

1 HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

2
3 "WE BELIEVE IN NEW ORLEANS"

4
5 VOLUME VI

6
7 THE GAY, LESBIAN & TRANSEXUAL COMMUNITY

8 LISTENING SESSION

9
10 TUESDAY, JUNE 26, 2007

11
12 6:00 P.M.

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16 KEN GRAND PRE' AND RABBI EDWARD P. COHN,
17 CO-CHAIRS

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21 REPORTED BY:

22 DIANE W. MATHEWS, CCR

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1 HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

2 MICHAEL COWAN, CHAIR

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4 DAWN SEGURA, HRC ATTORNEY

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12 GEORGE R. GALLIEN

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16 FRANCIS KING

17 MARGARET MONTGOMERY-RICHARD

18 DOTTIE REESE

19 DR. HANA SAFAH

20 JANE PARKER

21 CRAIG M. STEWART

22 PATRICIA BIVINS

23 - 0 -

1 DR. COWAN:

2 Good evening, everyone, if I could ask
3 for your attention. I am Michael Cowan and I'm the
4 Chair of the Human Relations Commission. I want to
5 welcome you and thank you for taking the time to come to
6 the part of our listening session this evening.

7 Before I say a little about it and just
8 set the stage, I would like to ask the other members of
9 the Human Relations Commission and the people who are
10 supporting us and live and work in City Hall, if you
11 stand up and introduce yourselves, please.

12 Larry, if you would begin.

13 MR. BAGERNIS:

14 Larry Bagneris, Executor Director of
15 the Human Relations Commission and Liaison for the
16 Mayor's Office and the City Council.

17 MR. GRAND PRE':

18 Ken Grand Pre', General Manager, I'm a
19 member of the commission.

20 MR. CARLL:

21 I'm Russ Carll and I'm a member of the
22 Human Relations Commission.

23 MS. BISSELL:

24 Michie Bissell, member of the Human
25 Relations Commission.

1 RABBI COHN:

2 Rabbi Ed Cohn, I'm a member of the
3 Human Relations Commission.

4 MR. ABDUL-SALAAM:

5 Abdul Salaam, I'm a member of the Human
6 Relations Commission.

7 MR. COWAN:

8 And Dawn.

9 MS. SEGURA:

10 Dawn Segura, from the City Attorney's
11 Office.

12 MR. COWAN:

13 Thanks folks.

14 The context for this evening is this;
15 the Human Relations Commission is just about halfway
16 into a process that has taken us a little more than a
17 year, in which we're trying to listen to all of the
18 different groups that make up the diversity of the city
19 with a particular theme or concern in mind. That is,
20 how do people feel either included or not included in
21 the life of New Orleans; respected or not respected in
22 the life of New Orleans. And then, related to that,
23 what thoughts do people have about how many problems
24 about inclusion or respect can be addressed.

25 And so, we're listening and we've got a

1 court reporter here who is making a transcript about
2 what gets said so that we have a record that we can go
3 back and read and study and draw out the themes, as
4 we're doing for each one of these sessions.

5 When we're done we're going to go to
6 the Mayor and City Council and any other decision makers
7 in the private or the public sector here in New Orleans
8 that we need to with a set of recommendations that are
9 designed to enhance the feeling of respect and inclusion
10 of all groups in the life of the city. That is our
11 agenda.

12 So our commitment to you is really
13 twofold. Tonight we're just going to listen; we're not
14 going to respond to concerns. We're here to listen;
15 this is your night to talk. So that is promise number
16 one, to listen and to pay attention. Promise number two
17 is that recommendations to influential people will be
18 made by the commission to them and we will also pay
19 attention to their response and keep a public spotlight
20 on that. So we are serious, we welcome you.

21 I'm going to turn the microphone over
22 to our two co-chairs for our session this evening and
23 that is Ken Grand Pre' and Rabbi Cohn.

24 MR. GRAND PRE' :

25 Hello. Like Mike said, we're here to

1 listen to you tonight. And there is two parts to this
2 evening; we have speakers who are going to talk about
3 the history of gay people in New Orleans and the
4 contributions that gay people have made to the City of
5 New Orleans. We have Robert Batson; he runs the gay
6 history tour for the French Quarter. We have Randy
7 Evans from the Forum for Equality. And we have Derrin
8 Bergeron from HRC, which is not the Human Relations
9 Commission but the - oh, Lord - Human Rights Campaign.
10 I almost forgot what the acronym stood for, sorry.

11 So first of all, without any further
12 adieu, let me invite Robert Batson to come up first.

13 Robert?

14 MR. BATSON:

15 Thank you. I'm supposed to give you
16 the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender history of New
17 Orleans. I can give it to you within about ten seconds.
18 Things used to be bad, they're a lot better now. But
19 you probably want a lot more detail than that.

20 When I first got involved in trying to
21 research New Orleans gay history, I went in with certain
22 preconceptions because I had been involved mostly as a
23 legal advocate and I had went in with some mindsets.
24 Some of these mindsets have borne out.

25 Do we really need this (indicating)?

1 Do we? I don't think so; I am just going to just put
2 this down someplace.

3 I went in with mindsets; some of them
4 have borne out and some have not. One of the mindsets
5 that I went in that has not borne out and surprised me
6 is; I went in with the idea that police harassment of
7 gay people was because there were a lot of police who
8 were deeply, deeply homophobic people. The more I
9 learned, the more I found that that really isn't very
10 true. I learned that the harassment of gay people by
11 officers of the law has not been because of any
12 homophobic feeling, but because it was just a way to
13 make extra money. That was part of the culture and it
14 wasn't true just here in New Orleans, but apparently
15 just about everywhere in our country. But that was
16 understood, if you were an officer you didn't make much
17 money, but you could blackmail gay people and that is
18 how you made more money. That is why bars were raided.
19 That is why men were trapped in public places. Because
20 the terrible, terrible thing, the worst part of being
21 arrested -- and the whole process of being arrested and
22 going through that, if you have never done it, it's very
23 difficult to describe what it does to you. The process
24 is designed to demean you, and it does. But the worst
25 part of being arrested was that you had your name in the

1 paper. For most people that meant that you lost your
2 job, your career was ended. There are even
3 heartbreaking stories of people who are out in the paper
4 that way, who were disowned by their families and there
5 were even suicides by being forced to be identified as
6 the shameful thing as a homosexual.

7 The world has changed and it hasn't
8 changed willingly, it's changed because a lot of people
9 have worked very hard for a very, very long time. Those
10 gay people; the historical riots in New York City in
11 1969 was a milestone, but that isn't where the modern
12 gay rights movement began. It really began 20 years
13 before that in Los Angeles where a manifesto published
14 by a wonderful radical gay man named Harry Hay, who just
15 died about two years ago, he was 90 years old. And in
16 1949 Harry Hay wrote a manifesto on behalf of bachelors;
17 that was as far as he could go in self-identification at
18 the time. This shows you how far we have come since
19 that time. On that came the homophile movement and
20 then later it became the gay rights movement, so far and
21 so forth.

22 In New Orleans we are slow to do a lot
23 of things so a lot of things have happened here later
24 than most other places. I did not know, even though I
25 was living here, that just a year and a half after the

1 gay riots there was a first gay rights organization. It
2 was called the Gay Liberation Front of New Orleans. It
3 was a term used right after the riots in New York, right
4 after Stonewall started using it and it was used in
5 various other cities. The GLF was started in the last
6 1970's, it only lasted less than a year before it fell
7 apart, but that group of people did some very courageous
8 things. It was only a handful, but they had the first
9 gay rights demonstration down in City Hall and they were
10 protesting police harassment.

11 I am going to go back to
12 preconceptions. One of the preconceptions that has
13 borne on and angers me, if you try to research our
14 history it's very difficult to do. I say that because
15 up until the modern era, almost every, whatever you want
16 to call it, same identifying people, same sex identified
17 people, were doing everything possible to keep from
18 being identified as such. Because you were burned at
19 stake, you were arrested, you were thrown in prison; you
20 were shot. It's so frustrating that we have a whole
21 part of our history so forever hidden from us. So you
22 just have to try to kind of read between the lines.

23 If you go to the old microfilm at the
24 Times-Picayune, you go through it and say, "Where is the
25 written record of our existence?" We know that we have

1 been here. About the only thing that you will find
2 written are stories about arrests. And that is pretty
3 much my documented history, and that enrages me because
4 what that does not show is, it does not show the rest of
5 our lives. It doesn't show all of the wonderful
6 creativity as far as our outrageousness and flair, and
7 yes, being fabulous in everything possible. It also
8 doesn't tell the stories of courage, tremendous acts of
9 courage. When I read about them I am always deeply,
10 deeply moved. And it also doesn't tell the stories of
11 friends and lovers taking care of each other. I love
12 being able to have found some of those stories and being
13 able to write them down and keep them and tell them as
14 we tell people about the French Quarters, I do the gay
15 heritage tour.

