

Oral History Center
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

The Freedom to Marry Oral History Project

Michael Crawford

Michael Crawford on the Digital Campaign at Freedom to Marry

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker
in 2016

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Michael Crawford, ca. 2015
Photo courtesy of Freedom to Marry

Michael Crawford was director of digital campaigns at Freedom to Marry from 2010 to 2016. Crawford was born in Houston, Texas, and attended the University of Houston. He moved to Washington DC in 1999 to work in preparation for the Millennium March for LGBT rights and then went to work for Human Rights Campaign as an associate field director. Crawford joined Freedom to Marry in 2010 where his focus was on mounting several, interrelated digital campaigns, expanding the organization's email list, and increasing the campaign's presence on social media. In this interview, Crawford tells about his upbringing and how he became involved in the LGBT movement. He recalls his introduction to the movement for marriage equality and his decision to join Freedom to Marry at a critical moment in the campaign. The interview details several of the key digital campaigns, such as Southerners for the Freedom to Marry, which began to sway public opinion in favor of extending marriage to same-sex couples.

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Hour 1

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Hour 2

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Hour 3

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Familia es Familia campaign encouraging marriage equality in the Latino community — Commenting in Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (2015) —

Evaluating inclusivity of marriage equality with respect bisexual and transgender communities — Beginning to archive Freedom to Marry materials — Hoping to impart effective campaigning lessons on other organizations — Remembering *Obergefell* (2015) decision — Future goals — Underscoring the significance of storytelling in the fight to win marriage equality

Freedom to Marry Oral History Project

In the historically swift span of roughly twenty years, support for the freedom to marry for same-sex couples went from an idea a small portion of Americans agreed with to a cause supported by virtually all segments of the population. In 1996, when Gallup conducted its first poll on the question, a seemingly insurmountable 68% of Americans opposed the freedom to marry. In a historic reversal, fewer than twenty years later several polls found that over 60% of Americans had come to support the freedom to marry nationwide. The rapid increase in support mirrored the progress in securing the right to marry coast to coast. Before 2004, no state issued marriage licenses to same-sex couples. By spring 2015, thirty-seven states affirmed the freedom to marry for same-sex couples. The discriminatory federal Defense of Marriage Act, passed in 1996, denied legally married same-sex couples the federal protections and responsibilities afforded married different-sex couples—a double-standard cured when a core portion of the act was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013. Full victory came in June 2015 when, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution’s guarantee of the fundamental right to marry applies equally to same-sex couples.

At the very center of the effort to change hearts and minds, prevail in the courts and legislatures, win at the ballot, and triumph at the Supreme Court was Freedom to Marry, the “sustained and affirmative” national campaign launched by Evan Wolfson in 2003. Freedom to Marry’s national strategy focused from the beginning on setting the stage for a nationwide victory at the Supreme Court. Working with national and state organizations and allied individuals and organizations, Freedom to Marry succeeded in building a critical mass of states where same-sex couples could marry and a critical mass of public support in favor of the freedom to marry.

This oral history project focuses on the pivotal role played by Freedom to Marry and their closest state and national organizational partners, as they drove the winning strategy and inspired, grew, and leveraged the work of a multitudinous movement.

The Oral History Center (OHC) of The Bancroft Library at the University of California Berkeley first engaged in conversations with Freedom to Marry in early 2015, anticipating the possible victory in the Supreme Court by June. Conversations with Freedom to Marry, represented by founder and president Evan Wolfson and chief operating officer Scott Davenport, resulted in a proposal by OHC to conduct a major oral history project documenting the work performed by, and the institutional history of, Freedom to Marry. From the beginning, all parties agreed the Freedom to Marry Oral History Project should document the specific history of Freedom to Marry placed within the larger, decades-long marriage movement. Some interviews delve back as far as the 1970s, when a few gay activists first went to court seeking the freedom to marry, and the 1980s, when Evan Wolfson wrote a path-breaking thesis on the freedom to marry, and “domestic partner” legislation first was introduced in a handful of American cities. Many interviews trace the beginnings of the modern freedom to marry movement to the 1990s. In 1993, the Supreme Court of Hawaii responded seriously to an ad hoc marriage lawsuit for the first time ever and suggested the potential validity of the lawsuit, arguing that the denial of marriage to same-sex couples might be sex discrimination. The world’s first-ever trial on the freedom to marry followed in 1996, with Wolfson as co-counsel, and culminated in the first-ever victory affirming same-sex couples’ freedom to marry. While Wolfson rallied the movement to work for

the freedom to marry, anti-gay forces in Washington, D.C. successfully enacted the so-called Defense of Marriage Act in 1996. The vast majority of the interviews, however, focus on the post-2003 era and the work specific to Freedom to Marry. Moreover, OHC and Freedom to Marry agreed that the essential work undertaken by individual and institutional partners of Freedom to Marry (such as the ACLU, GLAD, Lambda Legal, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, the Haas, Jr. Fund, and the Gill Foundation) should also be covered in the project. Once the U. S. Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell* in June 2015, the proposal was accepted and work began on the project.

After an initial period of further planning and discussions regarding who should be interviewed and for roughly how long, an initial list of interviewees was drafted and agreed upon. By December 2016, 23 interviews had been completed, totaling roughly 95 hours of recordings. Interviews lasted from two hours up to fourteen hours each. All interviews were recorded on video (except for one, which was audio-only) and all were transcribed in their entirety. Draft transcripts were reviewed first by OHC staff and then given to the interviewees for their review and approval. Most interviewees made only minimal edits to their transcripts and just a few seals or deletions of sensitive information were requested. Interviewee-approved transcripts were then reviewed by former Freedom to Marry staff to ensure that no sensitive information (about personnel matters or anonymous donors, for example) was revealed inadvertently. OHC next prepared final transcripts. Approved interview transcripts along with audio/video files have been cataloged and placed on deposit with The Bancroft Library. In addition, raw audio-files and completed transcripts have been placed on deposit with the Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives, the official repository for the Freedom to Marry organizational records.

The collected interviews tell a remarkable story of social change, the rate of which was rapid (although spanning more than four decades), and the reach profound. Historians of social justice and social movements, politics and policy, and law and jurisprudence will surely pore over the freedom to marry movement and Freedom to Marry's role in that for explanations of how and why this change occurred, and how it could happen so rapidly and completely. Future generations will ask: What explains such a profound transformation of public opinion and law, particularly in an era where opinions seem more calcified than malleable? What strategies and mechanisms, people and organizations played the most important roles in changing the minds of so many people so profoundly in the span of less than a generation? Having witnessed and participated in this change, we—our generation—had an obligation to record the thoughts, ideas, debates, actions, strategies, setbacks, and successes of this movement in the most complete, thoughtful, and serious manner possible. Alongside the archived written documents and the media of the freedom to marry movement, this oral history project preserves those personal accounts so that future generations might gain insight into the true nature of change.

Martin Meeker
Charles B. Faulhaber Director
Oral History Center
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December 2016

Freedom to Marry Oral History Project Interviews

Richard Carlbom, “Richard Carlbom on the Minnesota Campaign and Field Organizing at Freedom to Marry.”

Barbara Cox, “Barbara Cox on Marriage Law and the Governance of Freedom to Marry.”

Michael Crawford, “Michael Crawford on the Digital Campaign at Freedom to Marry.”

Scott Davenport, “Scott Davenport on Administration and Operations at Freedom to Marry.”

Tyler Deaton, “Tyler Deaton on the New Hampshire Campaign and Securing Republican Support for the Freedom to Marry.”

Jo Deutsch, “Jo Deutsch and the Federal Campaign.”

Sean Eldridge, “Sean Eldridge on Politics, Communications, and the Freedom to Marry.”

James Esseks, “James Esseks on the Legal Strategy, the ACLU, and LGBT Legal Organizations.”

Kate Kendell, “Kate Kendell on the Legal Strategy, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, and LGBT Legal Organizations.”

Harry Knox, “Harry Knox on the Early Years of Freedom to Marry.”

Amanda McLain-Snipes, “Amanda McLain-Snipes on Bringing the Freedom to Marry to Oklahoma, Texas, and the Deep South.”

Matt McTighe, “Matt McTighe on the Marriage Campaigns in Massachusetts and Maine.”

Amy Mello, “Amy Mello and Field Organizing in Freedom to Marry.”

John Newsome, “John Newsome on And Marriage for All.”

Kevin Nix, “Kevin Nix on Media and Public Relations in the Freedom to Marry Movement.”

Bill Smith, “Bill Smith on Political Operations in the Fight to Win the Freedom to Marry.”

Marc Solomon, “Marc Solomon on Politics and Political Organizing in the Freedom to Marry Movement.”

Anne Stanback, “Anne Stanback on the Connecticut Campaign and Freedom to Marry’s Board of Directors.”

Tim Sweeney, “Tim Sweeney on Foundations and the Freedom to Marry Movement.”

Cameron Tolle, “Cameron Tolle on the Digital Campaign at Freedom to Marry.”

Thomas Wheatley, “Thomas Wheatley on Field Organizing with Freedom to Marry.”

Evan Wolfson, “Evan Wolfson on the Leadership of the Freedom to Marry Movement.”

Thalia Zepatos, “Thalia Zepatos on Research and Messaging in Freedom to Marry.”

Interview #1: September 22, 2015

01-00:00:00

Meeker: Today is the 22nd of September, 2015. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Michael Crawford for the Freedom to Marry Oral History Project, and we are at the Freedom to Marry offices in New York City. The way in which we begin every interview is, I ask you to say your name and your date and place of birth.

01-00:00:57

Crawford: Sure. My name is Michael Crawford. I was born on October 5, 1967, in Houston, Texas.

01-00:01:39

Meeker: Houston, Texas. Tell me a little bit about the circumstances into which you were born, what your family life was like.

01-00:01:47

Crawford: Sure. So, I was born in a very, very poor African American neighborhood. I was the oldest of five children. My mom was a single parent. So I grew up, you know, not great schools, kind of violent area of Houston, and I remember the first time that anyone thought that I might be gay was when I was six years old. So it seemed a typical upbringing at the time, but it was a poor background, I was always the shy, quiet, gay kid.

01-00:02:39

Meeker: Who was it that thought you were gay at age six?

01-00:02:40

Crawford: Oh, some of the other kids. I mean, you know how the bullying and name-calling on the playground, et cetera, yeah, I was the focus.

01-00:02:52

Meeker: It's interesting that that left such an indelible mark. Oftentimes, we all have traumatic experiences as children, but the fact that you can sort of trace it back to age six—

01-00:03:06

Crawford: Yeah. Well, I think that was also the time where I started to have an inkling that I was gay. I didn't know what gay meant, and it wasn't in a sexual way, but I knew that I felt differently about boys than I did about girls. Now it doesn't seem traumatic at all, it was just something that happened and a part of the kind of culture that we live in, where kids feel it's okay to bully other kids for what they perceive as being different.

The family that I grew up in was religious. My grandma went to the same church for nearly fifty years. My dad's a right-wing, Tea-Party-loving, anti-gay Christian. So, yeah.

01-00:03:55

Meeker:

Did you have a relationship with your father growing up?

01-00:03:59

Crawford:

Not so much. It wasn't a very close relationship at all, and at this point I haven't seen or spoken to him in years. I remember one of the last things he told me was that if I didn't repent for being gay, that I was going to go to hell. I don't take that kind of talk from anybody, so there's no longer a relationship between the two of us.

01-00:04:26

Meeker:

Tell me about your mother.

01-00:04:27

Crawford:

So my mom died nine years ago. She was much more open than my father was. She worked very hard. I think she gave up—you know, made a lot of sacrifices for her kids to try to make sure that we had everything that we needed in the hopes that, that we would have better lives than what she had. She was very close to my grandma, as was I, so I was raised primarily by my mom and my grandma.

