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## A Public Lecture: It Is Time to Tell the Truth

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## A PUBLIC LECTURE: IT IS TIME TO TELL THE TRUTH

DAVID B. MIXNER\*

Good Evening. First of all thanks to Bill and Anthony for being two of the most gracious hosts that any speaker could possibly hope for on this campus. Thanks to you for turning out tonight. I promise you I'll get done in time for the World Series. Go Rockies!

Yes, I've been in jail fifteen times. My friends are a little confused whether that is for human rights or a fetish that I might have for handcuffs. I'm honored to be here, and I value that word very much because honor is so important. You see, I was a liar for the first years of my life. For thirty years. I lied about who I was. I made up names. I made up girlfriends. I even lied about states I lived in and professions I had. Anything I could do so they would not find out who I was. This in a nation that teaches us from our very early years that honesty is one of the most prized American virtues: George Washington never told a lie. A father to his son: "I don't care what you did son; just tell me the truth." People go to jail for perjury more than they do for the crimes they commit, except if you are a member of the LGBT community. And in our churches and our faith-based institutions and our synagogues and our mosques, mother and father, our family, the Grange Hall, the Union Hall, Corporate America says to us in the community:

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\* This essay is based on a recorded verbatim transcript of David B. Mixner's public lecture on October 25, 2007 as part of the Eleventh Annual Leo Goodwin, Sr. Lecture Series at Nova Southeastern University's Shepard Broad Law Center. The author has made minor revisions for clarity.

Mr. Mixner has been involved in public life, policy, and business for nearly forty years. A prolific writer, he is the author of the critically acclaimed memoir *Stranger Among Friends* and the number one bestseller *Brave Journeys*. His screenplay, co-written with Richard Burns, *Dunes of Overveen* won the Outfest MTV Award for "Best New Screenplay," and another screenplay, co-written with Dennis Bailey, *Fire in the Soul*, is being considered by a number of production companies. The Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University recently created the "David B. Mixner Collection" of his papers spanning over forty years. He is Executive Producer of the award-winning documentary, *House on Fire*, about HIV/AIDS in the African American community. Mr. Mixner has worked on over seventy-five campaigns as a campaign manager, fundraiser and strategist, including Bill Clinton's presidential campaign. He has raised over \$30 million for candidates and charity organizations and well over \$1 million for openly gay and lesbian candidates across the country. Mr. Mixner is currently a successful international public affairs/strategic-planning consultant with an expertise in HIV/AIDS. He is working tirelessly to bring worldwide attention to the ongoing health and political crises in Africa. In addition, he continues to fight for HIV/AIDS awareness here in the United States.

“You’re so bad David. What you are, please lie to us. You have the exemption. We don’t want to know who you are.”

I remember trying to figure out how I knew at an early age that I couldn’t talk to anyone about this and I remember reading in *LIFE* Magazine in the 1950’s during the McCarthy period—yeah you can add up age; it won’t take you long; sixty-one, I’ll save you some trouble—reading in *LIFE* Magazine an article where there was a shortage of space in certain mental institutions because families were committing their sons and their daughters to have forced lobotomies because they were gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered.<sup>1</sup> They were cutting our brains open in order to change who we were. I got the message. I got the point. I remember when young Freddie Davis, who—I will always remember his name—went to my school and was known as the “town queer.” He was bright. He was handsome. He was articulate. But I didn’t stand up for him. He committed suicide at sixteen; and I remember my father at our kitchen table, evening meal sitting there and telling my mother, “the family is better off with him dead.” I got the point. I got the message a lot.

And so for the first thirty years of my life, I lied to everybody. I lied to my mom and dad. I lied to my sister and my brother. I lied to the guys on the football team that I played with. I lied to my schoolmates. I lied to my best friends! I lied to everybody in politics about who I was. I lied to everybody in the anti-war movement and the civil rights movement while fighting for justice.

I had a heroine, a woman named Fannie Lou Hamer.<sup>2</sup> In 1964—I know many of you will find this a little more difficult to believe in reality—Mrs. Hamer lived in Sun Flower County, Mississippi, and she was a pig farmer with a number of children. In Mississippi, in 1964, African Americans were not allowed to vote.<sup>3</sup> In Sun Flower County, when you went to register to vote, if you were Caucasian, the criteria to vote was that you had to completely memorize the Constitution of the United States before you could register.<sup>4</sup> Now, amazingly, every Caucasian in this county completed that amazing task, and obviously, every black, African American failed it, except one,

1. Del Martin & Phyllis Lyon, eNotAlone.com, *Wanting More*, <http://www.enotalone.com/article/4763.html> (last visited Mar. 30, 2008) (reviewing DAVID MIXNER & DENNIS BAILEY, *BRAVE JOURNEYS* (2000)).

