

Civil rights. Community. Movement.

A joint statement by 22 national organizations

civil rights [n.] *The rights belonging to an individual by virtue of citizenship, especially the right to due process, equal protection of the law and freedom from discrimination.*

community [n.] *A group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society.*

movement [n.] *An organized effort to promote or attain an end; the act of moving.*

The histories of America's civil rights movements—and their successes in securing equal protection of the law for those denied it—have always been shaped by the complex interweaving of legal victories, political progress and advances in public opinion.

So when we look at the state of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender civil rights today, we have every reason to be optimistic. Our movement is strong, it is determined, and it is gathering momentum every day.

It has been only 18 months since the Supreme Court struck down the last remaining state laws that branded us as criminals, little more than a year since Massachusetts' top court ruled that same-sex couples could not be denied full equality in marriage, and mere weeks since California enacted the nation's most expansive domestic partnership law.

All the while, public support for LGBT equality continues to grow. Gallup has reported that 89 percent of Americans support equal employment opportunity for gays and lesbians. Polls also show nearly two-thirds support the same opportunities for transgender Americans. Nearly four in five—up from 57 percent just a decade ago—support openly gay military servicemembers, and amid the enactment of anti-gay constitutional amendments in 11 states this past November, exit polls showed that 60 percent of voters favor legal recognition for same-sex couples.

The speed with which our movement is advancing on all fronts is absolutely historic—and it hasn't happened by chance or by accident.

The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community crosses all borders. We are born into families as diverse as our nation. We are of every race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, class, educational background, ability and party affiliation. We live in cities, towns and neighborhoods across this country, in red states and in blue. We, literally, are everywhere.

Yet because that rich diversity often goes unseen, ignored or forgotten, we remain vulnerable to inaccurate stereotypes manufactured by a small but powerful group of anti-gay extremists. Wrapping themselves in cloaks of "family" and "values," these groups are spending tens of millions of dollars to confuse, distort and subvert the public debate that continues to change hearts and minds about our right to equality as it opens America's eyes to the true family values that LGBT couples, parents and families are living and demonstrating every day.

This public debate serves another purpose as well: It reveals the unjust realities our community faces. If we must take time to care for an ill partner, we can lose our jobs because we are denied the protections of the federal Family and Medical Leave Act. Surviving gay and lesbian partners can find their families imperiled by laws that deny inheritance, child custody rights and Social Security survivors' protection. Binational LGBT couples and families can be cruelly torn apart by deportation and immigration laws that treat them as legal strangers.

The manifest unfairness of these and countless other discriminations is one reason why support for LGBT equality continues to rise. It's also why we must commit to creating of our diverse community a truly inclusive movement—one that is represented by and pursues justice for the diverse lives that give it substance.

The groups represented here are parts of a large civil rights orchestra. We play different instruments—lobbying, electoral politics, impact litigation, grassroots organizing, public education, media advocacy and more—and we are dedicated to playing them well. While our organizations vary in focus and strategies, we share a number of common priorities that will help shape and unite our work in the months and years to come. Among them:

- We must fight for equal employment opportunity, benefits and protections—and the federal and state laws that safeguard them.

- We must fight against anti-LGBT violence and for the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in federal hate crimes law that already protects Americans based on race, religion and national origin.

- We must fight—in both the private and public sectors—for better access to health care and insurance. We must advocate for HIV/AIDS policies—including age-appropriate, LGBT-inclusive comprehensive sexuality education—that effectively address this epidemic at home and abroad.

- We must insist on safe schools, where youth can learn free from bullying, harassment and discrimination.

- We must fight for family laws that give our children strong legal ties to their parents.

- We must work to overturn the military's discriminatory anti-LGBT ban, which dishonors servicemembers who serve their country with valor and distinction.

- We must continue to expose the radical right's efforts to advance a culture of prejudice and intolerance, and we must fight their attempts to enshrine anti-gay bigotry in our state and federal laws and constitutions.

- And we must continue our vigorous fight for the freedom to marry and the equal protections, rights and responsibilities that safeguard our families, strengthen our commitments and continue to transform understanding of our lives and our relationships.

In December, *People* asked President and Mrs. Bush about civil unions. "Is a couple joined by that kind of legal arrangement as much of a family as, say, you two are a family?" "Of course," President Bush replied.