01-00:04:58

Meeker:

What kind of work did your mom do outside the home?

01-00:05:00

Crawford:

My mom was a nurse, and so very—as you would expect from a nurse, like very loving and kind and generous and helpful. I mean, I think that she didn't necessarily have or reach the ambitions that she may have had, but I think she invested a lot of time and energy in me and my siblings, in the hopes that we would have better.

01-00:05:26

Meeker:

Nurses often work long, odd hours as well.

01-00:05:30

Crawford:

Long or odd hours, and my mom worked quite a bit at night.

01-00:05:36

Meeker:

And so that's where your grandmother came in, sounds like, to—

01-00:05:39

Crawford:

Yes, yes.

01-00:05:41

Meeker:

—help raise the kids. Tell me about your school. You had mentioned that there was some name-calling when you were young. What kind of school was it, what kind of other people were at the school?

01-00:05:53

Crawford:

It was your typical inner-city school. I mean, at the time it didn't seem like there would be anything different; it seemed like it would be just like every

other school. Because when you're that young, you don't really—aren't really aware of the differences in school quality, in terms of how much resources some schools have versus the kinds of resources that other schools have. But it was a poorer school, primarily black and Latino. Teachers were nice, maybe not necessarily the best quality teachers. There was a level of anti-gay bullying, which I experienced. I was the quiet, shy, smart kid who liked to read and hang out with girls.

01-00:06:44

Meeker:

So you were more oriented towards academics, perhaps, than a lot of your classmates were?

01-00:06:49

Crawford:

Yeah, I was a typical nerd.

01-00:06:53

Meeker:

Good. So what kind of schoolwork were you most interested in engaging with?

01-00:06:57

Crawford:

Anything that involved reading, language, history, that kind of thing. Math, I'm a disaster at math. I can add two plus two and that's about the extent of my math skills. So it's really focused around anything that was around writing, around stories, around history, around language, that kind of thing.

01-00:07:25

Meeker:

Did you feel like your teachers at your school, whether elementary or high school, recognized your interests and talents and cultivated it?

01-00:07:36

Crawford:

I think, as I got older, like middle, high school, there was recognition. I mean, because at a certain point, when you're a teenage boy and you're not running around chasing girls, it's either because you're gay or because you're more academically inclined. In my case it was both. So there were some teachers that recognized it, that were supportive, that gave me additional things to read or things to think about, et cetera.

01-00:08:10

Meeker:

Did you have any role models in your community of people who were pursuing that kind of path as well?

01-00:08:16

Crawford:

Not really, no. At least I didn't feel like I did at that time.

01-00:08:22

Meeker:

When you were in high school, did you see a path ahead, were you thinking about college, were people around you talking about that?

01-00:08:32

Crawford:

Yeah, there were some that were thinking about it and talking about it, and I was thinking about it, because one of the things that I knew I wanted was not

to live in the kind of neighborhood or the kind of environment that I was living in. Not that there weren't nice, kind people, but I just felt that there had to be more and better, and I wanted more and better.

01-00:08:56

Meeker: What did that mean?

01-00:08:58

Crawford: Well, I think what it meant at the time, it was more around feeling safe in the neighborhood where I would live. It was about having more money to actually do more things. I mean, it's different now, one, because I'm in a different socioeconomic level than I was then, and so I think for me now, where when I was younger it was partially about having money in order to have things, now it's more about doing good in the world and having money to experience more of that world.

01-00:09:40

Meeker: So, when you were in high school, did you come out to any of your friends or—

01-00:09:50

Crawford: Oh, I came out when I was fifteen. Yeah. I just decided. I mean, I was already sexual active by that point. I remember coming out to my mom; that caused some conflict. I had a fight with my mom around that, and I went to live with my grandmother for a while, who was much more open and accepting.

So when you think about what a Christian would be—kind, warm, loving, generous—that was my grandmother. I mean, I know that right now we see Christian, and we see a lot of judgment and hatred and bigotry, but in the classic definition of Christian, that really was my grandmother. So she was open and accepting, so I lived with her for a number of years, even when I did some things that were a little bit more—that maybe I should not have done.

But I think coming out at fifteen, I mean, it's not like it was a super big shock to anybody. I think that for my mom and for my dad, it was difficult for them to actually hear me say the words and acknowledge it. They probably thought that I was, but to have that kind of confirmation and me be like, Okay, I'm gay, let's go on, was harder for them. And in school, I think it was harder for the other kids, but I really didn't care. Because at a certain point I decided, Okay, I'm gay, I'm going to come out. I don't have a problem with it, I'm perfectly fine with it, and if other people have a problem with it, then that's not my issue.

01-00:11:35

Meeker: You know, this would've been about 1982. For a fifteen-year-old to come out not just as gay to other gay people or perhaps their friendship circle, but to their family, I think is a pretty bold move at that point in time. Did you recognize the boldness of this?

01-00:11:55
Crawford:

It didn't seem bold at the time. It's just like, Okay, this is what I am, let's tell everybody. It didn't seem bold at the time. I mean, I think—and it's funny, because when I see gay kids, LGBT kids, now who are coming out at thirteen, fourteen, et cetera, I mean, I see them as being tremendously bold and incredible people, but when I came out at fifteen it just seemed, I don't know, it just seemed like, Okay, I'm black. Okay, I'm gay. It didn't seem like it took a lot of strength or courage to do it. I just did it.

And it's funny, because when I see people, you know, kids now who are coming out, it seems heroic, which is weird, I acknowledge, because anti-gay attitudes have lessened over the years. And maybe it's because I have a strong sense of admiration for the kids for coming out right now, whereas for me it's just like, oh, just something I did. It didn't seem bold or anything when I did it, but I feel a real sense of gay kids who are coming out now as being heroic.

01-00:13:18
Meeker:

Did you have any gay people in your life at that point?

01-00:13:21
Crawford:

No. So there weren't like gay adult role models or any of that, no.

01-00:13:27
Meeker:

You said you were sexually active, but—

01-00:13:29
Crawford:

Yeah, with boys my age.

01-00:13:31
Meeker:

Were they identifying as gay, or was it more like play?

01-00:13:34
Crawford:

I think it was more like horny boys. [Laughs] It wasn't like discussions, Oh, we're gay, let's forge gay people's paths together. It was more like, Okay, let's play around. So it wasn't like there was necessarily—they weren't gay identified, and there was no discussion around gay identity.

01-00:13:59
Meeker:

Nineteen eighty-two and the years after are the very early years of the AIDS epidemic in the United States. Did you as a young boy, as a teenager, learn about that?

01-00:14:13
Crawford:

I learned about it, but not from school. Schools are terrible now in terms of teaching about HIV and AIDS and sexual health; they were even worse when I was in high school and when I came out. What I learned, I learned from watching TV. Like I remember—this was a number of years later—watching, I think it was the Phil Donahue show, which god, I'm old—the Phil Donahue show and seeing members of ACT-UP [AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power] talking about HIV and the abysmal government response and so on.

I think television was where I learned about it, because I wasn't talking to my mom about sex, even though she was a nurse. I was living with my grandmother at the time, and I definitely didn't talk to my grandmother about sex, although she was perfectly fine with me being gay. It wasn't something that was really talked about in school. So what I learned, I learned from watching TV.

01-00:15:12

Meeker: What did you learn?

01-00:15:13

Crawford: I learned very little. I think there was this general sense that I'm gay, I would grow up to get HIV, and then I would die.

01-00:15:24

Meeker: That was the narrative that was put out there.

01-00:15:27

Crawford: Yeah, that was the narrative.

01-00:15:29

Meeker: Who were the first gay people you met, then? Who self-identified like you were self-identifying.

01-00:15:37

Crawford: You know, as I became an older teenager, there were other kids where there were rumors about them. So of course I was like, Okay, let's go make friends with these kids. I remember there being this—my school was predominantly African American, but there was this one white goth kid, who the rumor was that he was gay, although he was actually bi, and we became friends. I remember somehow through another friend meeting another gay teen from another high school, and we became friends. And it wasn't till I was out of high school when I started to meet gay adults.

01-00:16:29

Meeker: Tell me about getting out of high school. What was the next step for you?

01-00:16:33

Crawford: High school was awful. It was awful. I mean, the bullying continued, and it was just awful. And the next step was college.

01-00:16:47

Meeker: So, where did you attend?

01-00:16:49

Crawford: University of Houston.

01-00:16:54

Meeker: Hometown, good university.

- 01-00:16:56
Crawford: Decent university. But hometown, yeah.
- 01-00:17:01
Meeker: Did you have other options, or was the—
- 01-00:17:03
Crawford: There were other options, but I think more for economic reasons. I mean, again, my family was still poor, and so that made sense because it was the cheapest option.
- 01-00:17:15
Meeker: It's a public school, then.
- 01-00:17:15
Crawford: Yes.
- 01-00:17:16
Meeker: Tell me about your experiences at the University of Houston.
- 01-00:17:18
Crawford: It was fine, not remarkable in any sense. When I think about it now, I feel I wish I had aimed higher and left Houston. So not just aimed higher, because there are great universities, like Rice University, in Houston, but I wish I had aimed higher and that I had left Houston. I think that would have set me on a different kind of course. Although the course that I did take led to Freedom to Marry, so.
- 01-00:17:55
Meeker: What did you study at University of Houston?
- 01-00:17:56
Crawford: English. Which basically means I can't do anything but read and maybe write a little bit.
- 01-00:18:04
Meeker: What were the English classes like? This would have been the mid to late eighties at this point in time. Had the University of Houston English program started to incorporate more diverse voices, or was it kind of still the standard English and American literature?
- 01-00:18:23
Crawford: Yeah, it was still the standard—I think the phrase that people use now is “dead white men.” You know, still the standard stuff. So it wasn't like there was a huge number of diverse or, like, women, people of color, LGBT writers, et cetera.
- 01-00:18:43
Meeker: Were you exposed to any writers like James Baldwin or anyone like that?

- 01-00:18:48
Crawford: But I found James Baldwin on my own in high school.
- 01-00:18:50
Meeker: Oh, you did?
- 01-00:18:53
Crawford: Yeah.
- 01-00:18:54
Meeker: What was that experience like?
- 01-00:18:54
Crawford: It was affirming. I mean, not only—he wrote about being gay sometimes, so like in *Giovanni's Room* he wrote about gay issues, although it was odd in that it was white characters versus the African American characters he generally dealt with, so there was like a separate kind of thing there.
- 01-00:19:19
Meeker: And in France.
- 01-00:19:21
Crawford: Well, that too, yes. So it was an affirming experience, both because he was African American, because he was gay, and because he had done something that, growing up in the area where I grew up, didn't seem possible. I mean, so I don't know a whole lot about his background or his upbringing or anything like that, but it seemed like he had done something, versus what a lot of people, poor people do: they're kind of stuck in their economic circumstances because they don't see a way out. And he wrote his way out of whatever his circumstances may have been.
- 01-00:20:02
Meeker: Did you write much? I mean, were you trying to contribute in that way? Develop your voice, maybe?
- 01-00:20:11
Crawford: I did a little bit, but then that whole thing got sidetracked as I started to get into HIV/AIDS activism. Because it seemed like the thing to do. One, because there was developing a kind of culture around HIV and queer activism, you know, ACT-UP, Queer Nation, et cetera. So there was all of that kind of energy, that kind of movement and community that was coming together.
- And two—and I think this is why my entire career has been about nonprofits, is I felt a kind of responsibility to do something, I mean a desire to make some kind of difference beyond simply protecting myself, but identifying with this broader community, even if I wasn't necessarily part of that broader community, but still a sense of identification with that community. And knowing that I needed to take some kind of action to change it.