2. National Women’s Hall of Fame, Women of the Hall: Fannie Lou Hamer, <http://www.greatwomen.org/women.php?action=viewone&id=72> (last visited May 28, 2008).

3. See [Visitmississippi.org](http://www.visitmississippi.org), African-American Heritage Timeline, [http://www.visitmississippi.org/itineraries/themes\\_african\\_american\\_timeline.asp](http://www.visitmississippi.org/itineraries/themes_african_american_timeline.asp) (last visited Mar. 30, 2008).

4. See Spartacus Educational, Voting Rights Act, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAvoting65.htm> (last visited Mar. 30, 2008).

an elderly man who was a field hand all of his life who memorized the entire Constitution of the United States to vote. And I was sent down to Mississippi one summer when I was about seventeen or eighteen, with hundreds of students who went south to fight for justice and register people to vote. I was there three days and I was put in jail for thirty days in Indianola, Mississippi with a group of freedom fighters, which had, like the "Klan," come out and tried to talk in front of us about which one of us they would take out and hang from a tree.

I got out of jail and Mrs. Hamer had become disabled. Because she had walked up the main street of Indianola, Mississippi time after time up the court house steps to try to register to vote. And every time she walked up those steps they beat her to the ground until they made her permanently disabled. She got out of the hospital just after I got out of the jail. She said, "Well, let's go David." And I said, "Where are we going Mrs. Hamer? I want to go home. I want my mommy." She said, "Well, I'm gonna go register to vote." I said, "Mrs. Hamer, you can barely walk." "Well," she said, "it will take us a little longer." And I said, "Where do you get the courage to do this? I am so afraid." And she came over and gave me a big bear hug and said, "Honey, courage is just a lack of options, just a lack of options. I can't look at my children in the face and not walk back down that street." She said, "One, I've got to vote, my children got to vote and, number two, I can never let violence win, ever. And, if I succeed in letting them beat me into the ground and I don't walk up that street again," she said, "they win." So we walked up the street one more time. But this time, as she pulled her right leg behind her, like the Red Sea, the police parted and she walked up the county court house steps and she became the second African American registered in Sun Flower County.

Now let me tell you, I recently went back for a reunion—we now have reunions of those days—and her grandson is county supervisor of Sun Flower County, having been elected to office. And I learned a very powerful lesson, as Andrew Jackson said: "One [person] with courage makes a majority."<sup>5</sup> A person with values, a person with principles, a person with honor and integrity can't be touched.

And so I threw myself in the civil rights movement and the Vietnam peace movement because I didn't yet have the courage to deal with who I was. But at least I could help others who were crying out for help in the struggle for freedom and justice. You know how I got involved against the Vietnam War? There were four of us. We had \$125 between us and, in

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5. WorldofQuotes.com, Andrew Jackson, <http://www.worldofquotes.com/author/Andrew-Jackson/1/index.html> (last visited Mar. 30, 2008).

March of 1969, we held a press conference. And we said that on October 15, 1969, we were going to have a nationwide day-long moratorium, called the Vietnam Moratorium. And on that day we would ask all the universities and schools to shut down and not to do anything except discuss the war, no matter what you felt about it. Now, we had \$125 and one phone line in one office for the four of us. We said, as we walked into that press conference, "What in the hell are we doing?" Then, on October 15, 1969, six hundred universities and colleges closed down.<sup>6</sup> The United Automobile Workers and AFL-CIO all wore black armbands.<sup>7</sup> Troops in Vietnam wore black armbands and three million people across the country took the day off to discuss the war in Vietnam.<sup>8</sup> It just takes an idea, a dream, a vision. But I had to come to terms with myself.

