

Senator Murray Op Ed – June 11, 2009

On June 28, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community celebrates an earlier generation who, one evening, finally had enough of being marginalized, drew a firm line in the sand, and fought back.

Forty years ago, at a little bar in the West Village called Stonewall, a group of LGBTQ people spontaneously staged an uprising by resisting police arrest, discrimination, persecution and public humiliation. Their show of courage – particularly that of the drag queens, who were the bravest on that night – launched the modern-day gay rights movement.

Forty years later, as we honor the anniversary of this historic occasion with Pride Parades around the country, I look at how far we've come and how much further we need to go. That seems to be what forty asks us to do: look back to measure our success and look forward to make sure we accomplish our goals.

As of 2009, five out of fifty states recognize the love, partnership and marriage of same sex couples – Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont and Maine. Around the world, many countries have made huge advances accepting that love is equal.

And in Washington State we have made significant strides towards equality. In 1994, under the leadership of the late Sen. Cal Andersen, the state Legislature passed hate crime protections for gay and lesbian individuals. In 2002 the Legislature passed my bill to help ensure that our schools are safe places for gay and lesbian students. In 2006, the Legislature passed my civil rights bill to protect gays and lesbians from discrimination in employment, housing, and financial transactions. For the past three years, I've sponsored legislation to extend domestic partnership benefits for same-sex couples, so that we are now treated the same as married couples under state law. And this year, under the leadership of Sen. Joe McDermott, the Legislature passed hate crime protections for transgender individuals.

We are standing together united as couples in love and as individuals, recognizing that our country was founded on the premise of equality and acknowledging that none of us are free until all of us are equal.

This last 40 years hasn't been easy. We've made many strides, and we've suffered many disappointments. We have overcome and reversed discriminatory laws. And we have lost many fallen heroes along the way from Harvey Milk, to Matthew Shepard, to the too many victims from AIDS and the ones that remain unknown as they took their lives when rejected by family, friends and the only community they knew. As of 2006 studies showed that LGBTQ teens are four times as likely to take their lives than their heterosexual counterparts. Yet we are still here, as a minority and being joined by our heterosexual counterparts who understand the meaning of freedom and justice for all.

Let me be clear, this is not just a fight to legalize marriage equality for same sex couples. That is one of many battles that the LGBTQ community faces. Just as the patrons of Stonewall were not safe to express themselves openly and honestly in public, we as a community and as individuals

are not always safe in our families of origin, our schools, places of worship, our workplace and our communities. We are fighting for safety. We are fighting for recognition. We are fighting for acceptance. We are fighting for equal rights under the law. And we are fighting to explain that we are all in this together, as human beings with the same needs for food, shelter, and love.

And with that I call on all citizens to join forces and unite to make sure that all people, LGBTQ people in particular, are safe and protected by law as individuals, couples, in business, schools and communities. We must stay engaged and turn our disappointments into positives. We can gently come out to the communities who don't recognize our rights. If they know us, it will be easier for them to accept us. Be visible. Continue this fight and one day we will know longer need to have this conversation as we will be recognized as equals.

Every person around the state needs to be willing to work for equality. That is how they won Stonewall, and that is how we will win here.

Please join with me in the month of June to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Stonewall and continue in our fight for equality. The full calendar of events to raise awareness and funds for the equality movement can be found at www.celebratestonewall.org