01-00:21:18

Meeker:

What was your first introduction to HIV/AIDS activism?

01-00:21:22

Crawford:

ACT-UP.

01-00:21:25

Meeker:

In Houston?

01-00:21:25

Crawford:

Yeah. So I didn't start with like sweet, gentle, "Oh, let's volunteer to create condom packets at the local AIDS foundation." I jumped right into it. Which is great, and it was a great experience. And when I say I jumped right into it, I don't mean I just kind of jumped and showed up at a protest and then showed up at another protest. I jumped right into it and started to take a leadership role immediately, because it felt really visceral and really of the moment and really like this needed to change, and this needed to change, and I need to change it, and I need to step up. So I did.

It was an intense experience. And I'm thinking about, you know, how we blocked traffic in the middle of major intersections, disrupting city council meetings when they were discussing HIV policy in a really horrible way. Thinking about like the Republican National Convention when it was in Houston, and me coming this close to being trampled by a horse and potentially arrested if my friends hadn't pulled me away. So it was a very visceral, empowering kind of experience.

When you think about it, people who are traditionally a part of marginalized groups, and I was African American and gay, that kind of political awakening, that kind of coming into agency, is a really, really powerful thing. And I went with it.

01-00:23:30

Meeker:

Did you start with ACT-UP when you were still in college, or was this after?

01-00:23:34

Crawford:

It was a little bit after.

01-00:23:36

Meeker:

I mean, to me, it's not surprising that a young person would go directly into ACT-UP as opposed to sort of a more mainstream organization. It matched our youthful enthusiasm and lack of patience, I think, at the time. And that's also where all the young people were. Can you tell me about some of the people you met who became your friends in the context of ACT-UP?

01-00:24:04

Crawford:

Yeah, so I remember one guy who was older than most of us, was also a nurse, like my mom, and who understood the medical aspects better than a bunch of young people who had just like woken up the day before and said, Okay, I'm an AIDS activist. And he died a number of years ago, so he was HIV positive,

and even as the disease progressed, he continued fighting, and he was very, very smart—which it goes without saying, so many smart people gravitated towards ACT-UP at that time. But he had a kind of clarity that was matched with a sense of urgency, that really helped to push the whole thing forward.

I remember meeting a guy, who is now a political consultant, who was a little bit older and who's super mainstream now, but at the time was urging us along, coaching us on strategy, and teaching us how to be effective. I remember people who were helping us figure out how to spin the media, which is funny, because you think, Okay, so it's a bunch of people, a lot of whom have never done advocacy before or activism before, all of a sudden they decide that they're going to do it, and performing these kind of actions which generated lots of earned media attention, rapidly having to figure out how to work the media, spin the media, in ways that were going to be positive. And by positive, I don't necessarily mean like bright and sunny and friendly, but ones that were going to—a way that was really going to get the point across and help move the issues that we cared about along.

And I actually turned out to be good at that, which is great, and was something that I had never thought about before. But there was a kind of vacuum, or an opportunity, and I stepped in to that opportunity.

01-00:26:30

Meeker:

Do you remember any examples of actions or moments in which you were able to get media attention that you felt that were particularly successful?

01-00:26:40

Crawford:

Years and years ago, in Houston there was a gay-bashing, a guy named Paul Broussard was murdered. Ten teenagers went into the Montrose, which is like the gay area of Houston; Paul was, I think, walking home from the bars, it was late at night, and they literally beat him to death. They had two-by-fours that were studded with nails, and they beat him to death. I mean, like literally, they beat him to death.

Me and a couple of friends, we organized one of the Take Back the Night kind of marches. We started near the area where he was murdered and marched through the area, and then we got to what's one of the busiest intersections in the city, and we just stopped traffic. Because previously we had been walking along the sidewalks, playing the nice advocacy mad gay, but not too mad gay, kind of role, and at the appointed time, we all moved into the middle of the street and blocked traffic.

By this point, we had learned that if you time things in the right way, you get live media coverage. So we had timed the whole action and alerted the media to when we were—what we were going to do and when we were going to do it, but only shortly before so they couldn't spill the beans to the cops. And we stopped traffic. Which was the first time that anyone had done it, particularly

at that intersection. And it got endless media coverage around hate crimes around gay people.

We kept pressing that issue, even after that one action we kept pressing it. And it was hundreds of people that were in the street, and it was absolutely amazing. And I think that was one of the actions that catalyzed the LGBT community in Houston and changed the way—began to change the way people were viewing gay Houstonians at the time.

01-00:28:51

Meeker:

Had you identified people who would be the spokespeople who would engage with the media?

01-00:28:57

Crawford:

Yes.

01-00:28:59

Meeker:

Were you one of those?

01-00:29:00

Crawford:

I was the ringleader, yes.

01-00:29:05

Meeker:

Can you tell me about the process by which you, at that point in time, would have come up with, a message that might have—you might have thought would have been effective for those live media spots?

01-00:29:18

Crawford:

I don't remember the exact message that we delivered at the time, the exact phrase, but it really revolved around the one phrase that we picked that we repeated over and over and over again as we were talking to the media. That way, no matter how they tried to cut sound bites or whatever, we were still getting that one particular point across. Because we had learned by that point that you can say something, but the media can spin it and chop your quote in any way that they want. Sometimes it's for time constraints or whatever. And we had everybody repeating the same phrases: the same phrases that were on the signs, the same phrases that we had used in press releases, were the same things that we were saying as we were talking to reporters.

That's something that I think, for me, developed in part because of experience, but also because of instinct, right? Because at a certain point you start to think, Okay, what is it that we really absolutely have to get across, and what's the best way of doing that, knowing that there are going to be all these other things that we can't control. But how can we best control what we control in order to amplify our message and to push things forward?

It's funny, because I think about that and know that that's something I was thinking about, that we were thinking about, and that we were doing, but when I look at the work that I do now, it was much more instinctual then, even

though some of what I do is instinctual and gut-level kind of stuff now, and it's kind of shocking that we were able to generate the amount of earned media that we were able to generate at the time, that we were able to use it to put pressure on elected officials and to really, at the time, express the outrage of the community.

Like I said, it was a fantastic experience. One of the things I said earlier is that I wish I had aimed higher in terms of thinking about college, but if I had, and had left Houston at that time, I would not have been in Houston at that moment. And I think that was the moment that really set me on the course for having a career in nonprofits and fighting for social justice.

01-00:31:59

Meeker:

That's fascinating, thank you. Eventually you would leave Houston, right, and I know you would go to DC [District of Columbia]. Was the reason to go to DC to work on the Millennium March in 1989?

01-00:32:14

Crawford:

It was. So Queer Nation, ACT-UP, all that kind of stuff, eventually I was elected to the board of directors for what was then the Lesbian and Gay Rights Lobby of Texas, which is now Equality Texas.

01-00:32:29

Meeker:

What was it called then?

01-00:32:32

Crawford:

Lesbian and Gay Rights Lobby of Texas. As part of that, I became friends with the woman who was the executive director of the organization at the time, Dianne Hardy-Garcia, who ended up becoming co-director of the Millennium March. When she went to Washington to help organize the march, she took a number of Houstonians with her, or a number of Texans with her. So I went along for that ride, thinking that I would be in DC for six months, we'd organize this march, it would be great, and then I would go back to Houston. Instead, I stayed in DC

01-00:33:15

Meeker:

When you first heard about this march, did you have a clear idea of what the agenda for this march was and why you wanted to participate in it?

01-00:33:24

Crawford:

I had participated in the twenty-fifth anniversary of Stonewall march, which was, of course, here in New York, so I had an idea of what national marches were and some of the things that happened around them. I didn't have a true idea of how much work it would actually be, and I knew that we had goals that we wanted to achieve with the march. So I was wanting that kind of big experience.

It's funny, because I think about—and we'll come to this whenever—but I've been thinking about when I made the move from DC to New York and

working on marriage in DC to working on marriage nationally with Freedom to Marry, and those opportunities to have a bigger impact, a bigger kind of experience, I think are the ones that attract me and that get me excited.

With the Millennium March, I was still young and idealistic, I hadn't become cynical and bitter yet, so we wanted to achieve this great big thing for the LGBT community. And I was super excited to be a part of it. And it was a little bit nuts, in that six or seven of us who were all from different cities, a number of cities in Texas, we all lived together in the same house. So literally there was work 24/7, because we all worked together, then because we had nothing to do but work, when we got home we were talking about work and figuring out next steps and so on. So it was an incredibly intense experience.

01-00:35:19
Meeker:

What were some of the main pieces of work that you spent a good portion of time doing?

01-00:35:27
Crawford:

I was focused on field organizing; in other words, getting people to actually come to the march. So working with different constituencies like people in the HIV community. For some reason I had a responsibility for engaging the leather BDSM [Bondage and Discipline (BD), Dominance and Submission (DS), Sadism and Masochism (SM)] community, which was a great learning experience for me. And so it was really focused on how do we get people to actually attend the march, and then, as we got closer to the march, I was responsible for recruiting hundreds and hundreds of volunteers that we needed to actually pull off the march, particularly on march day. And then the day of the march, I spent my entire time working with volunteers to make sure we had people doing all the things that needed to be done in order to have the march be successful.

01-00:36:23
Meeker:

How did the march campaign, if you will, conceive of the different constituent communities that needed to be mobilized?

01-00:36:33
Crawford:

I think it was a result of building on some of the previous national marches and knowing that they were going to be kinds of constituencies that we needed to have or wanted to have, and knowing that for some communities—I mean, because just as it is not, when we tend to think about the LGBT community, we think about white LGBT people, and particularly white gay men. So a lot of the community's energy focuses on that.

We wanted something broader than that, and so we made special efforts to make sure that we had lots of women coming in, that we had people of color coming in, that we had people with HIV coming in, that we had people of faith coming in, that we had leather people coming in. Because we really

wanted to show the richness and diversity of the LGBT community. Which is a huge challenge, it's still a huge challenge now.

And so when we were thinking about who we wanted to come, we were thinking about all those different communities that are sometimes left out. Because when you think about it, the co-director of the march was a Latina, those of us who were working on organizing the march, we were women, we were black, we were Latino, so we weren't like just a bunch of white dudes organizing this march for other white dudes, we were a multiracial group of people organizing this event for what we saw as a multiracial LGBT community. I mean, we didn't necessarily reach that goal, and even now the LGBT community has incredible issues around gender and race and gender identity and so on.

01-00:38:23

Meeker:

How did you approach mobilizing those different communities? And maybe actually talk about the leather BDSM community. I don't know if this is a community you had previous engagement with or not—

01-00:38:36

Crawford:

No.

01-00:38:38

Meeker:

So as an outsider to that community, how did you learn about it, go in, and then try to generate some interest and buy-in from that community?

01-00:38:48

Crawford:

There were a number of challenges around engaging the leather BDSM community, in part because there was a feeling from the community that they weren't an intimate part of the organizing process. There was the thought among some folks in the leather community that this would be one of those Hallmark card style gay events with people carrying kids—even then, people were talking about kids, and we're all trying to say, Oh, we're just like straight people. And so there was skepticism on the part of a lot of folks in the leather community.

I started off by reaching out to people, talking to them, and having to figure out how to remain calm and centered as people were yelling at me. Because they weren't really yelling at me, because they didn't know me and I had done nothing to them, but they were yelling and feeling frustration because they didn't feel like they were included in the process, and now we were asking them to come to something that they had little hand in actually organizing and conceiving.