16 I want to talk particularly about our
17 relationship with government, because there is not time
18 to do everything. But if you are going to do a history
19 of who we are, you have to have all of the wonderful
20 stories or the social aspects of our lives. You have to
21 have Mardi Gras, Southern Decadence and Halloween and
22 just great fun and excitement. If you look at what a
23 lot of what modern great culture has become, it's what;
24 I think that the gay people created it and sort of set
25 the limits because we were always on the outside pushing

1 it on more.

2 I'm going to tell you a little story
3 that I have never written but I tell it on the tour
4 because I love it, because it illustrates two things,
5 our social life and the life of living in a situation
6 where the police were your enemy. In the 1950's, let
7 me go back a little, although we had gay bars early on
8 and Café Repeat and Exile was long of the longest
9 existing same name, same address gay bars in the
10 country. I am trying to research all of them now, but
11 it is one of the very oldest if not the very oldest.

12 Although we had gay bars early on, the
13 police would not allow same gender dancing. Whenever
14 that was attempted, the bar would be closed down. We
15 were told that it was because, and this is going back,
16 that it was because the police and some of the bars that
17 were in the Quarter, they were afraid that tourists
18 might walk in off the street and see it, same gender
19 dancing. Then that would be the end of the world as we
20 know it today and that would be a terrible thing. But
21 there are some stories of some bars that were on little
22 back roads and you might have read this, where dancing
23 was, there was one bar on Rampart Street the story is,
24 it was one of the back road bars where same gender
25 dancing could occur. The doorman had a little light

1 switch on the door and whenever the police would walk in
2 the front door he would flip all of the bright lights in
3 the back room. And then everybody would change partners
4 (demonstrating) so it would be boy/girl, boy/girl;
5 boy/girl. So people did get by; sometimes.

6 It wasn't allowed until, as far as I
7 can tell, until Pete's opened in 1968, where Oz is
8 today. That is the first bar where they allowed same
9 gender dancing. However I have found that in the early
10 '50's out in Gentilly, if you knew which back street to
11 go into, the back parking lot to go into the backdoor to
12 the back room behind the little neighborhood bar, there
13 was a place called the Golden Rod where women could
14 dance with women. Betty Caldwell told me that she went
15 there, that she was a 19 year old and was taken from
16 LSU. And she said, "Oh, I never thought I would see
17 such a thing in my life. Women were dancing with women.
18 I had thought I had died and gone to heaven to find
19 that."

20 But that bar was raided. There was a
21 famous raid; I think it was in either 1951 or 1952. A
22 lot of the women were arrested and taken down to the
23 police station; it was just a horrible experience. I
24 did not know these two women; I have heard this story
25 from Betty and from a lot of other women who knew them.

1 There were two women who were there that night of the
2 raid and their names were Gaudy Millhouse and Helen
3 Lofton. I don't make this stuff up. And they were at
4 the bar that night; it's a great little story, but by
5 the time the raid happened Gaudy was already very, very
6 drunk. Which is apparently what she usually did, the
7 whole story is really Helen trying to keep Gaudy from
8 getting into any more trouble than she already was in.
9 The story goes that they were put into the paddy wagon
10 and they got to the police station and were all lined
11 up. They are waiting to be booked and Gaudy doesn't
12 know where she is, what is going on. She can't even
13 stand up; Helen was behind her holding her up. Helen
14 was whispering in her ear, "Gaudy, whatever you do,
15 whatever you do, don't use your real name." You see,
16 back then the survival technique was if you were brave
17 enough to go to a bar and risk being raided, you didn't
18 take any identification, so you could make up a name.
19 Because that name is what is going to be in the
20 newspaper tomorrow and if it's your real name, your life
21 is pretty much over in this city.

22 So Helen is saying, "Gaudy, don't use
23 your real name. Don't use your real name." They get up
24 to the clerk and it's Gaudy's turn. The clerk says,
25 "Name?" Gaudy, apparently the clouds in her head have

1 cleared just enough that she realized where she was and
2 what was going on. She stood up on her own feet, stood
3 up and said very loudly, clearly, over enunciating and
4 said, "My name is Helen Lofton."

5 (Audience laughter.)

6 The look on Helen's face, "Gaudy, how
7 could you do that to me?" She said, "I'm sorry, Helen,
8 it was the only other name I could think of." So
9 telling that story, it tells our social life. And that
10 was pretty courageous that they were in this bar. You
11 know why we know that story? You know the story because
12 I know the story. I know the story because for 30 years
13 after that night Helen and Gaudy both love to tell the
14 story. If you go to any party you can prevail for one
15 of them to tell the story again. So they turned
16 something that was really a horrible experience into, I
17 think is really the kernel of what the definition of
18 what gay humor is. I think that it is for most groups,
19 that you turn that part of you into something that you
20 think you are going to be less, less hurt by.

21 There is so much to tell you, I will
22 just mention briefly some very important things that
23 happened. The Upstairs Lounge fire was a tremendous
24 event that affected us in many ways. The Anita Bryant
25 rally, very important, just beginning to mobilize us.

1 I want to end by going back and telling
2 you, trying to tell you how much I love these people.
3 The people who sometimes I just know a name or maybe
4 even just a description, I don't even know their names.
5 But they have come to be people that I really cherish,
6 for all of the reasons that I have mentioned. I love
7 them because of their wonderful flair, because of
8 courage and because they are friends and lovers taking
9 care of each other.

10 The, let me show you this
11 (demonstrating) document. The Gay Liberation Front
12 published three newsletters before it folded. This was
13 half of the first letter, it was front and back. And
14 what it is was these were three first person stories of
15 people telling their story of being arrested, for the
16 most part gay men entrapment. They are not their real
17 names; they are called Matthew, Mark and Luke. I wonder
18 where they get that from. But these are just, these are
19 horror stories. Not only just the horror of being in a
20 place where no one can help you. There was no community
21 in place. There were no political organizations. There
22 was no community center. There were no people, no one
23 to help, you had no where to turn.

24 I will read you just the shortest one,
25 it's not the most brutal but it's the story of Luke.

1 It's very difficult for me to read this. "I was walking
2 past the Cabrini Playground before midnight on Wednesday
3 night. This man came up to me and propositioned me.
4 You know, he wanted to make it right there in the park.
5 I told him that I wasn't into scenes like that, but he
6 wouldn't take no for an answer. He and another man
7 followed me for two blocks trying to entice me. I was
8 scared. I didn't know who they were. They seemed very
9 sick. I figured that soon I would take off, just run
10 from them if I had to, but before I could they told me
11 that I was under arrest. I stated to walk away. It was
12 all too crazy. I was just beginning to run when a
13 Billy-club cracked my head. They took me to Charity and
14 gave me a tetanus shot then took me back to a cell. My
15 head was bleeding for some time but my hands were cuffed
16 together so that I couldn't wipe the blood from my face.
17 I was charged with attempted crime against nature,
18 simple escape and resisting arrest. You know, until
19 this happened to me, I had no idea things like this went
20 on. You have no idea how much I want to help gay
21 liberation now, but I am afraid that if I said anything
22 I would go to jail. I have a friend who is going to try
23 to fix all of this all up for me, and I just wouldn't
24 want to jeopardize myself by speaking out." And that is
25 the least brutal of these three stores.

1 Along with these three stories, whoever
2 edited it and we don't know who, but somebody wrote a
3 little sort of a sidebar here (indicating) a little
4 editorial. I want to read it to you because I think
5 that it's one of the most astonishing things that I have
6 ever read in my life. I just wish I knew who the author
7 of this was and the editor. I wish I knew who to thank
8 for this. This was; I guess the editor. There are two
9 paragraphs and they are so different. He said -- I'm
10 told it was a guy, they remember they think his name was
11 Bill. They think he moved to California. And that is
12 really all I have ever been able to find out. Whoever
13 it was, he wrote, "It is nearly dawn as I type up these
14 statements by the brothers who were busted last week.
15 It is hard. Every time I started on Matthew's story a
16 pain rises up out of my belly. I want to scream out. I
17 don't know what to do but cry. In these stories, as
18 told to me by the victims, it is all you need to know
19 what it was like to be a homosexual in a hostile society
20 after 2,000 years of oppression."