You exported—and I lived in California at the time—a wonderful export choice and we want to thank you—Anita Bryant. In the mid seventies, she started her rampage against homosexuals and put on those ballot initiatives and we lost in Miami and we lost in St. Paul and we lost in Wichita and we lost in Eugene—and we lost hope. And I was in the closet and I had a partner, Peter, who I loved more than I love life. And our community decided that they didn't want to fight it; that we shouldn't spend any money because we would just lose again. I said I can't let that happen. I don't care if we lose, but we've got to fight. You know I came out of the South and the Vietnam movement; I know how to fight. So I came out of the closet! I was banished from my home for three years. But we took it on and I became, with Harvey Milk, a campaign manager for the "No On Six Briggs Initiative."<sup>9</sup>

When Harvey and I took over, sixty percent of the state approved an initiative in California that would have made it against the law for school teachers to be homosexuals.<sup>10</sup> If they were discovered, they would be put on trial before the local school board, and if found guilty of being a homosexual,

6. See *War and Protest: The U.S. in Vietnam (1969–1970)*, BBC News, Apr. 17, 2002, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A715042>.

7. See generally *Strike Against the War*, TIME, Oct. 17, 1969, available at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,840217,00.html>

8. See Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2007, *Vietnam War*, [http://encarta.msn.com/text\\_761552642\\_34/vietnam\\_war.html](http://encarta.msn.com/text_761552642_34/vietnam_war.html) (last visited Mar. 30, 2008). See also *Kaleidoscope of Dissent*, TIME, Oct. 17, 1969, available at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,901564-2,00.html>

9. See generally THE HUMAN TRADITION IN AMERICA: 1865 TO THE PRESENT 294 (Charles W. Calhoun ed.) (2003).

10. See *id.* at 294–95.

would lose their teaching credentials for the rest of their lives.<sup>11</sup> And sixty percent of the people of California supported it.<sup>12</sup> Well, I'll tell you a funny story—I have two funny stories about that. We got it up to forty-five percent of the vote against in the last weeks. We couldn't figure out how to get that last six percent and we were four weeks out and we had come so far, so hard. And that six percent was driving us crazy. So I said I wanted to see Governor Reagan. Harvey said, "You're nuts. Number one—he's not going to see you, and, number two, there is no way in hell he is going to come out against Anita Bryant!" I said, "I want to see him." What happened, and I know this will shock many of you, there happened to be some "closeted" Republicans that I knew, and I made some calls and, through a very circumspect way, I got fifteen minutes with Governor Reagan. So my partner Peter and I, walked in and he said, "Well boys," and we were in our thirties, "what can I do for you?" And I said, "We are here to get your opposition to Proposition Six." He said, "You know I'm gonna support it. You knew that when you came in here, but I wanted to extend a courtesy because so and so asked me to." And I said, "I just need you to listen to one line, one line." And he said, "What's that?" "Why are you supporting anarchy in the schools?" He said, "Anarchy in the schools?" I said, "Well Governor, that is what you are supporting when you support that initiative." And he said, "What do you mean?" And I said, "Governor, all a child who is getting a failing grade has to do is accuse his teacher of being a homosexual and they would have to be put on trial. The kids will run the classrooms. There will be total anarchy. Our teachers will live in fear of giving a failing grade. Discipline will disappear in our schools." "By God, you're right young man!" The next day he printed a column in all the newspapers coming out against the initiative, and we carried every county in California and won by fifty-eight percent of the vote.<sup>13</sup>

I have to tell you my favorite story from the campaign. Clive Kearns and Jim Lantry, who were two of the most famous interior designers in Los Angeles at the time—both have passed away from AIDS now—came in and we got a headquarters. It was your typical store front headquarters. And so Julian Dixon, an African American Congressman from Los Angeles, promised to give us some furniture for the office. So I called Clive and Jim and I said, "Can you get a truck from your design firm and go over and pick it

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11. See Nan D. Hunter, Comment, *Identity, Speech, and Equality*, 79 VA. L. REV. 1695, 1703–04 (1993).

12. See HUMAN TRADITION, *supra* note 8, at 295.

13. Don Romseburg, *20 Years Ago – Briggs Initiative Defeated – Failed 1978 California Referendum Banning Gays from Public School Jobs*, ADVOC., June 9, 1998, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1589/is\\_n761/ai\\_20752198](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1589/is_n761/ai_20752198).

up?" So they said yes and they went over in their truck and came back and there was no furniture in their truck. I said, "Where is the furniture from the Congressman?" They said, "It was so ugly, there was no way we were going to bring it into the headquarters." I said, "Guys, we need desks!" He said, "Don't worry, we've called every designer in the city; tomorrow it will be taken care of." I opened the door at eight o'clock. At nine o'clock, truck load after truck load of the best designer office furniture you have ever seen arrived from all over the city.

