



Creating Change Conference

February 6, 2015

Rea Carey, Executive Director
State of the Movement Address

First, I want to acknowledge and thank the organizers from Ferguson for taking the stage today.

I want to welcome every single person; every single voice; every single heart into this room; and into our conference that is Creating Change.

Today, and in the days ahead, we will see change. And I thank the organizers both last night and today, for helping all of us to move forward.

Let's give them all a hand please.

I want to welcome each and everyone of you to what we consider to be our annual family reunion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and straight people ready to create change!

I have to say that I stand here today with a heavy and angry heart with all that we as a people are facing. I want to thank the activists, the protesters from

BlackLivesMatter, from TransLivesMatter: Your words are powerful, important and needed.

As a social justice organization, and as a community of activists we want people to rage against the machine and hold our movement accountable. Thank you. I also invite you to join me, the Task Force and the many others who are making contributions to the Justice for Jesse Fund for Jesse's funeral and the family's other needs. The Task Force is making a \$10,000 contribution and we want to see that rise and rise so that she can rest in power.

It's great to be back in my hometown — and to have three generations of my extended family here with us today.

So much has changed here in Denver in the six short years since the city last played host to our Creating Change conference.

So much positive change has happened here – change I never could have imagined as a 16 year-old lesbian in the 1980s, coming out at East High School right up the street. Change that has often been driven by people who were inspired, trained and mobilized right here at Creating Change. And change that has been driven by Colorado's community based organizations like the GLBT Community Center, One Colorado, the Gill Foundation, many PFLAG chapters, people of color and youth groups.

In fact, on Monday, One Colorado is leading an advocacy day at the Capitol where they'll be advocating to make it easier for transgender people to obtain matching identity documents – documents that are so important for people to apply for housing, employment or to vote.

When we were last here for Creating Change in 2009, here's what we didn't have. We didn't have a law allowing undocumented immigrants to pay in-state tuition for state public colleges. Today we do. We didn't have marriage equality in Colorado. Today...we do. Back then we had 2,000 people attend Creating

Change. Today that number has doubled, with 4,000 of you expected here this week.

Last time we were here, our name was the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Today it is the more inclusive National LGBTQ Task Force, with the tagline, Be You, and a vision for a world in which each and every one of us will have the freedom to bring our whole selves to all areas of our lives.

Being you, being us, living our lives openly and proudly as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and straight people, advanced over the last year as our movement experienced astounding progress.

Yes, our movement's decades of work paid some significant life-changing dividends last year. To our elders, to the founders and instigators of this movement, we say thank you.

So, our progress in 2014...

First, being you at work, without the fear of being fired. As a step in the right direction, the President signed an executive order that transformed fear and frustration for millions of LGBTQ employees and their families into security by banning employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity for millions of federal and federal contractor workers. YOU helped make that happen!

Being you and being a step closer to accessing the promise of America advanced for some undocumented immigrants, including LGBTQ immigrants, who are getting some relief from the President in his executive action on immigration. YOU helped make that happen. And together, we will push for more change in immigration policies.

Being you and being visible progressed too, particularly for Transgender and Bisexual members of our community. More celebrities came out as Bi; Laverne

Cox graced the cover of Time; and Transparent won a Golden Globe. We know from our own history that cultural change matters. And, when the President signed that historic executive order prohibiting employment discrimination, Faith Cheltenham, president of BiNet USA, became the first out bisexual organizational leader to meet privately with the President before the signing and she appeared with the President as he signed the order. Faith is with us here at Creating Change. And to Mr. Obama's left at the same ceremony was trans leader and Task Force staff member, Kylar Broadus.

Being you, together, with marriage equality for all, took a quantum leap forward with news breaking, seemingly every week about the next state to recognize marriage for same-sex couples.

Being you, stigma free, living with HIV or AIDS moved forward with access to innovations like PreP and the real prospect of an AIDS-free world. An end to AIDS. For those of us who lived through the 80's and 90's with so many of our friends and lovers dying, and dying even now, that is nothing short of a breathtaking development.

I could list hundreds of advances we've made together over the last year, but I want to make sure you can make it to today's sessions, so we're going to celebrate our achievements, to celebrate YOUR work in a new way this year. I'd like you to take a moment and think about one thing you are proud of this year. Maybe you came out to your parents – or your kids; maybe you took part in a #BlackLivesMatter protest; maybe you changed or defended a law; or talked with a friend in a way that moved their heart on LGBTQ issues, immigration or reproductive justice. Maybe, you simply survived to see another day. Think about it for a moment.