So a lot of it was initially talking to people, traveling outside of DC to other places, talking to people. And as I started to make positive connections with some people, get them to introduce me to other people in different groups and so on—I remember coming here to New York and having a conversation at

the LGBT center with me and a bunch of folks from the leather community, and the conversation started off in a very hostile kind of way. I mean, not intentionally hostile at me, but they needed a space to express their frustration, and I just happened to be like the representative of the entity that they were frustrated with.

By the end of the conversation, people were a lot calmer. I was being invited to leather events. It was, if not great, it had gotten better. So a lot of it is still some of the issues that the LGBT community is dealing with now, where— we're an incredibly diverse community, and some people don't feel like they're a real trusted and valued part of the community. And we see that quite a bit now around transgender people and their place in the movement, and thinking about, for example, the new movie *Stonewall* (2015) that's coming out, and the controversy around representation and this that and the other. So I think at the time it was one of—those conversations and that kind of difficult conversation is something that we're still dealing with, and I think we're going to be dealing with for quite a while, because there are so many different parts of the community and we're still struggling to figure out how we fit together, and how we fit together in a way that's going to give everybody the opportunity to feel included.

So reaching out to the leather community around the Millennium March was really an intense experience for me, but it was really about giving people an opportunity to be heard, which I think we're still struggling with right now.

01-00:42:19

Meeker:

So listening, it sounds like, is part of the substance of the conversation.

01-00:42:25

Crawford:

Exactly. Listening, and actually hearing what people have to say, right? Because there's a difference between just, Okay, you're saying words to me and I'm nodding my head yes—there's a difference between that and actually taking what people are saying to heart. And even if you can't do every single thing that they're asking you to do, be honest with them and say, I see where you're coming from, I can help with A, B, C, and D. I may not be able to help with Y and Z. So can we come together around A, B, C, and D?

That doesn't necessarily make things perfect, but it makes things better. And once you've made things better, and with a little bit more time, you can figure out what Y and Z might look like and where are other areas for connection and opportunities for coming together.

01-00:43:20

Meeker:

Do you remember some of the specificities of those conversations with the leather community and what the back-and-forth was like?

01-00:43:27
Crawford:

A lot of it was around representation. I mean, particularly as you think about—because the big national marches, they have these incredibly long programs of like 70,000 speakers, and so—which I don't think I'd have the patience for anymore. And people want to see themselves, they want to see themselves as part of the lineup of speakers. They want to see themselves as part of the promotional materials. They want to see themselves as part of all the other events. They want to see themselves as part of the media that's happening around the event.

Particularly for people who have been left out, that is incredibly important. I know that African American LGBT people are still left out of what's considered mainstream gay. So even though I'm working for Gay Inc.—which is a term Evan hates, but it's what Freedom to Marry is—I know that that is problematic, but I also know that in the role that I play within Freedom to Marry, which is overseeing all the digital stuff, I have a role to play in putting out images of African American same-sex couples and really pushing that diversity perspective.

So I think a lot of the conversations and disagreements with the leather community around the Millennium March was the desire on their part to actually see themselves in what we were creating at the time.

01-00:45:03
Meeker:

Did you also play a role similar to that with the African American community across the United States?

01-00:45:10
Crawford:

A played a little bit of that kind of role, which is interesting, because I am African American, but I'm not a leather person, so it played a much more active role with the leather community, which was great, and I was very happy to have that experience.

One of the things that I find both frustrating about the LGBT movement that's also an opportunity is the kind of not-quite commitment to racial diversity in the community. Of course you'll have leaders talk about how we're a diverse community and blah-blah-blah, and how they want support from like the NAACP or the National Council of La Raza, but when it comes down to it, the LGBT community, LGBT organizations, and LGBT leadership, does it truly reflect that?

So I think that it's an issue that we still struggle with, that I still struggle with being a person who's worked for a number of years in the LGBT movement, and I don't see us as having overcome all those challenges around diversity and inclusion.

01-00:46:32

Meeker:

What is your evaluation of the Millennium March? Do you feel like it was successful in meeting its goal?

01-00:46:42

Crawford:

It's complicated. If I was summing it up in a Facebook status update—

01-00:46:48

Meeker:

You can get a little more detailed than that.

01-00:46:50

Crawford:

I mean, I think—it's complicated. There were some bad things that happened around the march that were not related to the actual organizing of the march. Some people did things that were wrong. That were really wrong, that gave the march itself a bad name, and I don't think allowed for a fair and honest assessment of whether or not the march met its goals.

The day of the march, we work our asses off, we go to sleep, we wake up the next morning to find out that there's been potential criminal activity. I'm not going to name names. And to have worked that hard to create something that we hoped would be good and have it blindsided by potential criminal activity was just an incredible blow to the team that worked to organize the march.

01-00:47:49

Meeker:

When you say potential criminal activity, I mean, you don't have to name names, but was it like financial malfeasance or something along those lines?

01-00:47:55

Crawford:

Yes, but not among like the executive director, Dianne Hardy-Garcia, who's this incredible—and I have the utmost respect for her, but some other people that were involved. I think it was also difficult for those of us working on the Millennium March to overcome skepticism on some in the community about the event. We brought together something like 800,000 people. But from the beginning there was a level of skepticism from some people about who said, Okay, we should do this march. HRC [Human Rights Campaign] had a lot of involvement in the beginnings, and people are skeptical about HRC, to this day.

So all of that kind of skepticism, and it's really easy to let skepticism blow out—grow out of control among LGBT people, and I think that happened with the march. I think that we did some really good things, in that whenever you create the kind of structure that's needed to pull off something that brings together 800,000 people, it brings in new activists and creates new entities that can continue on afterwards, which I think happened as part of the march.

One of the things that each national march for LGBT equality has set as a goal was energizing LGBT voters, and I don't think any march, including the Millennium March, has been successful in that kind of endeavor. So when I say it's complicated, I mean that there are some things that we did that were

good and that had a positive effect. There were some challenges that we were not able to overcome, like the skepticism from the community. There were promises that we made, like around energizing voters that organizers of every national march have made and have failed to meet. And then there was the potential criminal activity that occurred.

01-00:50:03

Meeker:

Was marriage an issue that was in the mix at all?

01-00:50:05

Crawford:

I don't remember marriage being much of an issue. So this was back, the organizing happened mostly in like 1999. The march happened in April of 2000. So we didn't really win the first marriage state until four years after the march. So if marriage was involved, it was like a small part and wasn't nearly as huge an issue as it's been over the last couple of years.

01-00:50:35

Meeker:

It was four years after DOMA and Hawaii, but it seemed like that was kind of lull period. So it wasn't really something that was on the dashboard, if you will.

01-00:50:46

Crawford:

Right. I'm sure there were people who talked about it, but it wasn't like—like when you look at the LGBT agenda from the last few years, marriage has been at the top. Definitely wasn't at the top in that same kind of way.

01-00:51:02

Meeker:

I guess the next thing that you did was, you did in fact move to become an associate field director with HRC, and you were in that position for five years.

01-00:51:14

Crawford:

So I started off as a regional field organizer in the eastern region of the country. So in working on the Millennium March, I got to know some of the folks at HRC. Luckily for me, a regional field organizer position opened up at the time my job with the Millennium March was ending, and so it was a great transition, and I ended up staying in DC So over the course of a few years, I grew from eastern regional field organizer to associate field director.

01-00:51:49

Meeker:

Who were some of the people you were working with at HRC?

01-00:51:51

Crawford:

Well, Elizabeth Birch was the executive director, she's phenomenal and I love her to no end. Seth Kilbourn was national field director; Sally Green was my counterpart, and we actually also rose together in the organization; Margaret Conway, who I believe now has her own consulting firm.

01-00:52:13

Meeker:

What was within the job description of a regional field organizer?

01-00:52:18

Crawford:

I was responsible for working with HRC volunteers, helping elect candidates. I endorsed candidates and built HRC in the eastern region of the country, which, luckily for me, included New York. So I started at HRC in June of 2000, which was about two years after HRC had endorsed Alfonse D'Amato over Chuck Schumer for the Senate. And I didn't know at the time that HRC's reputation in New York had cratered.

I remember my first work-related trip for HRC being New York Pride, and them saying, Okay, great, you're going to go with a couple of other staffers to New York Pride, you guys are going to sell merchandise, get members—sign up new members, get people to do all this kind of stuff. The very first question I got at New York Pride was, "Do you have any more anti-gay Republicans you can endorse?" The second comment was, "Why do you hate transgender people?" And that was my entire day. It was a kind of—well, it wasn't kind of, it was definitely a rude awakening to LGBT organizing at the national level, and particularly working with HRC.

01-00:53:48

Meeker:

How did you respond to those questions?

01-00:53:50

Crawford:

That was not a part of my new employee briefing.

01-00:53:56

Meeker:

They didn't say that people are going to ask you about the record on transgender rights for HRC.

01-00:54:03

Crawford:

Yeah. Because I'd been with the organization maybe a week, a week and a half. So for the first couple of hours I was in shock, and then I just started talking to people a little bit more and kind of ignoring the people who were hostile, because no matter what I'd said, it did not make a difference. You know, there's some people in the LGBT community who are angry and they're just going to be angry no matter what you say. It was a challenging experience.

01-00:54:46

Meeker:

Did you come back to HRC headquarters with those same kinds of questions, though?

01-00:54:52

Crawford:

Yeah, I did. And yeah, I came back with the questions around the endorsements, and the endorsement process was explained to me in more depth. I came back with questions around transgender people, and that was explained, although I wasn't quite satisfied with the explanation.

But I think the thing is, organizations and people evolve over time as new issues present themselves. Like the issue of marriage. Like now every LGBT

person pretends they were always in favor of marriage. I can tell you that they were not always in favor of marriage. So I think I was unsatisfied with where HRC was on transgender issues. I felt that that needed to be pushed, which I did from my small perspective within the organization. But it was also a much more controversial issue in the broader LGBT community, and not just at HRC.

01-00:56:03

Meeker:

Working with ACT-UP and Queer Nation, I don't know if you ever got involved with them or not, that's very outside—it became kind of mainstream, but it was still outside the established national organizations like HRC and NGLTF and Lambda, I guess, in the eighties. But then moving to HRC is very much moving to the heart of it, to the inside. Did you sort of think about this move and reflect on it and have to come to terms with it?

01-00:56:43

Crawford:

Well, I'd already worked on the Millennium March, which wasn't like radical, and I'd already been, by that point, been on the board of the Lesbian and Gay Rights Lobby of Texas for three years, so I had an idea of the lobbying process and all that kind of stuff. I saw HRC as two things: One, as an opportunity to continue the kind of organizing work around LGBT equality, and to have a bigger impact and greater resources. And so it wasn't so much—I didn't agonize about the choice. The only thing I agonized a little bit about was leaving Houston for DC, and obviously I chose DC

So I think it was more for me, I saw it more as an opportunity to do more and to be involved more and to be engaged at a much deeper level.

01-00:57:44

Meeker:

How did you find the gay life in DC different than Houston?

01-00:57:47

Crawford:

Well, DC is way gayer than Houston. There are fewer closeted people. I mean, even people who work in the federal government, except for members of Congress. They were much more open, there was a much more lively, vibrant, progressive LGBT community, and the community had more rights. I mean, even now there's still a fight over a basic human rights ordinance in Houston, in 2015. I mean, you can get married in Houston, but—

01-00:58:24

Meeker:

You can still get fired.

01-00:58:26

Crawford:

Exactly, exactly. And the fact that it's considered a controversial issue shows how Houston has stayed in that kind of almost backwards kind of mindset around LGBT issues, even as the rest of the country—well, parts of the rest of the country have moved on and grown and evolved.

01-00:58:50

Meeker:

Tell me about how your duties at HRC evolved over the five years you were there.

