talk directly to the millions of young people who helped him win and remind them that he still needs them.

Matt Singer, Bus Federation

Let me start by saying what the challenges have not been. Young people are not apathetic about healthcare reform, despite the claims of many in the pundit class. The reality is that 18- to 29-year-olds are the most likely age group to lack insurance and are the most supportive of progressive healthcare reform. The second imagined challenge is a lack of effective organizing models for youth on healthcare. Again, the reality is that a number of groups innovated great tactics for field organizing and media outreach, from the Young Invincibles’ photo petitions to the “Fake Doctor Invasion” street canvasses our organization did.

The biggest challenge in the youth sector over the past year has been a combination of an internal failure of youth organizations and a lack of external support from the progressive movement. Despite a youth sector brimming with organizations that have done amazing electoral and policy work, these organizations tend to be extremely resource-poor and overly reliant on a handful of foundations and major donors. These big supporters have made all this work possible, helping drive record levels of voter turnout. But any model predicated on foundation and major-donor backing was in trouble heading into 2009.

If youth organizations are to more effectively inject our generation’s powerful perspective into policy debates, we are going to have to develop stronger funding mechanisms that bring in resources from the young Americans we represent. The path to strength is to develop grassroots fundraising models for making youth organizations supported the way organized labor is—by millions of individual members who see reason to contribute. Significant membership will also give youth organizations the resources to put organizers on the ground. This will allow us to use the same face-to-face organizing tactics that have proven most effective for youth organizing. Real base-building and deeper organizing will free our organizations from the boom-bust cycle of foundation funding—and make our organizations even stronger when it comes to working in the electoral and policy realms.

Stonewall 2.0

Since California’s Prop 8, a new generation of gay activists have jumped into the fray.

by CHRISTOPHER LISOTTA

Before November 2008, Tanner Efinger was just another 24-year-old working at a bar in the city of West Hollywood, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) center of Los Angeles. “I was really not a political person, even a little bit,” he says. “I didn’t even know who Nancy Pelosi was and didn’t really understand what a senator was.”

But that all changed after the election of Barack Obama and the passage of Proposition 8, the voter referendum that banned same-sex marriage in California. At a postelection Prop 8 rally, it hit Efinger that despite all the cultural assimilation he has witnessed in his young life, gay people were still second-class citizens when it came to legal rights. “It is totally unfair,” he says. “I thought, ‘I know nothing about politics, but what can I do? I don’t even have activist friends.’ So I started Postcards to the President.”

Using his workplace as a catalyst, Efinger encouraged people to write postcards to Obama encouraging him to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), the 1996 federal legislation signed by Bill Clinton that defines marriage as something only between one man and one woman. “I like to joke he created a monster, and now he has to be prepared to feed it,” Efinger says, touting Obama’s call for supporters to be the change they believe in. Events at bars in New York and San Francisco followed, along with a website and Facebook page. According to Efinger, more than 15,000 postcards have been sent from thirty states, with his most recent Postcards to the President event taking place in Bowling Green, Kentucky. “It all happened so quickly,” he says. “My life has changed completely.”

Efinger is not alone. Until late last year, LGBT activism had been dominated for more than a decade by a handful of estab-

Christopher Lisota is a writer and television producer in California. In 2005 he won a GLAAD Media Award for an article he wrote for The Nation.
lished national organizations like the Human Rights Campaign and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, along with a network of statewide groups. These gay organizations saw scattered progress in the waning days of the Clinton administration and then fought vainly against a tide of state referendums banning gay marriage. But with Obama's election and the anger that grew out of Prop 8's unexpected passage, a host of twentysomethings have jumped into the fray with a new set of national strategies, often starting or joining new grassroots organizations that bypass the old guard.

Arisha Michelle Hatch is a 27-year-old attorney in San Francisco who quit her job early last year and began phone-banking for Obama. “I haven’t gone back to the law firm yet,” Hatch explains, noting that in March she joined up with Courage Campaign, a California-based group that is pushing for gay equality. Hatch is now the Southern California field manager for the organization’s equality program. But most recently she was on loan to Maine, fighting Question 1, the statewide same-sex-marriage ban. Hatch was stunned last November when California, which went heavily for Obama, also passed Prop 8. She was even more shocked when news reports connected Prop 8’s passage to majority support from African-Americans. “I don’t want to believe that of my people,” she says. “It is important as a straight African-American woman brought up in a Baptist church to say, This is about equality, and it’s not OK.”

The kids are not doing it all by themselves, however. Courage Campaign was begun by Rick Jacobs, an established organizer who was Howard Dean’s California campaign chair in 2004. And Efinger has become more involved thanks to Cleve Jones, who as a young man worked for slain San Francisco supervisor Harvey Milk and went on to create the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Now a labor activist, Jones began receiving thousands of e-mails from young people after they saw the Oscar-winning film Milk, which came out after the November election. In many of the e-mails Jones kept reading about young people’s desire for a national march for LGBT equality, which at first he actively discouraged. “I viewed it through the lens of other marches,” he says, “which had been enormously expensive, where some people weren’t paid and other people were paid too much.”