21 The second paragraph is so different, I
22 don't know where this man found the hope, the prophecy,
23 this is a time when we had no where to go for help.
24 It was in January of 1971, yet he wrote that night, "No,
25 it is not really all you need to know. There is also

1 hope and love and brotherhood and sisterhood and
2 division of tomorrow. And lovers and friends that make
3 the day bearable and even good. There is liberation
4 that swells like a huge smile up over the horizon of our
5 despair. There is a light that I have seen and perhaps
6 you have seen. A light so amazing, so tremendous, that
7 none of these petty forms of hatred or superstition can
8 survive them. That is where we're going brothers and
9 sisters. That is where we're going. That is the life
10 that is coming. And we're going to stay right here and
11 fight and be soldiers of love. And before too many
12 years have passed, we will have the dreams on earth, in
13 a time of love, in a nation of beauty. Joy, brothers
14 and sisters. Joy."

15 These are the people who have knocked
16 down the doors so that we could be here this afternoon.
17 I wished we knew all of their names. I claimed them,
18 knowing that I would probably never know their names.
19 But our responsibility is to take what we have been
20 given, because it's been a hard one, and to make the
21 world a bit better for the people who are going to come
22 after us.

23 Every generation I have learned, always
24 thinks that the new generation behind us doesn't really
25 appreciate us. I am of the generation now that a lot of

1 the people behind us that says, "Oh these kids, they
2 don't appreciate us. The Batsons' and I, they don't
3 know what we have gone through." They never will
4 appreciate us. My parents grew up in the depression; I
5 could never really appreciate what that was like for
6 them. But that is what happens, that is just our
7 responsibility, it's our joy, but it's also our great
8 privilege. When I got involved in learning about our
9 history I came to see something that I hadn't understood
10 before. I absolutely believe this, 20 years from now or
11 200 years from now, or 2000 years from now. When people
12 walk about the world and look and say, "What changed?
13 What changed?" When did we come out of invisibility?
14 When did we change the world? It's now.

15 Do you realize that for our people,
16 gay, lesbian, queer, bi-sexual, transgender, whatever
17 anyone wants to call themselves. For our people, this
18 is what it was to be the Elizabethan era was to England,
19 this is what the Renaissance was to Italy. This is
20 what Fifth Century BC was to Athens. And we're living
21 it and we're the ones who get to do it. It's such a
22 wonderful blessing to have upon us. Yes, it's difficult
23 because we're having to invent a whole community that
24 has never been existing before. That was before Jules
25 Gamet said, "Very few families prepare their children

1 for their gayness." And we have to find it ourselves,
2 which makes it very difficult.

3 I want to end by just telling you that
4 trying to sum up what I feel about this and what I call
5 the first generation, which is what I think people my
6 age are, and I think destiny chose us. We are history's
7 first generation to live without shame, to speak without
8 fear. Destiny commands, we must accept freedom's duty
9 to live without fear, to speak without shame. We must
10 keep safe our stories, lest they be gone with the mist
11 of tomorrow's dawn. We must hold dear our lives, lest
12 they be lost in the dust of uncaring lives. Silence is
13 truth unspoken. Future generations will judge us; will
14 judge us surely by how well we discharge the duty of
15 being the first generation.

16 Thank you.

17 MR. GRAND PRE':

18 Thank you, Robert.

19 Next we have Randy Evans from the Forum
20 for Equality.

21 MR. EVANS:

22 Hello.

23 MR. GRAND PRE':

24 Would you like the microphone?

25 MR. EVANS:

1 No, that is okay.

2 The Forum for Equality is a, it started
3 as a New Orleans based organization, we are now
4 statewide. Robert is right; there is a lot of progress
5 that has occurred in New Orleans. A lot of life is so
6 much better than when we got started in 1989. Well even
7 before we started there were some other political
8 organizations. Robert just mentioned one, but there
9 were a number of others and there were some that existed
10 even in the early years of the forum. We worked
11 together to accomplish a lot of things.

12 As a community our first real
13 accomplishment was in 1990 and that was with the passage
14 of the Human Rights Ordinance. Prior to that time the
15 community had attempted on two other occasions to pass
16 an ordinance in New Orleans and had been unsuccessful.
17 Basically at that time there were essentially two
18 elected officials who would even give the gay and
19 lesbian community the time of day. Most elected
20 officials would not even meet with our community, were
21 not interested in addressing any of our concerns. So we
22 basically went out politics in forums, the way that
23 politicians do. And we got involved in a big way,
24 donating money, putting in volunteer hours, organizing
25 voters, registering voters.

1 We were able to pass the Human Rights
2 Ordinance which basically affects housing, public
3 accommodations and employment for gays and lesbians in
4 New Orleans. That was a huge accomplishment.

5 Then in 1993 we actually got passed the
6 Domestic Partnership Ordinance; that was a really scaled
7 back version of domestic partnership. If you read about
8 things that are being passed now, it really is the
9 equivalent of marriage or maybe marriage-like, this was
10 pretty much a registration proceeding with very limited
11 benefits. It was more designed to allow the individuals
12 to go to their own employers and participate in company
13 benefits that might be offered if somebody was
14 registered as a partner. And that really is the place
15 that our community needs to move next in New Orleans.
16 In terms of feeling with a welcome-ness, or a feeling of
17 an inclusion, for this community there needs to be
18 standard domestic partnership benefits. The Forum for
19 Equality has made that one of our objectives.

20 In fact in this last round of mayoral
21 and City Council elections, these issues were raised to
22 all of the candidates who were running. We do have
23 commitments from a number of people, but if you are
24 familiar with politicians, some of them may commit but
25 that doesn't necessarily mean that they are going to do

1 what they said they were going to do. So that is really
2 the agenda that is left in New Orleans.

3 I generally like to say that we were so
4 successful in the '90's in what we were doing that the
5 battle of New Orleans was won already. The focus
6 basically shifted at that time to Baton Rouge to the
7 legislature. That really has been the main focus of
8 our activities.

9 In 1995 we were able to pass a Hospital
10 Visitation Act in the legislation. Prior to that time
11 the hospital could exclude the partner of any gay or
12 lesbian, if their hospital regulation so provided. And
13 that happens on a regular basis, even today. Even today
14 in hospitals around the state, nurses, doctors, will
15 order the partners of gay couples out of the room if
16 their family objects to the partner being there. In
17 some cases they were excluded even without objections
18 from the families.

19 What we did in 1995 with passage of
20 this act was it allows individuals, this doesn't apply
21 just to gays and lesbians; anyone can do this. You fill
22 out an affidavit and you file that with the hospital or
23 with the doctor and basically then that hospital has to
24 obey your wishes with that. We strongly as an
25 organization encourage everyone to have these

1 affidavits, and it's probably a good idea not to only
2 have one in your house but also to have one in your car.
3 Quite frankly most accidents, or most people who are
4 taken to the hospital is either because of what you are
5 doing in your car or what is happening in your car, or
6 you are going to use your car to get to the hospital.
7 So it's a good idea to have the document in your car.

8 In 1997 we were able to pass the Hate
9 Crimes Act. That was the first in the Deep South, in
10 any state, to basically create a special crime for
11 violence that was done against another in the context of
12 hatred toward that individual's group identification.
13 And that applies not only to gays and lesbians; it
14 applies to all of the various groups that have been
15 subjected to discrimination over the years.

16 Now we have been trying on a statewide
17 level to enact Equal Rights Legislation, literally since
18 1993. We have been successful to about 40 percent of
19 the way to where we need to be, but we have got a long
20 way to go. One of the particular things that the Forum
21 is working on statewide is this round of elections this
22 fall. There will be term limits coming to effect in the
23 legislation. We have working groups in all of the major
24 cities in the state, including Baton Rouge, Lafayette,
25 Alexandria, Lake Charles, Monroe and Shreveport. We are

1 going to be doing actual candidate interviews in all of
2 these cities and we will be making endorsements in each
3 of these cities. Hopefully we will help elect fair
4 minded legislators in the course of that activity. That
5 is very important not only to us here locally, it is
6 also critical to the rest of the state. Outside of New
7 Orleans there are no protections for gay and lesbian
8 folks in terms of their housing, public accommodations
9 or employment and we need to enact that.

10 That's also important, particularly if
11 you think about what happened to all of us after
12 Katrina. You know, we're used to a certain arrangement
13 of rights here and we're now elsewhere and those rights
14 don't follow us. Those rights end at the parish line.
15 So this is very important not only to us here in New
16 Orleans, but also statewide. Another reason it is
17 important in New Orleans is that quite frankly the
18 penalty that exists currently under city law is very
19 slight, literally, and we don't like it.

