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## The Advocate

**Gay rights champion and former State Senator Cheryl Jacques is no longer running the human rights campaign, but this election year, she's still in the fight.**

By Keith O'Brien | September 10, 2006

### **It's been three years since you left the state for Washington, D.C. What are you doing now?**

Lots of speaking, a lot in the college arena. I very much believe the next generation is going to be the tipping point for the gay civil rights movement in achieving full equality.

### **You were with Human Rights Campaign leading up to the 2004 elections. What happened?**

I described it as a train wreck. There were all these scenarios: We win the White House, we lose the Senate. We lose all these constitutional amendments, but we pick up seats in the House. There were all these scenarios, and they all went against us. And I mean us, progressives. Not just gay people. And it was a train wreck. It was a really, really bad day.

### **And within a month, you resigned.**

That was sort of the straw that broke the camel's back, but there was a real difference of philosophy on how we go forward. I'm watching it play out again with the New York decision coming down against [gay] marriage, the Washington state decision coming down against marriage. You see, in our movement, some leaders who want to retreat and say - gasp! - "Too much, too fast. We should run; we should back up." I don't believe that.

### **So you believe what?**

That we learn from history. We learn from the Dr. Martin Luther Kings. As Dr. King said, there is no convenient time when the country will be comfortable with the idea of full equality, where they'll just say, "You haven't rocked the boat. You've kind of sat on your hands for 20 years. Now we're ready, gay people, to treat you and your children equally under the law - all laws - including marriage laws." I don't believe that day comes by itself. I believe you constantly, constantly push.

### **What do you foresee for the upcoming midterm elections?**

From the perspective of this issue - gay civil rights being used as a political wedge issue - I think we're far from over. The conservatives and the ultraright are not done with this issue. They're going to drive this until it runs out of gas in the same way that George Wallace, a decade after *Brown v. Board of Education*, could still successfully run on a racist slogan. We're looking at a lot more election cycles - several more, I should say - where bashing gay people is an acceptable way to divide and distract the electorate from the real issues, such as healthcare, the economy, the war, the price of gas.

### **How will you respond this time?**

It's not that you do anything different. It's that you persevere. What you don't do is run away.

### **Your twin boys are 4 years old. Do you see same-sex marriage becoming more widely accepted in their lifetime?**

Yes. We could be looking at 40 years. ■

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