And just one more story. There was a woman named Gail Wilson who pioneered fundraising for women in this country.<sup>14</sup> She was a lesbian real estate broker, quite wealthy and she came out, like I did, to help defeat this initiative. And she raised hundreds of thousands of dollars and was the first woman in California to become a really powerful fundraiser. An extraordinary woman and she had raised tons of money. And then in the last week, the Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce decided that they would support the Briggs Initiative. And she came to me and she said, "David, look at this; look what they are doing." And I said, "Gail, the polls show that we've pulled ahead; they're not going to cost us any votes in Beverly Hills, don't worry about it." But then she looked at me and in the deepest voice she could muster, she said, "You don't understand, I shop there." I said, "Do with it what you want." The next day at noon, through Gail's organization, every hairdresser left their clients in the chair and walked out of their salon refusing to cut hair until they changed their endorsement. The second day, Norman Lear, Cher, and Donna Summer did a full page ad with Gail Wilson's name in the L.A. Times saying "Don't shop in Beverly Hills."<sup>15</sup> The third day, the Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce unanimously agreed to reverse their vote.<sup>16</sup>

It's only our own imagination that calls us and limits us. I helped form the first gay and lesbian political action committee in the history of the world called MECLA, Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles.<sup>17</sup> Now, let me take you back to those times so that you understand. This was the first one in history. The police were still raiding our homes, raiding our dinner parties, raiding wherever gay and lesbian people gathered. So we met in a bar called the Carriage Trade, where you went down a long alley and you

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14. *EXPERTS TALK: AIDS Out of Control*, REUTERS ALERTNET, Mar. 10, 2005, <http://www.alertnet.org/thefacts/reliefresources/111045354777.htm>.

15. See generally *The Race That Did Not Happen*, SACRAMENTO BEE, May 21, 1989.

16. Narda Zacchino, *Beverly Hills Chamber Does a Quick Switch on Prop. 6*, L.A. TIMES, Oct. 26, 1978, at C1.

17. Bettina Boxall, *L.A.'s New Gay Muscle with Big Bucks and Connections, the Local Gay Community is Changing Politics Nationwide*, LOS ANGELES TIMES, Mar. 28, 1993, at 27.

had to knock on the door, and they look through a peep hole and let you in. But we were afraid to walk in as a group, so we went in one by one—thirty of us—every five to ten minutes. Then another one of us would go in, so that our meeting would not be raided. We divided up the membership list, and each of us hid them so in case the police raided our home they could not find our membership list.

We held our first event. We raised \$40,000 which was an all-time record in California at that time. We sent out checks to candidates in the Democratic Party, to liberal Democrats, and they sent them back to us and said we cannot afford politically to accept any money that comes from a gay person. These are people that I worked with side by side. But I looked at the group and I said, “You know I don’t think it’s a question of when they accept our money; I just think it’s a question of how much we offer.” And eventually they took our money, and we were given credit for turning around a race and suddenly we had black tie dinners that were raising a hundred to two hundred to three hundred thousand dollars a night. And it was being duplicated and eventually a national organization emerged from it called HRC.<sup>18</sup> We thought we were on the top of the world. We thought the freedom land was in sight. We were doing it right. There was a great grassroots activity. Harvey Milk and Elaine Nobel got elected to office.<sup>19</sup> And then suddenly, in a span of three years, the world came crashing down on us. Elaine received so many death threats—she was the first openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered person in the country elected to office—she had to have two full-time state troopers by her side at all times to protect her from being shot. Her car windows were smashed out and her tires were slashed. She stopped owning a car because it didn’t make sense anymore. Then Harvey was assassinated in San Francisco.<sup>20</sup> We bounced up again and said we can pick ourselves up and we can continue. And then came AIDS.

This is always a difficult part for me. I’ve lost 292 friends to AIDS. I gave ninety eulogies for young men under forty years of age in two years,

18. See generally Human Rights Campaign, *Who We Are*, [http://www.hrc.org/about\\_us/2514.htm](http://www.hrc.org/about_us/2514.htm) (last visited Mar. 30, 2008).