01-00:58:57

Crawford:

It evolved in a number of ways. One of the ways was going from managing myself to managing other people, which was great. Well, it has its upsides and its downsides, right? You're able to function at a higher level, you get involved in more things, but you're also a little less connected to the work and the people on the ground.

It changed in that the number of places where I could be active grew, so initially I started working only in the eastern states, so primarily the northeast and New York. But as I grew, it became more about, okay, these are state-level hot spots across the country, and being able to assist and help with that kind of work, which is fantastic. It was also where I got to use e-mail more as a kind of an organizing tool, which is great, because I think that also helped to set the course for the current kind of work that I do, which is all focused around digital. I think it pushed me to set bigger kinds of goals and to figure out smart, effective strategies to actually reaching those goals.

So whether it was campaigns like Million for Marriage, which is when HRC was trying to get a million people to sign up in support of marriage, so this was even before the first marriage victory in Massachusetts, using that as an opportunity to build an e-mail list but also to build a constituency that was in support of marriage. So a lot of it, the responsibilities grew in terms of complexity, forcing me to think deeper about strategy, giving me opportunities to manage people, giving me opportunities to play at a much bigger level on a much broader canvas, and to see how things were working in one state or one part of the country and being able to say, Okay, this is great, let's apply this over here as well.

01-1:01:21

Meeker:

The Million for Marriage campaign, that was about 2002?

01-1:01:27

Crawford:

Maybe 2002, 2003.

01-1:01:28

Meeker:

By that point in time, e-mail had been fairly widely spread eight, ten years, but social media was still really in its infancy. I mean, I guess probably at that point we're looking at MySpace and Friendster or something, right?

01-1:01:44

Crawford:

[Laughs] Yeah, yeah. And so at the time, I didn't really use the social platforms while working at HRC. That only became a part of my work a little bit after that.

01-1:01:55

Meeker:

Okay. Well, how did you work with e-mail, then? What were the goals and what were the mechanisms, what were the strategies of actually making e-mail part of a campaign?

01-1:02:08

Crawford:

Some of the ways were similar to what we use now, right, where we try to get the e-mail addresses for as many people as possible so that we can give those people real things to do, whether it was send a form e-mail to an elected official, or get them to call an elected official, one of those things where we e-mail them with a certain number and they can be contacted directly by—and they can be patched directly to their members of Congress. Using it to get people to attend events and rallies. Using it to get people to donate money to the organization. So a lot of the same things that we use e-mail for now, but at a much more rudimentary level.

01-1:03:01

Meeker:

Was that the top of the agenda? I mean, George W. Bush had just been elected. I think there was a Republican Congress, although I know there was some weird shifting going on at that point in time, so actually going off like a national legislative agenda was probably a nonstarter at that point in time.

01-1:03:22

Crawford:

Although there was still a desire to try to push forward ENDA [Employment Non-Discrimination Act] at the time. It's funny, because some of the issues that are encapsulated in marriage were pulled out and were framed as kitchen table issues, so things like taxation on domestic partner benefits, things like immigration protections for binational couples, things like family and medical leave, that kind of thing, they were parsed out into a package of legislation and framed as kitchen table issues, I guess because people didn't really want to talk about marriage in that way—you know, in the way that we talk about marriage now.

It's interesting, because that's also a way of talking about marriage that's really focused on the rights and benefits, versus the way we think and talk about marriage now as love and commitment.

01-1:04:32

Meeker:

The poster above you reads, "Love and commitment equals marriage," right? Was there much discussion at the time when you were at HRC of getting the freedom to marry in the way in which it's talked about now?

01-1:04:51

Crawford:

There was some discussion, and there was also when Republicans had proposed the federal marriage amendment, so obviously there was a lot of organizing around that. I remember HRC was talking a little bit around marriage, and there was HRC being involved in helping in Massachusetts and some other places, and I remember that one of my co-workers was telling me how she got this call from an HRC member in Texas who was furious that the

organization was talking about marriage, because that was a kind of pinko socialist kind of thing, and that that was going to destroy the LGBT movement, talking about marriage. And that we should be satisfied with domestic partnership.

01-1:05:43

Meeker:

It's interesting, when I think of marriage, I usually think of it from the other perspective. I mean, I come from an academic background and the conversations I was hearing were, "Oh, well, we don't want marriage, one, because it's a losing political battle, and two, because, well, it's a corrupt institution to begin with, and we should actually just get rid of marriage." That's what I was hearing from people in my circle.

01-1:06:16

Crawford:

Yeah, so I wasn't hearing that so much. What I heard was more conversation around whether or not we should be going for marriage because it was a potentially losing political issue: Oh, it's something like decades away; Oh, we should really be focusing on ENDA, because people always kept talking about, Oh, we have an opportunity to move ENDA. And so I heard about it in terms of priorities, political priorities and where we should be most smartly putting our resources. I heard less about it being like this patriarchal institution that we should be working to destroy, although I did hear some of that, and that just seems so hysterical and funny right now, at least to me. But of course I've been working on nothing but marriage for a number of years now.

But at the time, there was internal discussion at HRC about marriage and where it would fit into the priorities that the organization was focused on. But people were very definitely of the mindset that ENDA was the number-one priority.

01-1:07:32

Meeker:

When Massachusetts started to happen in 2003, 2004, those were the big years of it, from your perch at HRC, what was the conventional thinking around what was happening in Massachusetts from HRC's point of view?

01-1:07:54

Crawford:

That we needed to defend Massachusetts and help it win. There were some HRC board members who were in Massachusetts and who were heavily involved. Boston was and continues to be a very strong financial source for HRC. It was in the context of ballot campaigns around marriage, which we were just losing everything. And we wanted to help Massachusetts, one, because that would be the right thing to do; two, because there were political pressures to help win; three, because it would help to stem, at least somewhat, the tide of—the constantly losing at the ballot, and it would provide actual protections for people who needed them.

01-1:08:47

Meeker: In your position there, did you play any role specifically on those campaigns?

01-1:08:53

Crawford: Just a little bit. I mean, so it was more people who were focused on the more explicitly political end, and a little less those of us that were from a field organizing perspective.

01-1:09:05

Meeker: Did you get to know anyone like Marc Solomon or—

01-1:09:08

Crawford: I did not get to know Marc. I mean, I'd heard of Marc and I knew who he was; he had no idea who I was. But it was other people that were working much more closely with the leadership in Massachusetts.

01-1:09:23

Meeker: One of your notes about your accomplishments at HRC was increasing the number of online activists from 150,000 to more than 600,000. What does that mean, exactly? I don't know what an online activist—

01-1:09:41

Crawford: It's really focused around e-mail addresses, right? Because e-mail is gold, even right now, because for organizations that are doing like fundraising online or getting people to take action online, the primary way of getting them to do that is through e-mail. So when we talk about online supporters, we're generally talking about the number of e-mail addresses that we have.

01-1:10:06

Meeker: How did you do that? How did you go from 150,000 to 600,000?

01-1:10:09

Crawford: Well, part of it was things like the Million for Marriage campaign, which was really basic pledge-type thing: I stand with blah-blah-blah in support of marriage. You sign your name, you give your e-mail address, which is great. Being at events all across the country—I'm sure you've been to events and you've been harassed by HRC staff and volunteers to sign up for something, and that way of bringing those kind of things in. Asking existing members to refer their friends, to get their friends to sign up. And the issues that the petitions encompassed were everything from ENDA and nondiscrimination to marriage, anything that we thought would get people excited enough to give us their e-mail addresses.

01-1:11:07

Meeker: How were those then utilized? I mean, when you get to 600,000, what is the goal?

01-1:11:13

Crawford: The goal is to have more people who you can solicit to take action, and those actions can include everything from e-mailing an elected official, signing up

to volunteer for an endorsed candidate, donating money to the organization. Now it includes asking people to share specific pieces of content online, to help it reach a broader audience. So any of the kinds of actions that we need supporters to do, those are the kinds of things that we ask people to do via e-mail. And now, of course, we also ask them to do via social media.

01-1:11:51

Meeker:

So you leave HRC in 2005. Were there just other opportunities, or—

01-1:11:57

Crawford:

Well, I had been there for five years, and five years was a long time. The LGBT movement is a little bit intense [Laughs] and so five years there is much longer than it would be, I think, in any other kind of area.

01-1:12:14

Meeker:

Is it the kind of place where there's really long hours expected?

01-1:12:14

Crawford:

Any nonprofit, there are long hours expected, and HRC has the added challenge of being a kind of controversial organization. LGBT people are opinionated about every single thing, and so at a certain point that kind of pressure—well, the pressure got to me. And I know other people who have just said, Okay, I'm done with LGBT politics, or I need a break from the movement.

Even like right now, I've been at Freedom to Marry for almost six years—I was going to say it will be six years in January, but it would've been six years in January—and the controversy and the intense feelings around marriage being a priority and something that we're focused on, that in and of itself was straining. So I left because I needed a break from LGBT people, which sounds bad, but it's true.

01-1:13:26

Meeker:

I understand. So you went to work on a variety of different other campaigns, including a mayoral campaign, I guess that was in DC?

01-1:13:35

Crawford:

Yes, first-time mayoral candidate with an inexperienced staff, inexperienced campaign manager. Single-digits in the polls on election day. So after I left HRC, I did a number of things, none of which, I think, were quite as exciting as what I'd done at HRC and what I do now at Freedom to Marry. So a lot of it was sort of finding what was going to be that next thing that was big enough, that was exciting enough, that I felt like—where I felt I could make a difference. So I worked on the mayoral campaign, I did some blogging-related stuff, I was online director for CREW, which is an organization that focuses on governmental ethics.

It's interesting, because someone asked me the other day, Why did you start working on marriage? Because I'm not any closer to being married today than

I was when I started working on marriage in DC in like 2007 or so. And it's kind of like what happened with ACT-UP. When I was younger, there was an opportunity where I felt I could make a difference, and I stepped into that opportunity.

So I was working at CREW, and working at CREW was nice in that it gave me my first online director type title, which of course helped me get other things, but it was less fun in that it wasn't super exciting kind of work that wasn't challenging, and I could literally work from nine to five and be done. Which gave me time on the side to work to win marriage in DC

01-1:15:40

Meeker:

Right, so CREW was the Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. Maybe tell me a little bit about the online program that you developed there, because this is now an era of social media, and the landscape is starting to change. There's a lot more possibility, at least.

01-1:15:59

Crawford:

There was a lot more possibility. Facebook, Twitter were both emerging platforms and would really start to take off in 2007, 2008 with the Obama campaign. We used it to build micro-sites, push the organization's message and agenda, where I think it was less exciting for me, in that we weren't so much using it as an opportunity to engage or to empower people, which is something that's really important to me.

So we used it, but I wouldn't say that we necessarily used it in any way that was innovative or cutting-edge or exciting.

01-1:16:48

Meeker:

It was sort of unidirectional.

01-1:16:49

Crawford:

Yeah, it was very much like, Oh, we have this report to promote, let's post to Facebook, let's post to Twitter, let's maybe build a microsite around it, and then we'll point reporters to the microsite, and they'll get all the content and they'll write great stories about it. Then, of course, there was a lot of other good work that the organization did, but in terms of the online program, there was nothing that was super cutting-edge or, if I'm being really honest, that was really interesting.

So it was easy for me to be working on marriage on the sidelines, in theory in my off times, even though sometimes during the workday. Which is also, when I got to know Evan really well, it was really easy—when the opportunity to run Freedom to Marry's digital program came up, it was really easy for me to make that decision to leave CREW to come to Freedom to Marry.

01-1:17:55

Meeker:

Tell me about your work for DC for Marriage. You were the founder and director of this campaign, I guess. When did you start working on this?