20 All of the employers in New Orleans
21 know about this, because literally you can only be fined
22 \$200. But it's really bad publicity and companies as a
23 general rule like to avoid that publicity. We have made
24 it clear, to some companies that have violated it, that
25 we will be all over the press with this. That

1 generally, that pressure has been enough to back down.
2 No human, no HR department wants to be in violation of
3 the law; that is the kind of thing that gets them
4 terminated. So even though it is a slight penalty, it
5 has been very effective. On a statewide level we would
6 like to see that have a more serious penalty.

7 Other things that we're doing and other
8 things that I think are important through us, we have a
9 large number of organizations not only here but around
10 the state. We have excellent church organizations which
11 provide for spiritual needs. And that is critical,
12 because many religions basically reject gays and
13 lesbians. It is essential for many of us who are
14 religious to have a religious home. We have community
15 based organizations, including our Community Center,
16 which the Forum was one of the organizations that helped
17 it get started in the '90's. That is critical to
18 helping out, there is an each lab which assists the
19 youths in coming basically to terms with their sexuality
20 and helps their parents in coming to terms with their
21 child's sexuality.

22 There are so many different
23 organizations that address various needs of the
24 community, whether it's social, recreational, sports.
25 It really is a phenomenal community in terms of all of

1 the activities that are available to people. So to that
2 extent I think that our community very much feels at
3 home in New Orleans; feels that this is place where
4 we're welcomed and we're valued and we make a
5 significant contribution.

6 Now Post Katrina I don't know what the
7 numbers are, but everyone generally tries to figure out
8 what the percentage is of gay folks in town. I don't
9 know. We believe that's probably somewhere, pre storm
10 probably somewhere, nine, 10, 12 percent. Post storm
11 the percentage is probably more like 14 or 15. We don't
12 know that, that is just pure speculation on our part.
13 But I do know that there has been no mayor that has been
14 elected in recent memory, other than most who had pro
15 gay stances on all of the issues that we talked about.
16 And I know that there are very few City Council members
17 who have been elected who have not had pro gay
18 positions. And those who didn't quickly changed their
19 views on life once they were there. And that is a true
20 compliment to our community, to the organizations and
21 not just the Forum but all of the other organizations
22 because it's a strong community.

23 As Robert said, it all started with
24 people saying, "Hey, I've had enough." And that really
25 is the history of our community in New Orleans. All of

1 the progress that we have made is by each individual in
2 our own life experiences saying, "I had enough, this is
3 my city, too." I think we're all proud to be a part of
4 New Orleans and I would like to thank the Human
5 Relations Commission for having this event and to hear
6 our voices.

7 Thank you.

8 MR. GRAND PRE:

9 Our next speaker is Derrin Bergeron
10 from the Human Rights Campaign.

11 MR. BERGERON:

12 Hello.

13 I guess, sort of like the things that
14 Robert and Randy said, HRC is more of a national
15 organization. But where I think you feel all protected
16 in all more, bigger, metropolitan cities, they have all
17 pretty much positive gay policies and things of that
18 nature. They don't, all over the country and HRC is
19 trying to change that.

20 We need to change it on the federal
21 level and this focus down at state level is very, very
22 important. Nationally HRC is the largest political
23 organization in the country, we're about 700,000
24 members. They fight discrimination so that families and
25 individuals can feel safe at home, at work and in their

1 community.

2 HRC was very instrumental in the 2006
3 election. They got three senators elected that were
4 very strong, Amy Klobuchar from Minnesota, Bob Casey in
5 Pennsylvania and Sharon Brown in Ohio. And those people
6 have said that if it wasn't for HRC, they wouldn't have
7 been elected. As a result, they have been really
8 forceful in pushing through legislation. As we all
9 talked about, although New Orleans might be protected
10 with hate crimes, it's still - where New Orleans is
11 protected with hate crimes, it's still not national. As
12 a result HRC says when you slur hate, when you attack an
13 individual and you call him gay or something, you are
14 not attacking that individual, you are attacking the
15 whole community and that needs to stop.

16 There are laws that have been in effect
17 since '68 or '69, but the one thing that it doesn't
18 include is gender identity or expression. So we are
19 acting to change that. It has passed the House and now
20 it has to go to the Senate. So that is one piece that
21 came in this year.

22 Another thing that is being repealed on
23 is the "Don't tell." There is about 10,000 servicemen
24 that were --

25 MR. BATSON:

1 And women.

2 MR. BERGERON:

3 And women, thank you. There were about
4 10,000 servicemen and women that were discharged because
5 of that, "Don't ask, don't tell." It's now more of a
6 witch hunt than what the policy was expected to do. HRC
7 has just this month started doing more town hall
8 meetings all over the country. So you can go on their
9 website and see the videos on that too.

10 The other thing that we have gotten a
11 lot of ground on here in New Orleans, which we're very
12 thankful for, is about 500, is it 578? Okay, 578
13 postcards that are going to the representatives and two
14 senators to say end employment non discrimination,
15 because in 33 states you can be fired because you are
16 gay or lesbian. And you can be fired in 42 states if
17 you are transgender.

18 So that's, HRC more focuses on federal
19 legislation, but especially where it's important in
20 states to where it can change the views in that state to
21 focus back here. In other words, like Mary Landrieu,
22 she has been very supportive. She cosponsored the hate
23 crimes legislation and ENDA; she has cosponsored all of
24 that. So when she is up for reelection, HRC has posted
25 for her that she is their number one target, to get her

1 reelected. It is that important, because she is a vote
2 for us. So that is where we focus on in all that, all
3 right?

4 So, thank you. Like I said, it's
5 important. Sometimes we live here in New Orleans and --
6 well then the other really important thing I think that
7 we don't have to really worry about because of the
8 change that was made in Congress in 2006, which is
9 Marriage Equality. You have your first domestic
10 partnership registrants' right here (indicating) Rip and
11 Marsha Naquin-Delain.

12 (Audience Applause.)

13 It's important that we all want to say,
14 you know, "Let us love who we want to love." And that
15 is what HRC is focused on doing. Thank you.

16 We've got to change the laws all over
17 this country. So that it's not cherry picked to where
18 you feel safe in one environment and you don't somewhere
19 else. All right?

20 Thank you.

21 MR. GRAND PRE' :

22 I would like to thank all three of our
23 speakers. I think they were all very informative.

24 Now we're going to move on to the
25 second part of the evening and that is where we want to

1 listen to you. We want to hear where you feel that you
2 think you are included. Where you are not included, in
3 New Orleans, and we want to know a solution.

4 So we're going to open this up to you.
5 Rabbi Cohn?

6 RABBI COHN:

7 Well my job was to pass the microphone;
8 that we're not using. So it's an easy job for anybody.
9 But I do notice some other members of our committee have
10 come in, so if they would stand and introduce
11 themselves.

12 MS. MONTGOMERY-RICHARD:

13 Hi, I'm Margaret Montgomery-Richard and
14 I'm a member of the Human Relations Commission.

15 RABBI COHN:

16 Anyone else that came in?

17 MR. GRAND PRE':

18 We have someone from the Mayor's
19 office.

20 MS. DUCPRE:

21 Hi, I'm Carlyn Ducre from the Mayor's
22 Office.

23 RABBI COHN:

24 Wonderful, wonderful.

25 All right, who would like to ask a

1 first question or make a first observation?

2 MR. BASTON:

3 One thing that I meant to say and I
4 didn't, looking back over 30 or so years, the little
5 ones ask me, "What is changed in my life? What is
6 different in New Orleans?" And I came to understand
7 something, what is different for me from 30 years ago is
8 that when I was an early activist and people knew who I
9 was, I was not well liked by any of the police
10 department for that reason. If I saw a police officer,
11 I was afraid. But now when I see a police officer, I am
12 not afraid. And I think that that is a tremendous
13 difference, because this is in my gut.

14 I didn't know the degree to which this
15 has been the experience of other people, but I think
16 that is a significant, a very significant thing for me.
17 I also think that it is because there is a lot of
18 sensitivity training, dating back to the early '80's in
19 the days of Mayor Morial's administration, he began
20 working with us.

21 RABBI COHN:

22 I think connected to that; I would like
23 to recognize the Executive Director of our Human
24 Relations Commission. Larry Bagneris, who is one of my
25 personal heroes and the work that you have done for this

1 community and through this community, our community,
2 thank you.

3 (Audience Applause.)