19. See Dan Allen, *Mixner Goes to Yale-at Least on Paper*, *ADVOC.*, Nov. 22, 2005, at 44, 2005 WLNR 19079463. Harvey Milk was the first openly gay man to be elected to any office. John Cloud, *The Time 100: Harvey Milk*, *TIME*, June 14, 1999, available at <http://www.time.com/time/time100/heroes/profile/milk01.html>. Elaine Nobel was the first openly lesbian woman to be elected to any office. Larry Nichols, *Noble Woman: An Interview With Elaine Nobel*, *D.C. METRO WEEKLY*, Oct. 17, 2007, available at <http://www.metroweekly.com/feature/?ak=3032>. She was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1974. See *id.*

20. George P. Fletcher, *Justice and Fairness in the Protection of Crime Victims*, 9 *LEWIS & CLARK L. REV.* 547, 556 (2005).



1989 and 1990. Every other week, I gave a eulogy to bury a young man. I lost my partner of twelve years and you have got to know what it was like. No one would touch us. Doctors wouldn't treat us. Undertakers wouldn't bury us. We had to dig our own graves. Dentists wouldn't take us as patients. Nurses refused to serve us on the floors of the hospitals. Health care workers wouldn't come into our homes. We had to sell everything we had because health insurance companies wouldn't insure because they said we were gay and we brought this on ourselves. Politicians wouldn't speak the name. No one would speak and we were left alone. Most people collapsed under such discrimination.

I remember the most humiliating moment of my life. Peter was the first co-chair of AIDS Project Los Angeles. We were raising money. We were invited to a liberal entertainment dinner party on the west side of Los Angeles. We were very excited because we thought we could come out with a lot of money to fight AIDS and to help people. And we went and we dressed up. I went to Neiman's and got a new suit. We walked in and it was very elegant. People were passing trays and we felt very welcome. We sat down to dinner and everyone else got a plate of china and they put paper plates in front of us. I don't know what was more humiliating, the paper plates or the fact that we did not walk out. But we knew we needed money and we knew that compared to our young friends who were dying, sitting there and being humiliated was a price we were willing to pay.

This community was not defeated. We did not hide. We did not bend down any longer after that humiliation. We discovered a new meaning for the word "truth" and a new meaning for the word "honor." We built our own health care clinics. We found our own dentists. We found our own undertakers and we listed those who would bury us. We found people and organizations that would walk people's pets as they lay dying in their beds. We found organizations to do their laundry. We had organizations that would do their grocery shopping or bring them their meals—sometimes their one meal that day—and with Project Angel Food or God's Love, we delivered. We did all of this, plus took care of our friends and partners who were sick and dying, plus earned a living, plus manned the barricades of liberty, fighting for our freedom and fighting for our lives. That is honor, that is justice, and that is nobility, and I found myself, finally, in that struggle against AIDS discrimination. It is a hard way to find it, but the only way I could possibly dishonor those that gave their lives so we could be in this room tonight, is to forget that they gave their lives so we could have that honor and that dignity to gather without fear of police raids and paper plates and that we were somebody. There was nothing to hide. We were magnificent in our most challenging hour.

While gay men lay dying, lesbians stepped up to the plate and took over the leadership of the organizations, took over the fundraising, and then came and sat by our sides and held our hands as we laid in the beds. They were magnificent. They were magnificent and they proved themselves to be great leaders—State Senators Sheila Kuehl and Carole Migden, HRC's Elizabeth Birch, the Task Force's Tory Osbourne. I can go through a litany of people who did not abandon us and stepped forward to assume leadership. What a magnificent moment with all of us working together. And out of that came power. I remember I went to Mike Dukakis, and we offered to raise him a million dollars in 1988, and the campaign told us that they could not accept the money. It was too controversial. So we lost. Bill Clinton didn't make that mistake. I know many of you are perhaps disenchanted with the political parties. I am certainly disenchanted with this President. I certainly can tell you that.

I know you think it wasted time to go and vote, but I want to tell you a story that is hard for me to tell. My partner died in 1989, May 13th. During the 1988 elections, he had been in a bed in a coma and we didn't think he was going to pull out before Election Day. I, of course, did not get him an absentee ballot. I didn't think he would be alive on Election Day. And before Election Day, he asked to see his parents—a Texas family—who neither knew he was gay nor had AIDS. So I had to call these parents and tell them their son both was lying and dying from AIDS and was gay. And the response I got from his parents was not “we're coming right away,” but “I hope he dies soon.” And I had to go in and tell my partner that his mom and dad were not coming to see him before he died. It was OK. He wasn't alone. There were dozens of friends in that room when he passed. He was very loved and very respected.

