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foundation of vermont

### Our Mission

The Samara Foundation of Vermont is a charitable foundation whose mission is to support and strengthen Vermont's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered communities today and build an endowment for tomorrow.

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# Views: Notes from the Convention

**H**aving recently participated as an openly-gay Vermont delegate to the Democratic National Convention, I am more convinced than ever that the road to true equality for LGBT Americans leads directly through the White House in November, 2004!

As we gathered in Boston, we would also be at the largest gathering of openly-LGBT delegates to any national political convention in U.S. history. In July, 255 openly-gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender delegates and alternates participated.

My fellow LGBT delegates represented a rainbow of diversity from 47 states, two territories (including an openly-gay delegate from Guam and nine from Puerto Rico) as well as Democrats living abroad. And the "T" in LGBT was more visible than ever, with seven transgender delegates.

With over 500 people attending, the LGBT Caucus had the clear, overarching goal to energize and mobilize our communities to move forward LGBT equality, and repudiate the homophobic tactics of the Republican Party.

Some questioned the absence of "same-sex marriage" or "transgender equality" in the Democratic Party Platform. Most delegates applauded the most powerfully affirmative LGBT commitment ever made within any major party platform: "We support full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and seek equal responsibilities, benefits, and protections for these families."

Earlier in the week, at a gathering of National Stonewall Democrats in Providence, RI, Congressman Barney Frank outlined the stark reality of what is at stake in this upcoming national election. Barney condemned the Bush administration and Republican Party's attack on LGBT families by their (failed) initiative to pass a federal constitutional amendment to outlaw marriage equality for same-sex couples, and their subsequent, unprecedented House-passed "court-stripping" bill that would deny all federal courts jurisdiction to review the federal and state Defense of Marriage Acts (DOMA).

Barney exhorted us to elect a president who supports our LGBT community, and simultaneously "break the back of homopho-

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bia as a tool of national political campaigning!"

Later from the convention podium in Boston, Congressman Frank revealed on national television, "The fact is, we who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, we do have an agenda, and here it is..." To be free to fight for our country, like John Kerry; to be hired for jobs based on our skills, and not fired for what someone thinks about us; to be safe in our schools; "and, it is true, that when two people are in love and they are willing to be morally and legally committed to each other and financially responsible to each other, that if they are prepared to get married, it's a good thing for the stability of society. We believe that."

The Congressman also addressed the appeal from Ralph Nader to our community: "With the vast differences between the two political parties on issues important to us as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people, when Ralph Nader tells us that there is no significant difference between the parties, *he trivializes our lives!*"

The LGBT caucus heard passionate words from a dizzying list of stars and politicians, including Ben Affleck, Carole King, Senator Barbara Boxer, Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin – the only openly lesbian member of Congress and the Vice Chair of the entire convention – and many more.

Teresa Heinz Kerry, more than any other caucus speaker, captured our hearts. Kerry talked about how she would share the same joy (as that of being told that one of her children were to be engaged) with all of her friends and family, if she were told that one of her children were gay.

Kerry spoke of how a gay man told her in California that he

wished she was his own mother. "At least, if nothing else," Kerry told the rapt crowd, when her husband is elected president, "You will have a 'mom' in the White House."

John Kerry, in his closing night acceptance speech, got the greatest roar of applause from the convention when he addressed the Republicans' use of a homophobic federal constitutional amendment to attack our LGBT families and divide the nation politically:

Kerry told the floor, directing his words to President Bush, "In the weeks ahead, let's be optimists, not just opponents ... and let's never misuse for political purposes the most precious document in American history, the Constitution of the United States!" The convention center roared in approval.

During my four days at the convention, I was proud to be a gay delegate, and a gay elected official. Night after night, I was inspired by powerful orations from Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, Barak Obama, Al Sharpton, Teresa Heinz-Kerry, and nominee John Kerry.

I returned home to the Green Mountain State tired, inspired, and determined to continue our fight for full equality. I also remain most proud of our Vermont delegation. When given the opportunity to cast our votes "from the great state of Vermont" on national television, our delegation chose to appreciate both our home-grown presidential candidate, Gov. Howard Dean, and to include visible pride in Vermont's ground breaking work for LGBT equality "by creating, for the first time anywhere in the country, legal rights, privileges and responsibilities for lesbian and gay families by the passage of Civil Unions."

As LGBT people, we must now make sure we are registered to vote, and get out to the polls. November's election is our next critical opportunity to strike a blow at homophobia, and to put LGBT friends and allies back in the White House. Voting will make a difference in all of our lives. ▼

*Bill Lippert is the executive director of the Samara Foundation and a member of the Vermont House of Representatives from Hinesburg.*