4 MR. GRAND PRE':

5 He also brought the cookies tonight,
6 folks.

7 MR. BAGNERIS:

8 Thank you; and they are Oreos.

9 MR. BATSON:

10 Does this remark on the police
11 department; is that pretty universal in this room?

12 MR. BERGERON:

13 I agree with that comment, I really do.
14 I also maybe agree with it too much, meaning that I
15 think that we don't cause problems so I feel that the
16 police don't necessarily have to worry about us. But as
17 a result I feel that maybe sometimes that is where a lot
18 more of the crime might happen, you know. Maybe it's
19 happening all over the city, but that is somewhat my
20 concern is, a little bit. You know, that just because
21 we are contained in our bars and in the same certain
22 areas of the city, you know we beautify them and all
23 this other kind of stuff.

24 But you know what, they are okay. They
25 are okay. It's just like some of the stories that I

1 heard during Katrina. You know, they kind of let some
2 of the residents that were in the French Quarter, "Don't
3 worry about it; stay inside." You know, I feel that
4 maybe we are not doing the harm, that might lead to some
5 exposure outside that the people will stay and want to
6 protect the area.

7 MR. GRAND PRE':

8 That is a valid point. You know there
9 is a lot of crime that has been happening in the Lower
10 Quarter and the Marigny. Do we have any thoughts on
11 that?

12 MR. NICOLAS:

13 I think that for myself that is true,
14 crime as a buggy driver.

15 MR. GRAND PRE':

16 Go ahead, sir. Do you want to say your
17 name first?

18 MR. NICOLAS:

19 My name is Michel Nicolas. I'm one of
20 the tour guides and buggy drivers. It's because of me
21 that they changed the name from the Gay 90's to
22 Carriages.

23 But anyway my feelings about this are
24 about the same, but after Katrina I obviously saw a
25 change in the Quarter, as far as business, things are

1 slower. But in the community I think Post Katrina I
2 think there is a certain fear, that there is a loss of
3 people. But also lots of people came from all parts of
4 America that have now come to the New Orleans and I have
5 met them in the carriages and some of them are clearly
6 homophobic. And they have come to the city Post Katrina
7 and that has developed a very special attitude or very
8 accepting attitude towards homosexuality. But now there
9 is a new New Orleans going on and this new blood that
10 hasn't yet come to the acceptance, you know, of the
11 French Quarter, or maybe from where they come from, this
12 might not have happened yet.

13 I think that, you know, we can't get
14 comfortable in this presumption that our community is
15 accepted as such as it was before Katrina because there
16 is concerns by some of these people. As a tour guide, I
17 hear them react as they pass by the gay bars and, you
18 know, the comments that they make. Not all of them,
19 but, well some of them. Some of them have called New
20 Orleans home now and that, they have those attitudes. I
21 think that one of the things that has to come to happen
22 is a re-education now that this city is a city that
23 tried its acceptance of people, it is a city that is
24 being accepted of everyone.

25 Thank you.

1 REV. BRECHT:

2 I'm Dexter Brecht, a Pastor of
3 Metropolitan Community Church here in New Orleans. My
4 concern at this point is about not only about the
5 claiming of the safety of the LGBTQ community that
6 exited prior to the storm but embracing fully following
7 the storm, the wonderful thread that LGBTQ community is
8 in New Orleans. Not just for the purposes of ensuring
9 safety, but for it being held up as the wonderful home
10 that it is and the wonderful aspect that it has been.

11 We heard all about the historic nature
12 of our community. We heard concerns about continued
13 safety because the community is shifting. We all know
14 that the community is changing, it's shifting, it has.
15 Through no choice of our own, it was put upon us, you
16 know, by the storm.

17 The city is going to be different and I
18 don't -- while I see that there are tremendous
19 challenges during the recovery. What I don't see is a
20 tremendous claiming of this as an opportunity for us to
21 define the city we would like to see to ensure that the
22 city is rebuilt in the way that we would like it to be
23 rebuilt. To lift up the wonderful aspects of the city
24 that were but also look forward and at this time make
25 the appropriate changes that will make it become the

1 city that we know and hope that it can be.

2 So that is a part of that wonderful,
3 hopeful new city that we have a chance to recreate now
4 because of what has been imposed on us, include a
5 claiming of the incredible gift that LGBTQ people have
6 to give to the city.

7 MS. DUCRE:

8 I have a question and this is following
9 along with that statement. I wanted to know with all of
10 the plans, well with the main plan that has gone before
11 the LRA and with the LGTB maybe having to look at all of
12 the other different other committees, planning
13 committees that have gone forth, with different plans as
14 to how they see the overall city. Have you looked at
15 those plans to see if they encompass all of the views
16 that you might have wanted to see?

17 And if not, did you offer any of those
18 suggestions at the different citywide meetings,
19 statewide meetings that did go on?

20 MR. BAGNERIS:

21 I want to make a comment to that
22 statement. First of all, I wanted to save this for
23 later but I think that I couldn't help but bring it up
24 now; it's a direct reflection of what you asked. I was
25 flipping the channels the other day, I was looking at

1 the Planning Commission, I was looking at Louis Volz;
2 who is one of the members of another commission. And I
3 see the number of gay people involved in the plans of
4 this city and I can answer you 100 percent-wise, we are
5 in the middle of that vision.

6 MS. DUCRE:

7 All right.

8 MR. BAGNERIS:

9 But the second vision that I would like
10 to get from some of us this evening is; we have been out
11 going throughout a community that used to ask for people
12 of color to show three and four ID cards. I am going to
13 jump some of that junk in this recording because it
14 needs to be there.

15 I grew up in a community where women
16 and men didn't even communicate until AIDS came along
17 and lesbian sisters came out to take care of us. I grew
18 up in a community where we fought over not allowing
19 transsexual people to turn this movement into just that
20 issue and yet they were all a part of the community,
21 included bisexuals. Where do we get this from? I mean,
22 we have a great community, particularly in the City of
23 New Orleans; that has caused to learn to live together,
24 blacks, whites, browns and yellows, you see it every
25 weekend, you see it during the week. We've got women,

1 men working together in groups and in everything else.
2 I mean; I really want to know. I want the record to
3 give some ideas to some other communities of how we have
4 been able to struggle and blend the community together
5 that I think is a prime example of a wonderful humanity
6 of souls coming together.

7 MR. GRAND PRE':

8 You know, I want to say something.
9 I've only been here for 15 years. I lived in San
10 Francisco for three and a half years and after that I
11 lived in Toronto. I lived in Key West, I lived in
12 Chicago. I have lived all over the country. And what
13 you're talking about, Larry, this city and I comment
14 this to tourists all of the time. This is the most
15 openly gay city that I've ever lived in.

16 In San Francisco you don't drive by and
17 see the doors to the gay bars wide open with people
18 standing out on the sidewalks, you don't see that. You
19 don't see people in San Francisco outside the cat
20 strolls holding hands with same sex people, you don't
21 see that. And I think living here for 15 years and
22 after seeing what I have seen in all of these cities,
23 it's because New Orleans, gay, straight, black, white,
24 is the most accepting city of other people. New
25 Orleans is the city of diversity and I think that is one

1 thing that we have all been very proud of. I think that
2 is one thing that we have all worked really hard at.

3 I don't know if you agree with that or
4 not, but that is my observation of New Orleans after
5 living here for 15 years.

6 Go ahead, Derrin.

7 MR. BERGERON:

8 And I love what you said, you're
9 absolutely right. Somewhat, some of the problems that
10 we've had, when we ask is that when we ask for marriage
11 equality that went on here at the state level. It was
12 just beat down like, you know, dogs with our tails
13 between our legs.

14 We had certain leaders in this
15 community to stand up, to support us, to go to bat for
16 us. To tell them that this is right, that people
17 deserve to love who they want to love. There was some
18 education involved with some of that and then when it
19 came down to the vote, you know, we had some of these
20 pastors telling them, "That is wrong. You will never be
21 reelected. You know, don't put your foot back in this
22 church if you vote against it."

23 So to your point, yes, that sometimes
24 we can live outside of this bubble, you know, and
25 realize that we're accepted. But then really when

1 certain things matter to us and we don't have certain
2 leadership standing up there supporting us, you what,
3 it's back inside the closet. It's back to that closet
4 that we have sometimes gone back into a little bit. You
5 know, and say, "Well, I have got to wait until that time
6 comes out to where I can like peek my head back because
7 we've been scared." Like I mentioned to you before, in
8 33 states you can be fired because you're gay or
9 lesbian. Yeah, okay, so we are at will stakes anyway,
10 they can fire you for whatever reason.

11 We have to work at a job and see
12 someone else's kids and husbands on their desk and yet
13 you are afraid to put your partner's picture up there
14 because, you know, you're afraid of what your boss might
15 say. So its like, get another job, well, you know what?
16 I like my job. I just don't like my boss.