But on Election Day, he had come out of his coma and asked, “When are we voting?” I said, “Peter, I didn't get you an absentee ballot; you can't walk.” He said, “I am voting against the people who have done this to me.” I said, “Peter, you can't,” and he said, “I am voting against the people who have done this to me.” So three of us carried him to the car, put the seat down, and loaded him in the back of the car. We got to the polling place which was in a garage at the end of a driveway, and he pushed us aside and walked on his own to the voting booth to vote against the people that had done this to him and collapsed by the voting booth when he was done.

So don't ever tell me that you are too busy or too indignant to vote. You really don't want my reaction after seeing what people will go through; not only Peter but people all over the world who risk machine gun fire, long lines, beatings, to vote and change this world for a better place. I don't care how you vote—that's a lie, that's just a lie; I've stopped lying but I just

caught myself—what’s important is that you vote because people have paid a terrible price so that you can.

You know we have come a long way. In 1992, it was considered a major victory to have Bill Clinton at the Democratic Convention just to say the word gay in his acceptance speech. And we all cheered and we considered it a victory. Now, we are fighting for marriage equality. Now, I’m going say a few words about marriage and then I’ll wrap this up and give you freedom.

You know, I want to make clear a couple of things. A lot of gay people said to me, “David, why do we pick marriage now to do this battle; now is not the time.” As if like ten of us got in a room and said, “OK, now here are the issues: we are gonna go with this in ’86, this one in ’90, and this one in ’92. We have a grand plan here.” I had nothing to do with it. What had something to do with it was the Massachusetts Supreme Court who said we should not be treated this way.<sup>21</sup> It was Mayor Gavin Newsom giving a license to Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon—who had been together fifty years—and suddenly he found six thousand people in the pouring rain waiting for licenses.<sup>22</sup> They decided now is the time, not “us.” No one promised us that this battle would be easy. Do any of you know of a struggle for freedom in this world that has been easy? High school students in Birmingham faced fire hoses, dogs, and jail. People marching to vote in Selma were beaten to the ground by troopers on horses. Of course, this battle is tough. It’s because there is so much at stake. Now I know, God Bless ‘em—bless their heart as we used to say at home—that the politicians are uncomfortable. I’d like them to be comfortable but not at the expense of my freedom. I know they are looking for every conceivable word, model, contraption, legal loophole to try and give us the same rights without using the word marriage. Separate but equal does not work.

We are finding in state after state that has adopted civil unions that we are excluded from many rights, privileges, and protections granted to every other American citizen. Now, you might say, “Let’s stay quiet this year ‘cuz we want so-and-so to win; let’s tip-toe through so that they don’t notice us this year.” If you want that strategy, we can do it. But please stand up if you are willing to give up your social security rights. Please stand up if you would like not to be by the bedside of your partner when they die. Please stand up if you would like to pay more taxes because you are gay. Please stand up if you would like to see your lover from another country deported because you can’t get married. Please stand up for thirteen hundred rights,

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21. See *Goodridge v. Dept. of Public Health*, 798 N.E.2d 941 (Mass. 2003).

22. *Mayor Defends Same Sex Marriages*, CNN, (Feb. 22, 2004), <http://www.cnn.com/2004/LAW/02/22/same.sex>.

privileges, and benefits granted to every other American citizen and denied to us. I'm not willing to surrender one of them.

They talk about us "asking" for marriage. It's not a religious thing. No faith-based, religious institution is obligated to marry us. It's a civil law. They act like we're asking, like we're lobbying, like we're pleading to be heard. It is not their's to give me. It is mine already, and I am just stepping up to claim my constitutional rights. And you have to do the same. Never go hat in hand. We've discovered honor. We have discovered integrity. We have proven ourselves worthy in the '80's of the great gifts we are capable of giving this world. Because of our struggle, because of our magnificence, this troubled world needs us and we have a moral obligation to offer our gift. So throw it back. I can stand in front of you today and say, "I am David Mixner; I am a gay man; and I am proud and I don't have to lie to anyone ever again." Thank you very, very much.

#### QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION<sup>23</sup>

Q: [Inaudible] long the history of our country marriage became both a religious institution and legal institution, and they have become intertwined. You made the point that it's strictly a legal issue, so how do we convince people that it's strictly a legal issue and de-emphasize the religious part of it?