Bush's acknowledgment (despite his support for an anti-gay constitutional amendment) has set an important new minimum standard for future dialogue surrounding same-sex couples and families, one that reflects an evolving public respect for our relationships that even those who seek to codify discrimination against us cannot easily ignore.

This revolution in understanding and respect has been made possible by millions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans who are coming out, being out and living the truth of their lives for others to see. By families unafraid to publicly declare their love for and commitment to

one another. By people unwilling, by word or deed, to tell future generations that our relationships are deserving of anything less than acceptance, respect and celebration. And by an orchestra of organizations committed to the strategic advancement of our movement.

But at the end of the day, our movement must be more than a collective noun. It must also be an action. Even the most vibrant, vital community can, over time, settle into a status quo. A movement cannot. And the success of our movement is measured not only in the hearts and minds we change, the allies we engage and the civil rights we secure, but in the strength of our collective commitment to the pursuit of enduring social, political and legal change that moves us ever closer to true equality. Each of us. Each of you.

Get involved. Learn more about the work of our movement's local, state and national organizations. Invest in that work. Encourage your straight friends and family to do likewise; give them the opportunity to invest in our future—and theirs. Champion equality and respect in

your community. Engage new allies at home, in your workplace, in your place of worship, at your school. Stand up. Spread the word. Share your story.

By virtue of who we are, we're a community. But it is by virtue of the decisions we make that we become part of a movement—a civil rights movement working together to create a better, more hopeful world limited only by our ability to envision its promise and experience all that it has to offer. ☐

FROM THE PUBLISHER

On Jan. 13 I joined representatives from gay and lesbian publications across the country in a conference phone call moderated by GLAAD executive director Joan Garry. The purpose of the call was to announce a statement of unprecedented unity in the gay rights movement.

A total of 22 of our community's leading advocacy groups came together to take a leadership role of purpose and focus: American Civil Liberties Union Lesbian & Gay Rights Project; Equality Federation; Freedom to Marry; Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders; Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation; Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund and Leadership Institute; Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network; Human Rights Campaign; Lambda Legal; Log Cabin Republicans; Mautner Project; National Association of LGBT Community Centers; National Black Justice Coalition; National Center for Lesbian Rights; National Center for Transgender Equality; National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs; National Gay and Lesbian Task Force; National Youth Advocacy Coalition; Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays; Servicemembers Legal Defense Network; Sigamos Adelante: National Latino/Hispanic LGBT Leadership; and Stonewall Democrats.

In the wake of 2004's election results, it is crucial that we, as a whole, clearly understand what lies ahead in our struggles for full equality—and the responsibilities incumbent upon each of us individually. —Marty Davis

FEATURE

18 THE BEST MEDICINE

Gail Hand is laughing through life's ups and downs

NEWS

6-11 NORTHWEST

Cascade AIDS Project clients thrive in a class that asks the big questions; Equity Foundation establishes Paul Higgins Endowment Fund; Queer blogs: DIY publishing on the Internet

13-15 NATIONAL

D.C. meeting galvanizes AIDS activists; U.S. Supreme Court declines to hear challenge to Florida gay adoption ban

16-17 WORLD

Nelson Mandela's son dies of AIDS; Nepal gets a gay newspaper

ARTS AND CULTURE

30-31 DIVERSIONS

Rock, read and listen at benefits for In Other Words; *On the Verge*; Out on the Slopes; The Tragedies; Hot Flash Dance Party; Gus Van Sant joins Oregon Film and Video board

33 BOOKS

Queer mystery writers explore the trail blazed by the late Joseph Hansen

34-35 FILM

Solid documentary celebrates queer poet and counterculture hero Allen Ginsberg; Ethan and Leo need to grow up; *Elektra* kisses a chick; *Dianetics* killed the movie star; zebra earns his stripes in kid flick; director pokes fun at herself in *Sex Is Comedy*; Kevin Bacon plays a paroled pedophile in *The Woodsman*

37 MUSIC

It takes a village

COLUMNS

29 MS. BEHAVIOR

Homocoming queen

32 EPIQUEERAN

Mushroom cloud nine

38 JIM'S CLOSET

Rude awakening

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