities.

Thus, as a movement, we must get our own house in order. People of color suffer irreparable harm as a result of racism, and all of us are diminished by it.

Further, how can we purport to advance freedom, justice and equality for GLBT people if we are not working for the changes necessary to make these concepts realities for all in our community? The great Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. believed that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

All of us share responsibility for working to eradicate the injustice in our own community. We will not succeed as a movement unless we make a significant investment in doing so.

And this responsibility must translate to organizational leadership. This year's conference is one way in which the task force is striving to shoulder this responsibility.

It also is important to acknowledge the range of emotions that a theme like "Building an Anti-Racist Movement" can elicit. Hope, fear, skepticism, anger, optimism—just to name a few. Sometimes these reactions are born of experience; other times they stem from ignorance.

For example, the task force already has been publicly attacked by a white gay male columnist who identified the theme of this year's conference as proof of our "obsolescence." Even if it weren't the right thing to do (which it is), and even if it weren't long overdue (which it is) and even if it weren't, indisputably, "a gay issue" (which it is), one would think that anyone who observes politics would understand that working to build an anti-racist movement is strategically smart.

Statistically, straight people of color are generally one of the most supportive demographic groups when it comes to civil rights for GLBT people. They understand that the bigotry that serves as the foundation for racism is often the same bigotry that serves as the foundation for homophobia, for anti-Semitism, for misogyny.

But our opponents are trying their hardest to drive a wedge between us and our most steadfast allies. The gay-obsessed religious fanatics who are behind anti-GLBT organizing in this country are now reaching out to straight leaders in communities of color—deliberately, systematically, maliciously—to try to convince them to join their homophobic crusade. Our community must offer the reasoned alternative.

And we cannot do so as effectively if most of our organizations and our leaders fail to represent the rich diversity that is our community. This is just one more compelling reason that all of us should be invested in building an anti-racist movement.

Finally, this year's conference is not really "the start" of this effort. Creating Change 2002 is neither the beginning nor the end of work on these issues.

First, just as is true of many conference attendees, the task force has been working on most of these issues for almost 30 years. The conference has always included workshops on these topics, and the task force has often been a leader in addressing them.

Second, "Building an Anti-Racist Movement" is a tall order—it isn't something that gets solved by a single conference or a single organization or even 2,000 well-intentioned and committed people. And we are bound to make mistakes in our attempt to promote dialogue and action around this very critical issue.

Still, a conference like Creating Change can serve as a catalyst for exponential leaps forward in our movement. And that is our hope for this year's conference. Just as it is our commitment to continue to work on the goal of building an anti-racist movement—day after day, year after year.

Together, if we approach this task with patience, with intellectual honesty and empathy, with understanding, determination and accountability, we can help our community and our movement make progress in building an anti-racist movement. Together, we can prove the relevance and effectiveness of this work. **J**

LORRI L. JEAN is the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director.

**endorsements**

Ballots must be returned by 8 p.m. Nov. 5. Just Out does not make endorsements in every electoral contest.

- U.S. Senate: Bill Bradbury
- Governor: Ted Kulongoski
- City of Portland Commissioner, Position 4: Serena Cruz
- Metro Council President: David Bragdon
- Congressional Representative, District 1: David Wu (D)
- Congressional Representative, District 3: Earl Blumenauer (D)
- Congressional Representative, District 4: Peter A. Defazio (D)
- Congressional Representative, District 5: Darlene Hooley (D)
- State Senator, District 11: Peter Courtney (D)
- State Senator, District 17: Charlie Ringo (D)
- State Senator, District 19: Richard Devlin (D)

- State Representative, District 11: Phil Barnhart (D)
- State Representative, District 21: Mike Swaim (D)
- State Representative, District 27: Mark Hass (D)
- State Representative, District 28: Jeff Barker (D)
- State Representative, District 29: Chuck Riley (D)
- State Representative, District 33: Mitch Greenlick (D)
- State Representative, District 36: Mary Nolan (D)
- State Representative, District 41: Carolyn Tomei (D)
- State Representative, District 42: Diane Rosenbaum (D)
- State Representative, District 43: Deborah

- Kafoury (D)
- State Representative, District 44: Gary D. Hansen (D)
- State Representative, District 45: Jackie Dingfelder (D)
- State Representative, District 46: Steve March (D)
- State Measure 25 (increases minimum wage to \$6.90): No
- State Measure 26 (regulates paid referendum petition signature gathering): Yes
- State Measure 27 (requires labeling of genetically engineered foods): No
- Portland Measure 26-33 (finances children's investment program): Yes
- Portland Measure 26-34 (restores park services and allows much-needed repairs): Yes
- Portland Measure 26-36 (renews library levy): Yes

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