A: Well, I think there are two parts to that question. There is the strategic, political one, which is, we keep talking and we keep making it clear and we train people who are running for office, especially the young people. It's the old folks like me that have a problem with marriage. If you're thirty-five, forty years, or older, almost by a two-to-one margin, people are opposed to marriage. Forty or younger by a two-to-one margin, they're in favor of marriage. We live in a changing world. You know I grew up in my time, in a town where there were signs for white and colored drinking fountains. And there were white and black sections in the movie theaters, and at the bus stations and so forth, and everyone assumed that that's just the way it was, and it was going to be that way forever. Guess what, they were wrong, and they were wrong because people refused to accept the deformation that they had for us. And no matter how many times they say in my ear that it is a religious institution in their mind—it is a civil law of the land. It has nothing to do with religion. Now, politicians want everybody to be comfortable. A lot of people in our gay community had this disease, what I call "the com-

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23. Mr. Mixner took questions from the audience after presenting his lecture. The transcript was made from an audio/video recording of the entire session, and unless otherwise noted by brackets "[ ]", represents a verbatim transcription of the entire session.

fortable disease.” “Let’s not make anybody uncomfortable by pushing too hard.” Now I want people to like me, and I think I give a pretty good dinner party, especially if Steve’s doing the cooking. I know I have better china than most of them, but if they’re not comfortable they have to seek help. It’s not my problem. Because, you see, in the Constitution—nowhere in that document, does the word “comfortable” appear as a criteria for freedom. In fact, the document says we’re supposed to protect an unpopular minority from the tyranny of a majority. If you read the Madison Papers, or the Federalist Papers. So it actually protects us, and I hope people become more comfortable. I hope the work I do in Africa, and Russia—I hope the work I do in getting people out of jails, will make people look at me in a way, that will make them want their children to grow up and do the same things in the world. But if not, that’s their problem. It is their problem. I’ve paid my therapy bills, they can go get theirs’.

Q: You’re very plainly a political animal all of your life—why have you not sought political office at some stage, and, at sixty-one, it’s one of the few industries and few professions, where you’re still not over the hill?

A: God bless you—can you come around wherever I speak, and make that point. Well, when I was growing up, I wanted to be president. Those were the days we had presidents we wanted to be like, like John Kennedy and people like that I mean. It was interesting, in my day and age, you know, if you wanted to be president you thought of Franklin Roosevelt, or John Kennedy, and everyone in the class raised their hand. Now if you ask a group of first graders if they want to be president, all they answer is “are you kidding?” But I wanted to be president. I wanted to be a senator. I wanted to be an ambassador—I worked very hard. I started doing what everyone is supposed to do. But we weren’t allowed to run for office. We could run in some places where ballot access was easy as a third party, but if people found out you were gay—with a few exceptions until the late 70’s—I got the message real clear—that we were not allowed to run for office. We weren’t allowed to work for campaigns openly. They wouldn’t accept our checks.

You know, running for office was quickly driven out of my mind. I never thought it was a great law until we got this president, and I thought, gosh, I’m about his age, you know, I think I could have done better, I could have had those troops home from Iraq by now. Yeah, I mean it’s . . . I want to take a minute and I’ll come right back to you.

I’m going to take a minute though, because I don’t feel right having said that without acknowledging that I am a pacifist. I’m a Quaker, a pacifist, Buddhist, Gandhi follower—a Gandhi king—do a little chanting, a little drum circles here and there. But I found myself ironically fighting for the rights of the LGBT community who serve in the military. And through that process I have gotten to know many of the fine men and women of our

community who serve our country and they're in Iraq, dying. Now I'm eminently opposed to this war and I know that's no surprise to you. And they're dying, and their partners don't get the letters, and their partners don't get the flag, their partners have to watch out since their emails are screened. They can't say I love you with all my life no matter what happens to me. Now, don't ask don't tell—no matter that candidates tell you it was a good progressive step—it has destroyed the careers of eleven thousand LGBT members of our community. Eleven thousand completely destroyed. Many committed suicide, many were court marshaled, many lost their benefits. I have talked to people who have served in Iraq who are now living their dreams of flying planes and leading the military. So I just want to acknowledge their heroism, their willingness to serve no matter what your political beliefs are, and their courage because no one else remembers them and honors them, so I think that's the least we can do, and I want to acknowledge that tonight.