17 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

18 I know that feeling.

19 MR. BERGERON:

20 And yet, you know that is what I'm
21 saying. You are running, you know, there are a bunch of
22 times whereas we felt like we have to get defeat and
23 stuff like that. We have a president who is leading
24 that way, in religious rights; that sometimes you have
25 to make a small step. We are trying to make those small

1 steps, to do the right thing.

2 So that is what I am saying. I have so
3 much support in some of the leadership around here, but
4 we have to take small steps first.

5 MR. GRAND PRE':

6 So what is the answer to that?

7 MR. BERGERON:

8 You know what, if I had it, I guess we
9 would have marriage equality. So I don't know.

10 MR. GRAND PRE':

11 Go ahead; you wanted to make a comment?
12 Would you just stand up and tell us your name for the
13 record.

14 MR. SIMS:

15 My name is Bryan Sims. I have lived
16 here for 18 years.

17 It is interesting when you are talking
18 about the community here, because I just got back from
19 PRIDE weekend in Boston and Toronto. And I think that
20 it's interesting because here we didn't have a parade
21 this year and you can look at that a couple of different
22 ways. But where in these cities the parades went on for
23 so long it got to the point where we were like, "How
24 much prouder can you get?"

25 You know, between Southern Decadence,

1 Halloween, Mardi Gras and now the Gay Easter parade, we
2 don't need necessarily need to have a parade just to be
3 proud and I think that is positive thing. And at the
4 same time I have never been prouder of the city, talking
5 about inclusiveness than when a few years at the St.
6 Patrick's Day Parade in New York and Boston were not
7 allowing gay people to enter and here Pete's was one of
8 the places welcomed in.

9 That sense of and in terms of what I
10 would like to bring to the table here today, in
11 rebuilding the city and it talks to what you brought up
12 what you (indicating) talked about, the people who are
13 coming in here. I don't know if that, if this is
14 necessarily within the purview of this commission, but I
15 think that in some ways whether it be the Mayor's Office
16 or the Convention and Visitors Bureau, need to do some
17 outreach to get people coming here to this city. And of
18 course it extends to every community, but given the
19 topic here tonight, why can't someone, some entity from
20 New Orleans work toward promoting or providing
21 information to those? You know, such events as the
22 PRIDE festivals throughout the country, saying that we
23 have respect in this community here, Patrick's tours,
24 information, whatever, that is not my expertise.

25 Whenever I meet people at these events

1 and tell them to come on down, they say, "Oh, yeah, we'd
2 love to, but." They don't know; many people in Canada,
3 they don't know what Southern Decadence is. You have to
4 explain it to them. Many people all around the rest of
5 the country don't. And if we don't start getting more
6 people of every type into this city on a regular basis,
7 it's a worry. Because I'm telling you, I am coming from
8 working on Royal Street and let me tell you, it's quiet
9 over there these days. Anyone else here in the service
10 industry knows that and if that doesn't change we may
11 not continue to have a community left to fight about.
12 At the same time we need to get more people involved who
13 would be able to participate.

14 I see a lot of people in this room whom
15 I have known for years who are actively involved, which
16 is great. I don't see a lot of say 20 something's out
17 here. And that is interesting, because up in Toronto
18 that is what the crowd is. People have become so
19 accepting and inclusive that the gay people, guys and
20 gals just go out to any bar. So I think that is
21 something that we need, to have a critical mass and get
22 more people, to get new generation to fight the fight.

23 Thank you.

24 MR. GRAND PRE' :

25 Thank you.

1 Yes, ma'am.

2 MS. GRIGGS:

3 My name is Mary Griggs.

4 I'm with the Community Center. One of
5 the things that I really think we need to do is have
6 more communication. I mean; I found out about this
7 meeting because Tim sent an email out from the Forum. I
8 had no idea about this meeting and I know that a lot of
9 people that would've been here if the word had gotten
10 out. There are plenty of ways to communicate, whether
11 it be a Yahoo group or posting on other places and I
12 think that is what we needed to do as part of the
13 community.

14 We all have our own separate groups.
15 We have listing groups, religious groups, community
16 centers, et cetera. There has to be more communication
17 between us and between the government to us so that we
18 can refer them among our membership. I was, you know,
19 able to rearrange my schedule to come to this meeting
20 but I only found out about it on Thursday. So that is
21 why there aren't that many people here.

22 I belong to about nine or ten different
23 groups that I could have spread the information to had I
24 known about it earlier in advance. And I think that is
25 to the detriment of our community, you know, yes it's

1 lovely that we are diverse. We have a great diversity,
2 we have a great tolerance of all different kinds, but we
3 are not communicating to one another or, you know, to
4 others.

5 That is what I wish for, you know,
6 we've got to communicate and you all need to communicate
7 to us, too.

8 MR. GRAND PRE':

9 Well in defense of that, the Ambush
10 donated two half page ads for the last month announcing
11 this meeting. So it was advertised.

12 MS. GRIGGS:

13 Yeah, now I certainly see that, but as
14 a lesbian I don't do much of the bar reading. I do get
15 it and I read one or two sections of it. So yes, I do
16 have the Ambush but I don't read it page to page because
17 it doesn't necessarily speak to, you know, the things
18 that I'm doing outside of the bar or areas that are
19 applicable.

20 MR. SIMS:

21 Can I just follow up with that? I
22 understand your point, but how you get the message out
23 is one step but it's also people caring enough to come
24 here. I think that is one of New Orleans' double-edged
25 sword. I know we have a great community, but it's

1 getting people involved. Among the community, we have a
2 limited number of individuals. Unlike areas such as New
3 York or Boston, I would think that this area would be
4 packed. Of course here it's like let the good times
5 roll. I mean; how do you create that community
6 involvement?

7 MR. NICOLAS:

8 I think what that she is saying, I used
9 to work downstairs and work with the community. I
10 started a group years ago called H -- and worked with
11 people in the community and aides. I remember it was
12 meant to be related to work and reaching out to people
13 in the community. I knew a number of couples and it was
14 just so difficult to get the word out because the
15 different organizations were not communicating. So
16 there was nobody to turn to, there was no cohesiveness
17 and no unity of the gay community because they were so
18 dependent on their own things.

19 I think if there was some kind of
20 umbrella, most people would be able to come under. When
21 I think that it didn't become that because they didn't
22 want it to become, but because of these other groups
23 were so independent on their own. You don't have still
24 today that super umbrella that can come to cover the
25 whole community so that there is that universal voice

1 and that universal organization.

2 As a result we sort of, um, we sort of
3 shortchanged ourselves and that is what I see. I see
4 other gay communities around the country and they have
5 that. They have that cohesiveness where the word gets
6 out and everybody knows about it. I found out this
7 weekend, you know, so I am here.

8 I think that we need that; that is
9 outside of the city that is up to ourselves, we need to
10 create that cohesiveness.

11 MR. BATSON:

12 I would like to add something here that
13 addresses that issue. It's a new organization that some
14 of us have put together to try to increase
15 communication. The board was put together in the last
16 couple of years, since Katrina. Mary, she is on the
17 board, so she could probably address that.

18 MS. GRIGGS:

19 It's the Community Coalition of Greater
20 New Orleans Organizations and Businesses.

21 We have, we're trying to come together
22 as that umbrella of all of the organizations and
23 businesses impacted in our community. It started post
24 storm when there was money available and the only people
25 that the money, that the loaners knew to contact was the

1 No-AIDS Task Force. And they didn't have connections
2 with children; they didn't have connections with all of
3 the other groups so they put the call out.

4 You know, we need to communicate among
5 ourselves. So we are trying to start with this
6 Community Coalition. We are trying to do a directory so
7 that people can know what businesses to support in our
8 community or that we own in our community. Again, we
9 have to get that information out there because there are
10 a lot of people that we had conversations with and
11 talking to folks and they had no idea about this group.

12 It's, I don't know what the solution is
13 as far as getting that communication out there, but
14 we're trying. The Community Center started to do that
15 and we need to move that next step over to the Community
16 Coalition. It would be great if we could have more
17 involvement with that group.

18 MR. GRAND PRE':

19 Is there anybody else that would like
20 to speak?

21 MR. BAGNERIS:

22 I'm going to take full responsibility
23 for the crowd not being here tonight, because Ken
24 offered to have an open bar.

25 (Audience applause.)

1 We would have probably not had enough
2 seats to fit everyone. But we couldn't do for one group
3 anything that we couldn't do for the others.