On the count of three, I want you to shout out – really shout out - that thing you are proud of. 1, 2, 3! Fabulous!

Today, throughout this weekend, when you go home, know that there are at least 4,000 people who heard your achievement, who are holding and celebrating and building on your achievements! Thank you for all you have done.

[Pause]

But 2014 was also a bittersweet year of challenges and tragedies that have made so clear, so painfully clear, the hard work that remains. We are seeing new attacks on our progress, requiring us to both defend the advances we've made but also to develop proactive strategies to ensure that other barriers are not thrown in the path to progress.

One such challenge is this. We are now seeing those who would deny us freedom, those working against our equality, actively manipulating religious beliefs and religious liberty, and working to move the line drawn on the separation of church and state. These opponents are twisting the true meaning of religious freedom as a Constitutionally protected right to justify discrimination and to act as though they don't have to follow the same rules, the same laws as the rest of us.

In states across the country – including states like Wyoming, Utah, Georgia, Texas and North Carolina there are attempts to include what are called “religious exemptions” or “religious refusals” in new and existing laws, with the intended outcome to strip critical protections for LGBTQ people.

Yes, we've heard about the baker who refused to make a wedding cake because their religious beliefs tell them that same-sex couples shouldn't get married. But this isn't just about wedding cakes being denied to us. This is about being fired from your job as a janitor or cafeteria worker at a Catholic hospital; or being denied basic emergency care as trans person because of the EMT's religious beliefs; or being denied the ability to fill a prescription for birth control. Friends, we have worked too long and too hard to be treated differently than our friends and neighbors when it comes to basic protections like housing, employment, or receiving healthcare.

We saw this on the federal level with the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), a bill that we had crafted, fought for, and supported for over 20 years. Over time, we had to make a lot of compromises – including one that resulted in a very broad religious exemption that would have treated LGBTQ people differently than all other protected classes in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and in the U.S. Constitution.

Simply put, ENDA had a big open door for discrimination in a non-discrimination bill. Ironic, right?

Then, the Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby ruling was a game changer — creating a world where employers could impose their religious beliefs on their employee's health care choices.

That ruling really magnified the potential impact of blurring the lines between religious beliefs and employment; between the separation of church and state. And, on July 8th, we pulled our support for the Employment Nondiscrimination Act. We simply had come way too far to compromise on such a fundamental principal of fairness and federal equality in the workplace. Instead we redoubled our work for what we really need—strong federal non-discrimination legislation without broad exemptions. I'm happy to report that our opposition, and that of other organizations, worked.

Let's be clear: This is not about being anti-religion. Lest we forget, millions of people-of-faith think discrimination is immoral and should be illegal. We will fight for the right for anyone to have their own beliefs. But we will also fight for all people to be treated equally and we will not stand by while religious liberty is twisted and manipulated by politicians to discriminate. You have a right to your beliefs, but that is not an excuse to pick and choose which laws you want to follow or change the laws to fit your religious beliefs.

Mark my words. This ground, this very public tug of war on the role of religion in public policy, in politics, in the provision of services, in basic civil rights is how our movement will be spending much of its energy in the coming years. But the ground is shifting quickly and more harm is and will be done if we don't work to hold this line. If we intend to keep full marriage equality, gain non-discrimination protections for all, or simply be able to live our lives with dignity and safety we must pay attention to how religious exemptions are expanding in local, state and federal laws.

Also adding to the bitter part of a bittersweet year, we are deeply aware that many people in our communities are experiencing violence. I know that many of us come here this week with anger and heavy hearts.

This senseless violence is happening in all parts of the country, including right here in Denver last week. Today we all hold in our hearts the family and friends of Jesse Hernandez, a queer Latina 17-year old shot by a Denver police officer.

We also hold in our hearts, and in our actions as we protest, the deaths of Black men at the hands of police, including Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Tamir Rice. Killing our sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters has got to stop.

Racial profiling is an LGBTQ issue. Racial profiling, personal and systemic violence aimed at Black and brown people is all of our issue. Right now we are being called to walk across that bridge hand in hand, to organize, to call out injustices. We are being called to confront racism in its many forms. We have seen the power of taking risks, of holding out a hand to the person who is about to be injured or killed knowing that in doing so, we may not see the sunrise the next day. And while some of us are not faced with a life-and-death choice every single day, we know that there are so many, including in this room, for whom walking out the door, walking into a convenience store, buying a pack of skittles, walking down the street with friends, driving a car... are life and death situations.