01-1:18:07

Crawford:

It started in 2007, I believe it was, and so it's funny, it wasn't like I intentionally said, Okay, I'm going to start working on marriage because we need marriage in DC. It was—I remember being at a community forum that was focused on LGBT issues in DC, where the LGBT community and the city needed to go in order to increase equality. And I remember someone raising the question, "Well, shouldn't we be thinking about marriage?" And I remember the people on the panel at the time saying, "Oh, no, not yet. We shouldn't work on that now, we should work in increasing domestic partnerships." I remember I stood up and I said, "Well, why the hell not? Why the hell shouldn't we work on marriage?"

It was funny, because at the same time, another guy, Lane Hudson, stood up and said pretty much the same thing, and we were both like, "What the hell? Why should you wait? Don't tell us to wait." I mean, I'd never really thought much about a marriage campaign in DC, I didn't think about local LGBT politics, because I'd been working for HRC and it was all focused on national. But that moment when someone said, "Okay, you should wait, that just pissed me off to no end."

And then Lane and I became friends. Together with a couple of other guys, we formed DC for Marriage, all with a focus on building support for marriage in DC. Again, it's another one of those situations where an opportunity presented itself and I felt like I could make a difference. I had experience organizing at the national level, so I got to see things that were working in a lot of different places. I had the energy. I clearly had the passion, even though I didn't know I had the passion about it until that moment. I'm African American, and DC is a predominantly African American city.

So I felt like there was a responsibility for me to take up that fight, even though I had not thought about marriage in DC really at any point before that. But I saw something that needed to change, I felt a sense of urgency around it, not necessarily because I felt a sense of urgency around marriage in DC, but because someone was saying wait, that you should just wait, and wait to be treated more equally, because that kind of thing just doesn't work for me. And I felt like, okay, I have this skill set, it's like everything has been leading towards this moment, let's seize it and make something of it.

01-1:21:15

Meeker:

Institutionally, did you establish a 501(c)(3), or how did you get this thing going?

01-1:21:18

Crawford:

We didn't. We got the DC LGBT Community Center, which I was on the board of, to be our (c)(3) sponsor, which is great, because the executive director there is super smart, visionary, very much in favor of thinking about what's the next step and thinking boldly. And of course I was on the board of directors, which made it a little bit easier for that process to move along. And DC for Marriage focused initially a lot on building a group of volunteers to go out and actually talk to people about why gay people wanted to get married, and figuring out what was going to be that earned media kind of strategy to get gay people talking about why they wanted to marry, you know, on TV, in newspapers, et cetera.

And not just doing it in the northwest quadrant of the city, which is the better-off portion of the city; it's also the portion of the city that has a lot of the white residents of the city. We didn't just stick in those kind of areas; we went across the river into Anacostia, into Wards 7 and 8 to talk to the predominantly African American neighborhoods, to talk to the people in those neighborhoods about why gay people wanted to get married and ask for their support. Yeah, we went to churches, we went to community centers, we went to community meetings. Because that's how you do the work.

And there were a couple of concerns in DC. Less of a concern was actually getting a bill through the city council. The city council is like super pro LGBT. But it was also about preparing for a potential ballot campaign, and knowing that Congress oversees DC, that we had to be prepared for that. I successfully like ignored them. So in DC, our strategy was informed by the fact that Congress has oversight over DC laws, and there's a whole range of things that Republicans in Congress could've done to stop the implementation of marriage, including demanding that it be put on the ballot. So as part of that public educational kind of work, we were building up that support, doing that kind of thing that you do when you prepare for a ballot campaign. And we were also simultaneously building up that pressure on the city council to move faster and not to say, Okay, well, let's just go slow, but to move faster, because we really wanted it to happen.

01-1:24:19

Meeker:

You talked about going out and going door-to-door and to community centers explaining to the broader population why gay people wanted to get married. How did you get to that base of knowledge? How did you learn why gay people wanted to get married?

01-1:24:37

Crawford:

Along the way, we created a core volunteer team of gay people who cared about marriage, because they wanted to get married and they would share their personal stories of, "I want to get married because I love my partner;" "I want to get married because we want to be able to take care of our kids;" "I want to get married because we want these protections that come with marriage." And we used that as the basis of what we were talking about. So

we would be using those kinds of stories and that kind of flexibility of sharing personal experience to guide all of that kind of work, and at the same time I was talking to Evan Wolfson, who's like, "What do you think about this? What should we be doing here?" This was before Freedom to Marry had made the big transition from the old Freedom to Marry 1.0 to Freedom to Marry 2.0, and so he was thinking about a lot of this same kind of stuff.

We agreed on things like—in a lot of marriage campaigns before the DC campaign, the LGBT organizations were like, "Okay, we're not going to really touch the faith issue, we're going to let religious people primarily," who at the time seemed to be opposed to marriage, "have their say, and we're going to focus on this other kind of stuff." We did not cede faith at all, and we intentionally created Clergy United for Marriage Equality to be that kind of pro-marriage faith voice. And I think that's a result of lingering ACT-UP, Queer Nation influence, where you're like, "No, we're not just going to cede this because the opposition is trying to claim it as its own. We're going to claim everything that we want and everything that we are." So rather than just writing off people of faith, we intentionally invited people of faith in and asked them to join with us, and to be very public about it.

So at the same time that I was working to get stories of gay couples in the media, and African American voices who were supportive of marriage in the media, I was also working to get faith voices in the media. We were not prepared to cede anything to the opposition.

01-1:27:08

Meeker:

It's interesting. To me, it kind of harkens back to what you were talking about at the beginning of our conversation today about your grandmother and her basically placing of love and caring at the heart of Christianity, not some things that parts of Christianity has become today. I mean, did you kind of hold on to this and see this as a real potential for working with faith communities?

01-1:27:36

Crawford:

I wasn't necessarily thinking about my grandmother, but I was thinking that I knew people of faith who were gay, and people of faith who were pro-gay, and we didn't just limit it to Christians. So we had, you know, on the days that we had testimony before the city council on the marriage bill, which, by the way, we got so many people to register to testify that it became the biggest day—the largest testimony in the city's history, so much so that it had to be extended for a second day. And we had people of faith who were Christian, people of faith who were Jewish, people of faith who were Muslim. I was not prepared to cede any of that to the opposition, because they put out this viewpoint that they speak for people of faith, and that's a lie.

There are a lot of people of faith who support LGBT people, and particularly LGBT people on marriage, and I really wanted their voices to be heard, one,

because it's just true, but two, because that's the kind of message and narrative that we needed to get across in order to build support for marriage in a way that would help us move a bill faster, that would help us show Congress that there was broad support across the city, and that would also help us in the event that the bill went to the ballot.

01-1:29:08

Meeker:

When did you first meet with Evan and start to engage with Freedom to Marry?

01-1:29:13

Crawford:

I knew Evan from back in my HRC days, but I didn't know him very well. I don't remember exactly when—I remember reaching out to him, and of course Evan's like, "Sure, go forward, go forward!" But go forward in a really smart way. Even before that, before I had started thinking about marriage in DC, I know Evan had had a conversation with a couple of the leading LGBT activists in DC, saying, "Why are you not going for marriage? Go for marriage, go for marriage." And they were hesitant. I mean, you met Evan. Evan is a force of nature. So he has one speed, and that is like forward. Which is great, because it was definitely matching where I was at the time.

But Evan also had, I think, a bigger strategic vision than I had around marriage, and he also—not just in terms of, okay, these are some of the things we needed to think about in order to win marriage in DC, but how marriage campaign in DC would fit as part of the broader national narrative around the push for marriage. Because we won marriage in, I believe it was December 2009, which was shortly after we lost the marriage bill in the New York legislature, and when marriage was overturned at the ballot in Maine. So a victory in DC was a good thing for the national marriage movement, because we had had a couple of losses, and this gave us a great opportunity for a win, and a win that would happen in a jurisdiction that was primarily people of color.

01-1:30:58

Meeker:

Freedom to Marry, I know, at the time was giving re-grants to different local or in-state groups. Were you a recipient of any of the funds?

01-1:31:08

Crawford:

Yeah, so Evan helped us with funds, which really helped a lot in terms of us getting increasing earned media capacity, by being able to hire a PR person, who was fantastic. Then Evan also helped a bit later with a grant from the Civil Marriage Collaborative, a big, sizable grant that was used to focus on public education, specifically focused on the African American community.

01-1:31:40

Meeker:

The Civil Marriage Collaborative is?

01-1:31:43

Crawford:

It's an entity that I think may be more public now, where a lot of people who are funding the LGBT movement come together to figure out how they can

leverage their assets to help win marriage. So there were much larger kinds of discussions around where they should be strategically investing in different states in order to help those states win. It's extraordinarily successful.

01-1:32:14

Meeker:

I am really interested in this perspective that you would have as, in essence, a client of Freedom to Marry, because we're interviewing mostly people who have been here, although a few people who have been on kind of another side, like Thalia [Zepatos] and I guess Marc [Solomon] as well. And I'm really curious about what it was like to work with this big organization in New York City and—yeah, if you can give me maybe more insight into how they would reach out and what the expectations were, what they were hoping in return, what you could expect from them as well.

01-1:33:00

Crawford:

This was about six years ago, so Freedom to Marry was very different than the Freedom to Marry we have now. It wasn't a big national organization, it was more like Mickey and Judy's like, "Hey, let's put on a show!" Although Evan probably wouldn't characterize it as that. So there were maybe four people on staff at the time, they had a much smaller profile and were much more behind the scenes.

A lot of it was helping think through a strategy around getting the bill through the city council, dealing with potential push-back from Congress, how we think about earned media strategy and the messaging points that we should be pushing out by our earned media, how we thought about the public education that we were engaging in with local communities. And sometimes it was really just Evan giving a pep talk in those moments when I was like, "Oh my god, this is all too much." Because I had a full-time job at the time, plus I was doing this work, so it was quite a bit.

Working in the LGBT community itself is challenging, so Evan would also provide that kind of positive reinforcement: "Here's what's really important," helping to focus on the bigger picture when I would sometimes get lost in the weeds. Which he's very good about thinking about, that bigger vision, that broader picture, and here's how all the various pieces fit together. He would constantly keep me in check, both in terms of thinking about how we win in DC and what this would mean for DC, but also thinking about what this could mean for the bigger national picture.

01-1:35:03

Meeker:

This campaign was running at the same time that all the stuff was happening in California, that is, the California State Supreme Court decision that allowed couples to marry for four months, and then Prop 8 promptly passed in November of 2008, the same time that Obama was elected, which was a huge moment, came with this downside. And then all of the sort of soul-searching and anger that followed Prop 8. I mean, I'm from California, so I witnessed it firsthand. Rightly or wrongly, a lot of the discussions centered on one, of

course, the role of the Mormon Church coming into California and dumping millions of dollars in that campaign. Another thing was, blaming's not the right word, but pointing out that the African American vote maybe shifted in the direction people didn't think it was going to shift, and there were a large number of African Americans who voted for Prop 8 as opposed to against it.

I mean, there's been some analysis now, I think, that contests that conclusion, but that was part of the public discourse of the time. I'm wondering, in DC, with a large African American population, there must have been a recognition that a lot of work needed to be done on this issue. How did you go about that?

01-1:36:43

Crawford:

I'll say a couple of things. I think it is fair to say that some in the white LGBT community blamed African American voters, and that's just the truth. I also think it's bullshit, and I think even the idea that African Americans voting—a majority of African American voters voting for Prop 8, that that's what lost Prop 8 for us, is bullshit. I mean, when you look at the size of the African American electorate in California, which is in single digits, and you look at the fact that it was white people who run the Mormon and Catholic churches, who were funding the pro-Prop 8 side, I think the idea or the blame that some white LGBT activists placed on African American voters is another sign or another symptom of the racism that exists in the LGBT community, and an unwillingness among white LGBT activists to look at the fact or accept the fact that it's actually white people who are the primary drivers of homophobia and anti-LGBT legislation in the country.