4 I want to leave here three ideas.

5 Number one is why I leave here
6 confident that because we have small group, that if a
7 gay man, lesbian, transsexual or bisexual person was in
8 danger out there because of a police officer or an
9 injustice from the city, we could pile 3,000 people out
10 in front of this building and there would be no problem.
11 So we have got that one thing.

12 The second thing is that I go to City
13 Hall every day. I am just amazed; there are gay people
14 on every floor in City Hall. And there are gay people
15 throughout the system. So once again, we're
16 comfortable. I never dreamed that I would be in a
17 position to collect data on people losing jobs, people
18 losing apartments and housing, that sort of thing, as
19 Director of the Human Relations Commission. So I go to
20 work and I see other gay people that are comfortable in
21 their environment. I know they are on the domestic
22 partnership lists. I know people call me every day
23 about that.

24 So once again, I'm confident, but I'm
25 more confident because I work with 18 incredible people

1 on the Human Relations Commission. The Commission is
2 made up of Christians, Muslims, Jews, blacks and whites,
3 men and women, black, white and yellow. We have
4 everything on that commission that insisted that this
5 group have an input in these conversations because when
6 this document is put together, we will be included with
7 everyone else.

8 And I want to share with you the big
9 picture. This is not just about turnout, because the
10 other group that we had a low turnout on, believe it or
11 not was the - and I want to share this with you so that
12 you can go home with this - was the NAACP, SCLC, Eracism
13 and the Urban League, members of the activists
14 community. The reason is because people are waiting to
15 be active on an issue. They are not as interested in a
16 conversation. But we wanted to make sure, the
17 Commission wanted to make sure that this community was
18 included in this document that we are going to produce.

19 This is the sixth series that we have
20 had. We have talked to; believe it or not, the African
21 American men and women in the community. We had a fight
22 over whether you call them Caucasians or white men and
23 women in the community. These volunteers in this
24 commission, these people are volunteers, spent a day in
25 this room planning this. We argued over this for six

1 months. We had Irish, English, French and Italian
2 influences. African American activists, the ones I just
3 told you about. Members of the Hispanic community, we
4 had a room full of 80 people last month. Members of the
5 GLTB community, you are here.

6 Next month we are going to have
7 former residents of federal housing. And then we are
8 going to have members of the Asian community the
9 following month. Then we are going to have members of
10 the working community. Next will be members of the
11 German and Greek communities. Then we will hear from
12 members of the religious faith, Jewish, Muslim,
13 Buddhists and Christians. Then we are going to do the
14 Lebanese and Mid Easterner's community, add all of that
15 to this document.

16 And then finally in January, we're
17 going to say, "Okay, if any of you feel that you don't
18 belong to any of these groups, this is the Gumbo group,
19 come and talk to us. Tell us what you think about this
20 city."

21 And while it's so impressive what
22 everybody had to say, where it's not like the meetings
23 that most of us activists people go to where people are
24 concerned about getting beat up by the police or
25 somebody getting hurt. Its praise and respect and a

1 celebration of the diversity of this city that 300 years
2 ago came together as a city and celebrate it,
3 intermarrying, doing the things that the commission
4 wanted to bring back. And it wasn't until 200 years ago
5 when America bought us -- and you know they didn't buy
6 us in 1776 -- they waited until 25, 26 years later.
7 Then started putting labels on us that divided us all
8 up. What the commission is trying to do is to get back
9 to that celebration of diversity and included in that
10 celebration is the GLBT community.

11 So to each of you that is here this
12 evening, you have made a tremendous contribution. The
13 numbers might be small, but remember, and I don't want
14 to get into any particular faith, Jesus started with 12.
15 I'm not going to get into another, I'm a Christian and I
16 will leave it that, all right.

17 I want to thank you; I think there was
18 somebody else that wanted to make a comment.

19 MR. VOLZ:

20 Yes.

21 MR. BAGNERIS:

22 And there was the other thing, before I
23 leave that thought. Every time I turn on a television
24 and I look at a commission, this administration; both
25 the City Council and the Mayor's Office, have appointed

1 more gay and lesbian people to commissions and boards
2 than any other in the history of this community. So I
3 think that another reason that the numbers are off is
4 because we're included in the system and we're not
5 fighting from outside. And Louis is one of those
6 members from one of those commissions so at this time,
7 Louis?

8 MR. VOLZ:

9 I fully got to go with what Larry said.
10 We had, when I was on the Forum with Randy and a few
11 other people a few years ago, trying to get the Mayor
12 and the City Council to appoint gays and lesbians to
13 boards and commissions. We are even more successful
14 than when Morial came on as Mayor, but even then
15 whatever the forethought was, he stereotyped us. We
16 were on the Vieux Carre' Commission, the French Market
17 Development Corporation, the HRC. We couldn't get
18 across to them that we could do everything, not just the
19 area we are focused. That is what I am saying, a lot of
20 people have the idea that, oh, the Quarter, we live
21 there, we got a little Marigny, a little Bywater, we've
22 got a little Crescent City. And we do, we live
23 throughout the whole entire city.

24 When Mayor Nagin took over, he was able
25 to start putting people on board. He appointed people

1 to different commissions such as the Landmark
2 Commission, City Planning Commission, Board and Zoning
3 Adjustment. Not just the ones where they like to
4 stereotype us, but ones that we can bring to the table
5 professional ideas, anything as such. He has been very
6 responsive to this community, responsive to the gay and
7 lesbian community. As Larry may have mentioned earlier,
8 I served on the DNOD as Chair of our Committee and we
9 had lots of gays and lesbians involved with that. We
10 have people in UNOF and things like that. We had Walter
11 and lots of people coming from the gay and lesbian
12 community that came in and offered ideas and
13 suggestions. People from our present neighborhood
14 associations, I am a former President of Lower Garden
15 District and Coliseum Square. We have a large gay and
16 lesbian involvement in our neighborhood, not just local
17 groups.

18 So we are well diversified and we are well
19 represented in these areas. I totally concur, like I
20 said earlier, with Larry. It's so nice to see where we
21 have, I don't know if it's achieved the norm, we do not
22 have to come out there and be a stereotyped board or
23 things like that. We can be with our home, we can help
24 with parish boards or commissioners and we can represent
25 the city and do what we can for the city.

1 When I got involved with politics 25 or
2 30 years ago in the gay and lesbian community, the idea
3 of discussing gay marriage, domestic partnership, civil
4 units established, that was even beyond anything that we
5 could have acquired. That would not even have
6 transpired. To think that this communication, this
7 conversation has changed so much in the last five or ten
8 years, it's absolutely amazing, stupefying to think how
9 far we have come. I think that in another five or ten
10 years we are going to have what we need. I think the
11 bills will pass, I think we will have gay marriage.
12 That is for those of us that want to have that, you
13 don't have to opt into it, but it's an option that we
14 want to have if it is something that we want to take
15 advantage of. We should be able to get all of the
16 rights and benefits that relates to that.

17 RABBI COHN:

18 We have someone in the back that wants
19 to speak.

20 MR. GRAND PRE':

21 Yes, sir.

22 PASTOR HARRIS:

23 I just want to say something real
24 quick. My name is Pastor Darren Harris and I am from
25 the Freedom Fellowship Community for Greater New

1 Orleans. It's definitely good to be here.

2 I was listening to a lot of the
3 conversation and of course I know Robert and some
4 others. And I see Dexter within the community, but one
5 of the things that I realize is that, and it's a
6 wonderful thing for us to be diverse and to have this
7 diversity and talk about inclusion. It's wonderful to
8 include all of the different communities, even with the
9 LGTB community as well. But I noticed even in this room
10 and a couple of the other meetings that I have been in,
11 there is, I think even though it's not intentional,
12 there is still some communities that are excluded even
13 though we are trying include communities.

14 I wanted to say that there is an
15 African American part of the LGTB community who are not
16 represented and who are not here. And of course it
17 could be due to communication, like Mary stated. It
18 could be due to the fact that they don't feel that they
19 are part of this LGTB community. Which I know that
20 there is a difference, and I'm not sure if anybody knows
21 what I'm talking about.

22 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

23 Somewhat.

24 PASTOR HARRIS:

25 But there is a whole different arena of

1 a different group of people. Maybe they are not
2 professionals, but they go to different clubs and they
3 have different issues. I noted that they are not
4 represented. Now I know that Rip and Marsha, they go to
5 a bar and they show up and try to, you know, connect
6 with the other bars as the Society Page and of course
7 it's all fine. But there still is not a representation
8 of that particular community and I think what needs to
9 happen is to, because I don't think that they are going
10 to come to these meetings.