Q: I'm curious, obviously the gay culture has really been advanced. People like yourself have done so much to stand up for our rights, but on an international level, on the face of statements made by the President of Iran—I just read a recent statement by a . . . it was attributed to the chief of police in Iran—all around the world, that there are statements that are saying the rise of the gay movement in America are leading the doomed. What is the responsibility, or how do you access, everything that you've done and what the gay community has done to face that?

A: Well, I think that it is our moral obligation to offer what we've learned in thirty, forty, fifty years of struggle—and by the way, no place that I go in the world where there are activist organizations, whether it be Poland or Russia, or even in Iran where we have an underground operation working to help to get people out, or get them political asylum once they do get out—do I not run into an openly gay man or lesbian working in those teams and projects no matter where I go, who are from America. And that's what I was referring to earlier, we have so many gifts. We know how to organize a healthcare system; we created one for ourselves. We can go into these villages and these towns and offer these magnificent gifts and help these people. Thirteen countries have the death penalty for being gay. Increasingly, we are seeing a trend in Africa for life imprisonment.

Now, I was sent by the Dutch government to Kenya, with two of the hottest French bodyguards you have ever seen in your life—I have a picture this big of them on my wall at home—I'm sorry. Whoa, as I was saying, I'm sorry. I was sent to Kenya to document. Kenya had passed life imprisonment for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual gender people. Six hundred had been rounded up. So we went to get their names, and I went up into the northern villages to collect data on who they were so the Dutch government

could have a list, with documentation, to formally protest to the Kenyan government. What we found was that only half of the people rounded up were from our community, about half, and they were rounded up in case anyone came asking. What the oppressive forces in Kenya had figured out was this was a way to aggress their opposition supporters because they knew that the United States would never protest if they just said they had arrested gay people. So they found out a way to round up the political opposition by saying they were gay or lesbian, put them in jails, and surround them by enough members of our community to prove their case in case anyone came asking; and our government has yet to issue a protest.

You know, I've got to say something—we have a moral obligation to do all we can, and we are. We just replaced a government in Poland that encouraged people to beat the participants in the gay pride parade in Warsaw and our community was intricately involved in replacing that government through Michael Cashman of the European Union and getting money from all over the world through to the opposition. We are working in other nations, including Russia, to make life more tolerable. The Middle East is a very difficult process and we have to work very discreetly and very quietly and that's all I'll say. But, we're working on it. But I want you to understand it's not just a moral obligation to help ourselves.

I want you to raise your hand if any of you have talked to anyone else about Congo. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. In the last five years, in the Congo, four million people have died. I have been there. It is a genocide. It is four times more than died in Rwanda. It is twice the amount that died in Poppa, in Cambodia. I have walked down roads where there have been hundreds of bodies on each side of the road—of women and children. I have entered villages where seventy-two percent of the women had been raped. Children, thirteen, fourteen, have been forced into trafficking and are made drug addicts, and are given AK-41s or 47s or whatever—you can tell I am a pacifist. I don't know guns from hell. It is a crisis calling out for every one of us. It's fifty-eight million people, we have three hundred million. We lost three thousand in the World Trade Center, and we know the impact that had on us as a society. Among the fifty-eight million people, they are losing three thousand people a day—three thousand people a day. They are having a World Trade Center every day among their women and children in the Congo. Today, another truce broke down, and this week, another seven hundred and fifty thousand new refugees. In one day almost the entire refugee number for Darfur. Has anybody here called their congressman? The order of official policy in this war—I dare you to find a policy paper. Have we sent any troops? Have we sent any humanitarian aid as a nation? Have we sent counselors for those women? Have we tried to put those children back together who have drug addictions and guns? No. Zero.

So our moral obligation, so we don't become narcissists and say how magnificent we are—because we are—but because of that magnificence there is a moral obligation to take the gift to a greater world, and not just ourselves. And that will speak more highly to the world than anything else we can do.

Wherever I go, whatever country I am in—I've been in Sierra Leone, the Congo—wherever I go, I say I'm David Mixner, I am a gay man and I am here to help, and so do others. So we have that obligation, and I promise you by the time I help with the healing and I help put things back together and I help people get out of jail, they will think differently of the LGBT community. So the battle is us, this planet is crying for leadership, your community needs you, the women and children of the Congo need you, and nation after nation needs you. I hope that twenty years from now that the future generation of married gays and lesbians come to you and they say tell us what it was like during the great battle and tell us the stories. And that you don't have to look down at the ground and have to tell them you were too busy or too scared to fight.

Thank you very, very much for coming tonight, I am very, very honored.