This daily stress of life or death is particularly true for transgender women of color.

Twelve transgender women of color were murdered in 2014, that we know of. And folks, we are barely into 2015 and at least 4 or 5 trans women of color, that we know of, have been killed, including Ty Underwood in Tyler, Texas, Lamia Beard in Norfolk, Virginia and Yazmin Vash Payne in Los Angeles. We have an epidemic of anti-transgender violence on our hands. We need the Justice Department to continue aggressively investigating and prosecuting cases under the Matthew Shepard, James Byrd Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

It can be overwhelming to think about what we can do to stop the violence happening to people of color, to LGBTQ people. And there are actions large and small to be taken. One group of inspirational activists, whom we honored last night, gave us one way to come together when they created the #blacklivesmatter campaign.

The hashtag blacklivesmatter was tweeted and re-tweeted by caring and passionate people with love and good intention in their hearts. It brought people together across the nation in our work for justice. But what concerned me was how quickly people were to step away from the clear and necessary statement that BLACK lives matter, to move to the hashtag AllLivesMatter. Yes, all lives do matter, absolutely — I've spent my life working for the respect and humanity of every single person. But to deny over 400 hundreds of years of structural racism that has resulted in the need for such a powerful phrase – BlackLivesMatter – to quickly move away from the Black in BlackLivesMatter as such an important mobilization of compassion, anger and resolve is to step away from our collective responsibility as allies to engage in the sometimes uncomfortable work of change. We don't need #white lives matter — there are all sorts of things that tell us that every day.

Until Black and brown lives really matter to all people, this epidemic of violence will chip away at the soul of this nation. Until we see ourselves in every Black man profiled and killed; in every transgender women murdered; until we see ourselves

in the faces of our brothers and sisters, we won't be able to move authentically and powerfully towards change and solutions.

But, friends, we can move from tragedy to transformation.

Wouldn't it be amazing if history eventually records that these tragedies were actually the catalyst for an expansion of our collective work on racial justice; to continue to heal and change this nation? Wouldn't it be extraordinary if out of these tragedies, a bigger and more diverse movement emerged with a clearer shared vision of a world where you can Be You without limits?

Like people, movements change and adapt and evolve and have choices to make. So the question for our LGBTQ movement is, what will we be next?

We have worked hard over the decades — from the Stonewall riots to the rallies at the Supreme Court — to become a powerful and inspirational movement and catalyst for long lasting change.

We are a movement with momentum — but of course it has taken decades to build that momentum. Believe me, it hasn't always felt like this. And it won't always feel like this. But now that we have had some success in some areas, we have a moral obligation to use our progress and any relative privilege we might have to drive broader change for LGBTQ people and their families and to do our part for a changed and just society. We have momentum now and we can't squander it, we can't silence it, and we cannot deny our responsibility to use it for greater good.

The greater good, the greater truth we hold is that freedom is not a zero sum game. Sadly, there are those who believe otherwise. But I believe that your life is not diminished by my freedom to be whole. And, my life is not diminished by your freedom to be whole. I don't become less of a human if more of your humanity is recognized.

We stand here on what can only be described as the eve of potentially resolving one of the most significant questions of our generation which is: will every state in this country recognize the marriages of two people of the same gender?

But as we stand here 50 years after the Voting Rights Act, still fighting county by county, against voter suppression, we know that progress must be defended. Let's not mistake our possible win this summer on marriage for permanent victory.

Let's not believe that by winning the right to marry that it somehow crosses off more than one item on our LGBTQ agenda, or even recognizes all of our families.

I believe we need a new agenda for the next decade, for the future — a new agenda for all LGBTQ people and our families — that recognizes the breath and the depth of all we face. And there is no one organization, there is no one person that can or should create that agenda. Rather it will be held by all of us and will require of all of us to envision it, to create it and to fulfill it.

Next month you'll be hearing from us and other organizations about a grassroots digital and in-person campaign called Our Tomorrow that will engage people across the country in a conversation about their hopes, fears and ideas to inform the future of the LGBTQ movement.