Like many others, Jones assumed that with Obama entering the White House and Democrats holding majorities in Congress, a gay rights agenda would move forward. But then Obama picked antigay pastor Rick Warren to speak at his inauguration, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi suggested that repealing DOMA was not a priority. On his website veteran Democratic operator David Mixner called for a national marriage equality march in November; Jones wrote back that it should be a full equality march, in October and done for no money. Mixner agreed on an LGBT website and said Jones was organizing it.

It was then that all hell broke loose, Jones recalls. “The whole chorus started singing about how this was impossible and
irresponsible,” he says of the more established LGBT rights groups. “But in the community people just totally got it and got it early. All I did was reach out.”

Privately many LGBT career advocates dismissed the march, suggesting it would be little more than a high school hot mess. Congressman Barney Frank publicly called it a “waste of time” and, using his signature wit, predicted that “the only thing they’re going to be putting pressure on is the grass.”

But in the meantime younger, less experienced organizers jumped on board. Jones stresses that he played only a small part in organizing the event compared with the work done by the many young people he met through promoting *Milk*, including guys like Efinger. On Columbus Day weekend, Efinger and Jones joined some 200,000 demonstrators for a march that culminated in a rally in front of Capitol Hill. The weekend’s activities included meetings with legislators, organizing seminars and other networking events that were set up without the support of established gay groups. Efinger notes that with a budget of just $200,000, the organizers pulled off an event that “cost less than a dollar a person.”

Besides being an activist incubator, the National Equality March was also an amplifier. Utah native Chloe Noble, 27, owned a cleaning service and had done some work with a local shelter, but when it became clear that Prop 8 had passed in part because of the heavy involvement of the Mormon Church, she got motivated. Noble, who identifies as “bi-queer,” was shocked to find out that as many as 40 percent of homeless teens identify as LGBT, according to a study by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. That prompted her to begin a 6,000-mile walk across America to raise awareness of LGBT homeless youth through her organization Operation Shine. But Noble put her journey on hold when National Equality March organizers asked her to plan a youth event at nearby Gallaudet University the weekend of the Capitol Hill demonstration. She put together more than a dozen programs at the three-day fair, including a flash mob that involved hundreds of people. Back on the road, Noble says, “The youth that I worked with nationwide are really angry, and that’s the most common thing I hear them say about what’s happening in the United States.”

That anger has led to a sea change in the fight for LGBT equality, which had been dominated by state-by-state fights and an almost surgical focus on a limited number of federal issues, like repealing “don’t ask, don’t tell.” In contrast the National Equality March demanded “equal protection in all matters governed by civil law in all 50 states.”

Jones is fully aware that enthusiasm from marches and other big events comes and goes. From the post-Stonewall years to Harvey Milk, ACT UP and the development of an LGBT “market” by corporate advertisers, he’s seen it all. But this time he feels things are different. After the election someone used the term “Stonewall 2.0,” Jones says. “When I read that, I snickered out loud and said to myself, We’ll see about that.” But now Jones says that he is witnessing a “sustained national grassroots movement.” Not one of the national organizations has come close to it,” he observes.

Efinger is among the many trying to maintain the momentum from the National Equality March. He is working with the march’s outgrowth organization, Equality Across America, to organize Congressional District Action Teams, or CDATS, in all districts to put pressure on local representatives.

“This has been going on now for a full year,” Jones says. “Part of it is Barack getting elected. You can be as cynical as you want, but you can’t deny the milestone of that generation.”

Conrad Honicker is one of that generation. A senior in high school, he is already something of a veteran organizer. Soon after he came out at 14, Honicker led his first demonstration in his hometown of Knoxville, Tennessee. “It was the largest LGBT rally Knoxville had ever seen,” he explains. He also fought to have a Gay-Straight Alliance club in his high school, a first for Knox County. Not only did Honicker succeed; the greater Knoxville area now boasts eight GSA clubs. Thanks to a National Equality March co-chair who was also a Knoxville native, Honicker was asked to be on the steering committee, which makes sense, since much of his free time is spent whipping together local rallies and other events, including a gay-friendly prom. “I guess I just like to stay busy organizing,” he admits.

When the march organizers proposed legislation as benchmarks to establish equality, Honicker noticed there was nothing youth-specific. “They were all really good pieces of legislation,” he says. “Sure, I want to get married one day, but I’m certainly not thinking about it right now.”

Honicker suggested advocating federal antibullying legislation, “which is very much needed,” he says with some tension in his voice. As an intern at the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, the local GSA’s national umbrella organization, Honicker attended Obama’s June reception commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the Stonewall rebellion. Honicker spoke to Obama about antibullying and felt that the president was very supportive.

While other gay advocates have been skeptical of Obama’s commitment, Honicker is willing to take the president at his word, even though he understands that older activists rue the lost opportunities of the Clinton years. “Maybe an older generation—anybody over 25—might be feeling like it’s just going to be a repeat of the Clinton administration,” Honicker says, fully cognizant that he has no political memory of those setbacks.

“I don’t think it’s right that he’s not just ending ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ or not ending DOMA. But at the same time, that’s not what I’m going to be complaining about,” he adds. “I’m complaining about the policies and not him. We have to work to change how the system operates and how we function within the system.”
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