Now, having said that, I think that yeah, the loss of Prop 8 and the conversation around whether or not it was the fault of African American voters did help to drive my interest in wanting to further reach and engage with African American people in DC, because I knew that if we lost in any way, whether it was Congress demanding that it be placed on the ballot, that it would be blamed on African American people. So we just doubled down on that kind of work.

I mentioned that we had formed Clergy United for Marriage Equality. Among the key leaders of that coalition were the Reverend Wileys, an African American husband-and-wife pastor team at one of the most historic African American churches in DC, located in a heavily black area in DC. And they were extraordinary both in terms of the public support, the media interviews that they would do, the work that they would do engaging in the local community, even when it came back to bite them in some ways. Because it affected their congregation, and some people in the congregation were concerned. They still stuck with us and they were still very vocal and they were very, very generous and very passionate in how they explained their support for the freedom to marry and why it was important.

So we just doubled down on the work, doing public education work in African American communities. I remember picking up lunch in a Five Guys restaurant, and there was an African American mom, she had her little girl with her, who was standing in line ahead of me, and she looked at me, and I noticed that she would turn and look at me a couple of times. Then she turned and she said, “I’ve seen you on TV. I just want you to know I support everything that you guys are doing.” And that was fantastic, right? And that’s a small moment, but for me it was one of those moments that signal that what we were doing was actually working, and that we were going to win.

01-1:40:23

Meeker:

Did you get a sense of what messages were particularly effective within the African American community in DC?

01-1:40:32

Crawford:

Yeah. One was the messengers. So we weren’t sending a bunch of white people to talk to African American people. What we were sending were people like me and gay African American couples to talk about why it mattered to us. We talked about it in the context of strengthening African American families. We talked about it in the context of the continuing evolution—we didn’t say civil rights—but the continuing evolution and the protections of rights of African American people. We talked about how marriage would strengthen and help African American people. And in this case, it just happened to be focused on African American gay people, who are part of every community.

So—at the time I was living in Logan Circle—we didn’t just take people like me who lived in Logan Circle, we also took people that lived in those communities, in Anacostia, et cetera, and those people could say, I live in the neighborhood just a few blocks down, and this is something that matters to me. So we were really trying to figure out messages and messengers that people could relate to in the most visceral way. So stripping away some of the things that can potentially come with busing white volunteers in, we got people from those communities to talk to other people in those communities.

01-1:42:04

Meeker:

It’s interesting. It sounds like, to a certain extent, the gay part or the lesbian part was, I don’t want to say pushed to the background, but it was the common racial identity of the African Americans who happened to be a same-sex couple, letting the larger population know that by extending marriage rights, you’re actually helping your African American brothers and sisters—

01-1:42:38

Crawford:

Exactly, exactly.

01-1:42:39

Meeker:

—who happen to be gay or lesbian.

01-1:42:42

Crawford: So rather than leading with gay, gay was just part of the mix. The bigger focus was, yeah, we're in this together, and if you support this, you will be helping me, which will help us.

01-1:42:57

Meeker: Interesting. We should probably wrap up today. I know that you've got a celebration here [Laughs]. I think this is a good spot to stop, too, unless there's anything else you'd like to add up to your hiring in 2010 here.

01-1:43:19

Crawford: No, I don't think so.

01-1:43:22

Meeker: Okay, so you think that we covered the DC campaign relatively well?

01-1:43:24

Crawford: Yeah.

01-1:43:25

Meeker: Great. This is really good.

Interview 2: November 9, 2015

02-00:00:00

Meeker:

Today is the 9th of November, 2015. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Michael Crawford for the Freedom to Marry Oral History Project. We are here at the Freedom to Marry offices in New York City, and this is interview session number two. So, last time we got to the point, really, I think, of you talking about having met Evan and your previous employment, but we hadn't started talking about your work here at Freedom to Marry. So why don't you tell me about how you learned about the position or were recruited for the position, and what you were told about what it was going to entail.

02-0:00:50

Crawford:

As I mentioned previously, I worked closely with Evan on winning marriage in D.C., and at the same time that I was working on marriage in D.C., Evan was working on Freedom to Marry 2.0, building support for it, raising money for it, figuring out what the staffing would look like, and so on. And so shortly after we won in D.C., he sent the job posting for new media director, the position was called at the time, which shows you that it was like six years ago.

And, you know, basically they were looking for someone to really take their digital efforts to the next level. They had a website which was a hideous website, which I think even Evan will admit. They had a very small social media presence. They were looking for someone to really ramp it up and use digital to do a couple of things: to rapidly accelerate the growth and public support for marriage, to help to shape marriage supporters into an effective movement, and also to brand Freedom to Marry as the campaign with a strategy that would help us achieve that national win.

So it's interesting, because Evan sent me the job description, asking if I knew of anybody smart who would be great to apply for this job. And I replied, "Oh sure, I know some folks," and I sent it on to other people. Then I get another e-mail, "So do you know somebody smart who should apply for this job?" And I'm like, "Well, I sent it to a couple of people, but I guess I could send it to a couple more people." Then I got another e-mail, and I'm kind of dense, in that it took me three times to realize that he was asking me to apply for the job.

02-0:02:49

Meeker:

Was he just worried about poaching you from your current position?

02-0:02:53

Crawford:

I don't know if he was so much worried about that, because it was a non-LGBT focused nonprofit. I think, at the time, he was looking for really smart people, because Freedom to Marry had previously played more of an advisory role and was more behind the scenes. I mean, Evan still had a pretty strong media profile, but nothing like he has now, and so they were looking for

people who could help drive everything forward. So I think he really wanted to be thoughtful about that process.

So during the interview process, which was a little intimidating, because one of the people that interviewed me was Chris Hughes, Facebook co-founder. And so generally, when you're interviewing for jobs, you don't get—unless you're interviewing at Facebook—you don't get interviewed by a Facebook co-founder. And so the process was nerve-racking for me, and it's interesting because now I'm looking for a new job as Freedom to Marry is winding down, and that period during the interview process, I was more nervous than I had been in a while, in part because I really, really wanted the job. And the whole process, you know, talking to Evan, talking to Scott [Davenport], talking to other people who were connected to the organization—because it was a much smaller staff at that point.

So like, for example, Thalia Zepatos, you know, she was going to be director of messaging and research, and she was one of the people that I talked to. Everybody consistently said that there was a political moment that we really needed to take advantage of and that we needed to be thinking in a campaign-like manner. Because, you know, a lot of organizations that come together, they think of themselves as organizations, they become institutions, and then at a certain point the organization's role is to keep the organization going. Evan didn't want that kind of thing. What he wanted was folks who were willing to work really, really hard in a campaign-like environment to accomplish the job of winning marriage, and then the organization would go away, would disband, which is what we're in the process of doing now.

And so the process itself was nerve-racking for me, although if I think about it now, I should have been less nervous, because it seemed like a job that was perfectly fit for me, and obviously I got it. And I think my first day was January 1, 2010.

02-0:05:37

Meeker:

Were you aware of these three interrelated goals when you had applied for the job?

02-0:05:40

Crawford:

Evan had a pretty expansive document laying out what Freedom to Marry would become, and including in that was some of the things that he wanted to build with Freedom to Marry. A lot of what he talked about was that kind of central capacity, and among the things he talked about central capacity around were communications, digital, messaging, research, and all of that. And so I think, you know, I wasn't as clear on those three goals when I started, but those became clearer over time.

Particularly as we built the digital program, started to figure out how we actually build a real e-mail list, how do we build a real strong social media

presence, how we start to engage in storytelling online. Then those things became much clearer, because everything—you know, at the time, everything tied back to the road map to victory, which was really all about winning more states, growing public support, and ending federal marriage discrimination. So everything tied back to those three goals, but the three more specific goals that I was tasked with only became crystal clear a little bit into the job.

02-0:07:01

Meeker:

Did it seem to you very much like the past was the past at that point, that they were really trying to, in essence, relaunch the organization as a campaign?

02-0:07:12

Crawford:

So, at the time it was very clear that Evan wanted to relaunch, and that he was very clear that there needed to be this central campaign, and he talked about that a lot, this central campaign that could really energize and turbocharge the movement. I mean, obviously there were some holdovers from the previous incarnation of the organization, right? I mean, because some of the staff was still the same, and so there was that kind of holdover. Plus, you know, when you've been doing something for a while, it kinda sticks around even as you're trying to do something new.

So what I think, you know, the goal was was to move away from that more organizational kind of mindset and move toward a much more entrepreneurial campaign-like mindset. And if you think about it, a lot of Evan's thinking about this started to happen in 2009, which was a year after—well, I guess less than a year after the Obama campaign had revolutionized campaigning, which is one of the reasons that Evan hired Blue State Digital, which is the digital firm that first became really widely known by working with the Obama campaign. So he wanted some of that same kind of energy and the energy of—the digital energy that they use to engage supports and build them into a real movement. He wanted that, so he hired that firm and he hired me to lead those efforts.

02-0:08:42

Meeker:

How familiar were you with Obama's digital strategy in 2008?

02-0:08:51

Crawford:

I was pretty familiar with it. I paid attention to it. I was consistently impressed by the work that they were doing. A number of my friends worked on the campaign. I didn't work on the campaign, but I was a really strong volunteer in the D.C. area, particularly helping get LGBT residents of D.C. to go turn up the vote in neighboring Virginia. It actually turned out that one of my friends also worked for Blue State Digital, and so worked with the Obama campaign, and he was the account manager that was assigned to Freedom to Marry. And so I knew some things about the Obama campaign, in part because I was just paying attention, in part because I knew people who were working on the campaign. And then I knew some things about Blue State Digital, because

everybody knew about them at that point because of the Obama campaign, but also because I had a friend that worked there.

02-0:09:48

Meeker:

What were the things that you learned about it or knew about it that you knew that you wanted to take into the position here?

02-0:09:55

Crawford:

Sure, so I knew that there was a strong emphasis on branding and on design, on making sure not just that things looked pretty, but there was an energetic kind of quality to the design, one that was going to move forward the branding of President Obama in that campaign, but that also made volunteers and prospective voters feel really a part of a campaign. So there was very much a movement kind of aspect to it that we needed in the marriage movement in order to build and grow.

There was also a lot of really smart use of social media, and using it in terms of scaling up in terms of communicating messages, in terms of bringing people into the campaign, in terms of generating donations, and I wanted to bring a lot of that into Freedom to Marry.

02-0:10:50

Meeker:

I mean, this is kind of the same question, similar, but when you started here, did you have a particular agenda, in addition to what you just said? Was there anything else that you thought that you could bring into the organization that it was lacking at that point?

02-0:11:07

Crawford:

Yes. Color. So one of the things that's always been in the back of my mind no matter what job that I had is how to bring a measure of diversity to that work. And the LGBT movement is predominantly white; the marriage movement reflected the LGBT movement, it was predominantly white; the stories that were being told, the faces that were being seen, they were predominantly white, and I wanted to bring a much more multiracial face to the marriage movement and, by extension, the LGBT movement. So from the start, I wanted to diversify Freedom to Marry and all the content and stories that the organization was telling.

02-0:11:51

Meeker:

Did you present this when you interviewed? Was this something that they seemed to be on board with? How did they respond?