For our part, the Task Force has a few hundred items for the agenda, but we are particularly focused on a few big picture things that should be on that agenda:

- 1) Keep racial, economic and gender justice front and center of our work as a movement. If we did this, it would be obvious that immigration and racial profiling and housing and jobs and access to reproductive healthcare are LGBTQ issues.

- 2) End policies that continue to criminalize our lives. For example, the Obama Administration should stop allowing Border Patrol and TSA to engage in profiling based on race or religion. Also, Congress should pass an inclusive End Racial Profiling Act. And, ban using condoms as evidence of crime which particularly

targets transgender women who are stopped by police for suspicion of engaging in sex work. And, end the criminalization of people with HIV. You can join The Task Force and over 1,000 others to endorse the Positive Justice Project's National Consensus Statement to End HIV Criminalization.

3) Secure nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ people in every state and federally in all areas of our lives including employment, housing, public accommodations and healthcare. And do so without broad religious exemptions.

What's on your agenda? What are you being called to do?

Feminism teaches us that the personal is political. Experience teaches us that the political is intensely personal. And sometimes something as simple as a haircut can turn into the most fundamental and brave personal act of trying to be ourselves. Last week a distraught mother called our office in tears. She had taken her 8 year-old sports-loving daughter to a Sports Clips salon; she wanted a short haircut like her brothers have. Not only did the hairdresser refuse to do the haircut but told this proud mom that she was a terrible mother for letting her daughter get a haircut "like a boy."

I mentioned earlier that we changed our name this year to be more inclusive, including people who identify as Queer, Trans and Bi. And we have a new tag line of "Be You." [Put up slide of our logo]

As we were working on the new name, upon hearing our staff members' idea, "Be You," I immediately felt two things: I was uplifted by the freedom of possibility, the aspiration to truly be ourselves. And I also felt the weight of how some days, truly being ourselves feels so hard, so insurmountable.

I felt the crush of all the history and the systems and the forces at play against every single one of us that makes it so incredibly hard to be fully you. The work of being whole.

The challenge of being you and the promise of being you: It's a balancing act we are all very familiar with, right? Do I hold my boyfriend's hand? Do I tell my teacher that I live in daily fear that my undocumented parents will be deported? As a Black person, how can I be real about my anger when talking to my white friends? Do I tell my lesbian friends that I'm bisexual? Will I be judged? Or will I be celebrated and supported?

I ask you, what would it take for you to be fully you, to be whole? What would it take for you to feel whole?

For some of us being whole is to reconnect to our families who rejected us when we came out to them. For some of us that is to be able to go to work or get a job based on our qualifications and expertise, free from the fear of being fired for who we are. For others, it would be to be released from grief and loss.

So many of us carry not only the pain of what we ourselves have experienced in our lives, being told we are illegal — or worse an alien; being asked to leave our places of worship; being bullied for not "acting like a boy" or not "acting like a girl;" or the indignity faced by people of color being followed by security in the department store as they simply shop for socks or a tie.

Many of us carry the pain of losing our entire circle of friends to AIDS. And so many of us also carry the pain of discrimination and violence experienced by generations before us.

Against all odds we strive to be whole, to heal. You can see why the dream, the drive to Be You can be so incredibly difficult. But, in those moments when any one of us feels whole, feels free – it is exhilarating! And that's what the Task Force is working towards. We know that in order to heal the world, we must come to this work healed and as whole as we can be.

Getting to 'Being You' takes time. We all have our own paths to walk, our own identities to integrate, and finding the way to "Be You" should be done in a time

and space that's safe for you. So be patient with yourself. The work of "Being You" is never done; it's 'being you' in exactly what each day brings.

We must work hard to heal ourselves if we are to be whole, so we can bring the power of our voices and our bodies and our spirits to this fight for real freedom. And with every change we make, with every law we pass, with every heart we open, we ease the pain of discrimination just a little bit, making it that much easier for someone else to step forward and join this work.

Friends, I have so much hope for our future! I have no doubt that the path to full freedom, to justice, to wholeness, to a healed society is being paved through the actions we take collectively in the coming years, and starting here this week at Creating Change. This speech isn't the State of the Movement; this Creating Change conference is the state of our movement! YOU are the state of our movement. And the state of our movement is energized, passionate, strong and ready for more!

And if you have those days when you falter, when you are afraid, when you are unsure – I certainly have those days - know that the National LGBTQ Task Force will be with you all the way until equality, justice and freedom is realized!

Thank you and keep being you.

ENDS