11 It's a reality; they are not going to
12 come here. As a pastor, one of the things that I
13 realize is that if they are not going to come then we
14 believe we have to go the people. You can't expect them
15 always to come, that is the way it is. You talk about
16 numbers; we may have to go, in order to get the
17 particular feedback that we need. It may not be in a
18 setting like this. It may be that you have to go where
19 they are. That you have to meet people where they are,
20 that is all I wanted to say.

21 So to get the information that you
22 need, you just have to go to meet the people where they
23 are. To have a diverse meeting in New Orleans, you have
24 to go where they are.

25 MR. GRAND PRE' :

1 Did you have something that you wanted
2 to add?

3 MR. COWAN:

4 I want to ask Pastor Harris a question.
5 If they had been here, can you give us an example of
6 what they might have said?

7 PASTOR HARRIS:

8 Well.

9 RABBI COHN:

10 What would you say?

11 PASTOR HARRIS:

12 Yeah, I can do that. I think I would
13 say that most of, within the LGTB community, most of
14 programs are, whether it's a parade or something, there
15 is still this separation. There is not this
16 inclusiveness that we talk about. Now there are some
17 African Americans that do participate. But there is
18 still this large community, it's a huge community; that
19 is almost non existent when you talk about political
20 issues or when you talk about the issues of the city.

21 Well I think they need to have a voice
22 and I think that by giving them that voice, I think that
23 is what they need. You know, if you don't feel included
24 then you are going to have your own separate group.
25 That is what is happening right now, what we have is a

1 part of the community that feels segregated and their
2 voice is not heard on the issues that we talked about
3 today.

4 This is the second meeting that I have
5 attended, I think I was with the young African American
6 professionals, one of the first meetings that you did.
7 Once again, there was a group that was left out even
8 when you did that. So I think that sometimes we have to
9 expect people to come to us with information, but
10 sometimes you have to go to them.

11 I want to say that these sessions are a
12 wonderful thing. I have been invited by one of my
13 really good friends from my childhood, Mr. Craig
14 Stewart. So I appreciate being here, I always leave
15 here with some useful information that I hear here.

16 MR. COWAN:

17 If I'm understanding you correctly, one
18 of the things that you are saying to us is that problem
19 of segregation that still will in the white community,
20 white/black community, it's not only in the straight
21 community it's also alive and well here?

22 PASTOR HARRIS:

23 Yes.

24 And I want to say to you tonight, that
25 I don't think it's intentional, it's just, you know,

1 cultural.

2 RABBI COHN:

3 I want to ask about what Pastor Harris
4 is saying and expand on it further. Where are our Asian
5 brothers and sisters?

6 There is a huge settlement in Eastern
7 New Orleans and not one. Not one felt safe enough or
8 invited enough to be here.

9 MR. NICOLAS:

10 I'm here.

11 RABBI COHN:

12 There is one Latino.

13 MR. BAGNERIS:

14 I just want to get this in the record.
15 I was standing up talking to eight Asian guys on
16 Saturday night. I told them about this function. They
17 are college kids. I really think that on a Tuesday
18 evening at 6:00 o'clock, sometimes you have to go other
19 places. What we tried to do with this particular
20 outreach is to make it equal for everybody.

21 That is why we have the map out there,
22 to make sure that we choreograph and making sure that
23 every council-matic district was touched. So although I
24 hear what you're (indicating) saying and I hear what
25 you're saying. I believe if we took it directly into

1 the community and went to the Society Page or even
2 brought it there, I think it would be effective but I
3 don't how much more effective it could be.

4 RABBI COHN:

5 I am not saying this as a criticism of
6 how these meetings were done.

7 MR. BAGNERIS:

8 Oh, no.

9 RABBI COHN:

10 Well, I am trying to raise
11 consciousness to the fact that one of the wonderful
12 things about the LGTB and one of the bigger challenges
13 of LGTB herein New Orleans is that we are still
14 segregated and striated just as the whole greater
15 community. We are this wonderful microtone of
16 everything that New Orleans is and we're just as
17 inviting as New Orleans is.

18 MS. MONTGOMERY-RICHARD:

19 I'm Margaret Montgomery-Richard.

20 I think one very important thing that
21 needs to be mentioned is that what our intent of the
22 conversation really blends itself into what you all are
23 bringing out, in that there are differences within each
24 community. And that you will have people in every
25 community that will not always feel included. They will

1 not come to certain forums. You can't, you can bring it
2 to them and they will not participate. I think that one
3 of our contentions is that we have these conversations
4 to recognize that it's beyond clearly, we want to move
5 from black and white, which in many cases that is how
6 people will see diversity to where we really the
7 differences. We have identified the differences and we
8 begin to work toward identifying the inclusion that we
9 are looking for. These conversations are recorded and
10 out of that will come some good recommendations on how
11 to resolve some of these challenges that exist in our
12 community.

13 So the conversation is healthy and it
14 helps that everybody recognizes that, even within the
15 sessions. Every month we have these issues that come up
16 and we get class-ism in some cases where people think
17 they belong to a certain class as opposed to a just a
18 community. So it's good.

19 MR. CARLL:

20 Just a brief comment, one of the things
21 that I think that we found out because of the HRC, in
22 this community process we realize that this isn't going
23 to end in January. We are going to make recommendations
24 at the end of the listening sessions, but one of the
25 things that I think that we all agree on already is that

1 it has to continue here on. It just can't stop, do a
2 report and put it on a shelf, send it to the City
3 Council and the Mayor.

4 This is going to have to be an ongoing
5 process as to how we improve on it and how we build on
6 it; that is what we are doing right now. I appreciate
7 it, I personally appreciate it. I think that in my mind
8 the commission is a really good process.

9 REV. BRECHT:

10 I think that maybe some of the
11 important things for you all that sit on the commission,
12 the HRC, is to realize what we're all going through as a
13 gay, lesbian, transgender, is fighting within ourselves
14 as well, to feel accepted.

15 As you mentioned, Derrin, I think we're
16 probably becoming better at it as far as financial
17 things. There are still things that need to be
18 mentioned to the community and we have outreach and we
19 do have some African Americans that are represented, but
20 I know that struggle in itself from being gay or lesbian
21 in an African American community as well. It's a lot
22 more of struggle for them than it is in the Caucasian
23 community, but we all struggle within ourselves for that
24 to be somewhat accepted.

25 As long as we have a government that

1 accepts us or is inviting to us, that just makes it a
2 little easier.

3 MR. BATSON:

4 We only have one lesbian in this room.
5 I think.

6 (Audience laughter.)

7 Well one that I know of, anyway.

8 That's all.

9 MR. BAGNERIS:

10 I would ask that one of our members
11 pass out the survey sheet. We really think that it is
12 important that you fill those out and let us know what
13 you feel.

14 I want to thank our two co-chairs,
15 please, Ken and Rabbi Cohn, just wonderful people to
16 work with, as is the rest of the commission.

17 (Audience applause.)

18 I want to add that I think it's
19 interesting that I had this conversation last Saturday
20 about why we can't get our young people involved. I
21 said to myself, you know years ago the gay bar was the
22 place you go to meet other gay people. Now their
23 friends and peers are accepting them for who they are.
24 They would rather hang out, like this gentleman
25 (indicating) said earlier, in Toronto they go with their

1 friends, particularly in the high school and college
2 group, hey hang out with their friends in the regular
3 bar with the people they grew up with.

4 That is the problem that we as a
5 community have to figure out. We have to lose a little
6 bit of what they call the gay ghetto in order to get
7 into mainstream. But while we are here, we need to
8 include as many people as possible, in as many ways as
9 we possibly can.

10 I really thank each of you for being
11 here this evening. We take to heart what each of you
12 have said. We will try to make sure that in January
13 when we pull everybody together to report to them, if
14 your email address is there, you will be included. We
15 are going to pull everybody together so that we can look
16 at each other and see who we are and celebrate whatever
17 concepts we come up with to make this one New Orleans,
18 all of the people of New Orleans, regardless of color,
19 religious background, or sexual orientation.

20 Thank you once again for being here.
21 We have refreshments in the back.

22 (END OF SESSION.)

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CERTIFICATE

I, the undersigned reporter, do hereby certify that the above and foregoing is a true and correct transcription of the stenographic notes of the proceedings herein, taken down by me and transcribed under my supervision, at the time and place hereinbefore noted, in the above-entitled and numbered cause(s).

I further certify that I am not of counsel nor related to any of the counsel or any of the parties, nor in the employ of any of them, and that I have no interest in the outcome of this action(s).

Diane W. Mathews