02-0:11:57

Crawford:

I did not present it—so, I didn't so much bring it up to them and say, "Okay, here's my grand master plan for ensuring that we have the richest, most complex presentation of same-sex couples and their families that has ever existed." It was something that I knew that I wanted, and since I was the person charged with finding the stories and initially telling the stories, I intentionally chose stories that were diverse and couples that were diverse and

photos that were diverse, and even if it was something as simple as taking—Freedom to Marry had a program called Voices for Equality, which is basically famous people who were supportive of marriage, who had said something good about marriage. And they had been building this list for a couple of years before I joined the team. So even thinking about that program and which of those people that we pushed out, I was thinking, “Okay, we need to be pushing out people of color, we needed to be expanding the age range so that it wasn’t the same type of person,” but it really was a kind of mosaic of diversity.

So I didn’t talk to them about it, it was my own private agenda. And yeah, it was my own private agenda that I pushed. And once I joined the staff, then I raised the issues more.

02-0:13:20
Meeker:

We’ll talk about that a bit more when we get to the specific campaigns, because I think that there’s some really great examples, I’d like you to talk about how they happened. Why don’t we talk about the e-mail campaign, to start out with, because this one actually has very clear metrics. You were charged with basically creating an e-mail campaign that was to grow an e-mail list that was languishing sort of below 10,000 to many times that. How was this communicated to you? Were there certain goals that were communicated to you about what it was that they wanted to see done with the e-mail?

02-0:14:10
Crawford:

It was less about numerical goals that were laid out. Evan kept hammering the point, “Build an army, build an army.” That was his phrase the first couple of years, “Build an army, build an army.” When I started, the e-mail list was, about, a little under 7,000 e-mail addresses, some of which were no longer active. And over time, I guess over the last nearly six years, we built it so that it’s a little over 700,000 right now. And so it wasn’t so much that they said, “Okay, here’s this numerical goal and you need to reach this numerical goal.” It was more like, “Build this army, now go figure out how to do it.”

You know, a lot of it was done in the kinds of ways where we just bring people in, we’re looking to bring in masses of people. We started off with some simple like pledge campaigns. It’s funny, a couple of weeks ago I was looking at the very first pledge campaign that we ever did, for a presentation that I did, and the language was very simple. It was something like, “I add my voice to the growing chorus of Americans who support the freedom to marry.” So very, you know, big language that no one could be offended by, except of course if they were against gay people. And we used that as ways to bring people into the fold.

Well, first we used it e-mailing the existing 7,000 people to start to reengage those people. And then asking them to share that pledge with their friends, so that we could start to bring in people. And we also started to use that on social

media. Again, the language being big, but aspirational to reflect the Freedom to Marry brand, so that we could bring people into the fold. And after we have them into the fold, we'd start to figure out ways of getting them to take higher-barrier kinds of actions.

For a number of years, we did those kinds of things. We did petitions, we did pledges, we did sign this letter to elected officials, and so on, all with the goal of building the e-mail list, because e-mail is gold. I mean, it's how you raise most of your money online, it's how you get people to take specific actions. And I knew that the bigger e-mail list that we had, the more people we could potentially get to donate, to contact elected officials, to vote, to attend rallies, et cetera.

02-0:16:57
Meeker:

It's interesting, you talk about starting out with this kind of entry-level statement, very basic, not saying, "I demand that the Supreme Court overturns or that the Congress votes against DOMA," or something like that. It was very general, as you said. Can you tell me a little bit about the conversations that happened arriving at what that very basic statement would be, and were there any sort of debates about how to go about doing that?

02-0:17:30
Crawford:

There weren't so much debates about how to do it for a couple of reasons. One, we worked with Blue State Digital on our overall digital strategy including e-mail list building, and one of the things that the Obama campaign did was that very general, warm, feel-good kind of pledge, and we could say, "Okay, this is what the Obama campaign did, and look at how well it worked for them." And so, even at that time there wasn't, in Freedom to Marry, this kind of, tell the Supreme Court to do this kind of thing, in part because that's not what Freedom to Marry is. Even as it got to 2014, 2015, we would never like tell the Supreme Court, because you don't really tell the Supreme Court in that way, it's not like, "Tell Congress to pass the Respect for Marriage Act!"

It's interesting, because I think at the beginning, I think, even though Evan sensed that digital was an important piece and could be part of a smart strategy, I still think he was a little hesitant or doubtful about some of the things. So I think he was a little bit cautious about the general pledge language, and so I think we had to convince him a little bit that it should be that big, affirmative, easy first step kind of thing, and that we would then employ a strategy to move people up what's called the ladder of engagement, which is where you bring people in and then you give them additional actions, stories, or whatever you need in order to get them to take higher and higher level asks.

02-0:19:26
Meeker:

Is this also based on what Blue State Digital was recommending or had done in the Obama campaign?

02-0:19:33

Crawford:

Well, they were recommending it, but the ladder of engagement is something that existed prior to Blue State Digital, right? It's basic organizing 101. You bring people into the fold, the campaign, the organization, and after you bring them in, you thank them for taking that first step, and then, "Oh, here's a second action you can take," which has a little bit higher barrier. And you continue to move them up. I mean, so it's basic organizing 101. In this case, it just happened to be things that were happening online.

02-0:20:02

Meeker:

Let's say you could get all 6,600 e-mails addresses engaged again at that level. What then was the plan to grow that? How were you going to sort of get it to snowball and get a lot more people involved?

02-0:20:21

Crawford:

Yeah, so one of the first things we did, so let's say that you were a person that was a part of that, already on the Freedom to Marry list, then you signed that pledge. The immediate thing that we would ask you to do after that is to tell your friends, ask your friends and family to sign the pledge. And we'd give you the opportunity to easily send e-mails to those folks, to share on Facebook, to share on Twitter, the idea being that when a friend or someone that you know asks you to do something, you're much more likely to do it. So there was that aspect of it as well.

And then we started to pair that kind of ask with really super-cute adorable couples photos, right? Because then you could see, "Oh, this is the kind of couple or the kind of image or the kind of family that I'm signing this pledge in favor of." And so we tried a number of tactics like that over time. We did things like "Obama: Say I do," which is when we created an open letter to President Obama asking him to come out publicly in favor of the freedom to marry. Now, we didn't do that until 2011, and that was a huge boost to our e-mail list, and I think we got about 120,000 people who signed that letter to President Obama, which was a big boost to our e-mail list.

So it was a combination of the more general kind of asks, along with taking advantage of opportunities like encouraging President Obama to come out in favor of marriage that we used in order to build the list.

02-0:21:58

Meeker:

Because by that point in time, he had already talked about evolving on the issue.

02-0:22:02

Crawford:

Yeah, yeah. So he talked about evolving. Well, at least one of the first times was in a meeting when he was called out by a blogger named Joe Sudbay, who raised a question about his stance on marriage, and the president said that he was evolving. And of course the evolution was a multi-year evolution, which also actually, I think, ended up being a good thing, because it was like a

really public performance of evolution that demonstrated to people how they could evolve on the issue as well.

02-0:22:35

Meeker:

You know, this kind of gets back to the organizational side of it. The organization would have to spend money, not just on your salary, but there's other costs associated with, for instance, gathering these e-mail addresses. Can you tell me about the process of working—generating budgets, justifying those budgets, you know, kind of building out the internal capability to actually make this happen?

02-0:23:08

Crawford:

Right, right. So one of the things that I learned early on about Evan and Freedom to Marry is that if you could show some initial success, then you could go back and ask for more resources, on the theory that the success would be even greater. So showing that we were building the e-mail list, that we were building the Facebook page, that helped to justify spending more money and it worked out to bring those things in.

So like particularly initially when we were building the e-mail list, we didn't like rent lists, we didn't like buy other people's lists, and actually didn't do that ever—

02-0:23:51

Meeker:

Oh really?

02-0:23:52

Crawford:

No, we didn't buy lists. I mean, we did do some sponsored petitions with Change.org, and we had some partnerships with state-level campaigns as we were helping to build the campaigns, but we didn't like rent the Democratic Party's list, we didn't rent the ACLU's list, we didn't do any of that kind of stuff. So the vast majority of the list growth was organic and not paid. And specifically because it was—well, not paid meaning that we didn't pay for the actual list. Of course we paid for my time, you know, Blue State Digital's help, et cetera.

And one of the things that helped to show the value of the e-mail list was fundraising. The more people that we had on our list, the higher our fundraising went. And that would pay for stuff that we were spending money to build the list and communicate the message and drive people to vote and get them to communicate with elected officials. So a lot of it was figuring out how we could show strong initial results and that the time and energy that we were spending on these efforts were bearing fruit. And then I could go back to Evan and say, "This worked really well. I think if we put in these additional resources, put more of my time here, that we could grow that even further." And Evan understood that.

I mean, because you remember, the idea was, or one of the prime directives was, build an army. And you build an army by bringing in more people, and that requires, you know, time and resources.

02-0:25:29

Meeker:

Freedom to Marry was never a real big organization that tried to, you know, get members and produce T-shirts and, you know, maybe like HRC kind of model, if you will. And even early on, they didn't really—I don't even know if they had a donation button on their website. It wasn't until later on, right?

02-0:25:52

Crawford:

Well, I mean, they had a donation button prior to me joining, but they didn't really push fundraising. It was just there. And if you happened to come across the donation button and decided that you wanted to donate, you could. And of course when we did—so when I joined, we worked with Blue State on completely redesigning the website, adding in smart new tools and much better, much cleaner, much more intuitive design. And of course a much more prominent donate button, because again, part of it was to bring in the resources that we needed to help fund the movement so that we could win. So while it wasn't a big part of what was happening before me, after me fundraising became a much more important part of the work.

02-0:26:45

Meeker:

Could you talk about that process of bringing fundraising into the equation? You know, sometimes you could have the message and then the donate button at the bottom of the page, but linking them sometimes, you know, is a difficult thing to do logically or, you know, it's a maneuver that you have to make on the website to get people to understand that you're not just seeking to fill your coffers, that there is a real link between their support of the issue and the funds that you're asking for. How did you go about bringing that into a more prominent place on the website and integrating it into the campaign?

02-0:27:29

Crawford:

Sure. So I think a couple of things. You know, every piece of the work that we did went back to the road map to victory. And I think the second video that we did was a motion graphics piece about the road map to victory. So we were hammering—not hammering, communicating, strongly communicating with our supporters about the road map to victory, like from the beginning, or at least from the beginning of my time with Freedom to Marry. Because we really wanted people to understand, you know, how we would achieve the national victory. Because previously people had talked about, “Oh, gay couples should be able to marry nationwide,” but no one had really laid out that vision. Freedom to Marry had the vision and we wanted people to see and to understand what that strategy was.

And so we communicated that a lot, all the time. And as part of that communication, we were showing people, “Okay, here's how the actions that you take help to push forth this road map to victory, and here's how the

money that you donate help us to win more states, help us to grow public support, help us to end federal marriage discrimination.” So when I say everything came back to the road map, I can’t say that enough, because it’s that kind of road map, particularly as we were communicating it regularly by e-mail, by social media, by blog posts. Evan would talk about the road map in interviews on TV and newspaper, radio, et cetera. And people understood—eventually people understood, “Okay, this is the strategy that’s going to help us win.” And we communicated a lot about people’s role in it.

So one of the guiding visions of our digital program was, we wanted to make our supporters the hero of the story. And so, you know, our supporters were the hero of the story, that would help us to win marriage, Freedom to Marry had that strategy. And because Freedom to Marry created the campaign and the strategy through which our supporters could be the hero of the story, they became an exceptionally important part of it. And we used that communicate, “Okay, this is why we need you to donate.” Plus, we had also been regularly saying, “When we win, we’re shutting down. That’s it. We’re a campaign. We’re not an organization, we’re a campaign.” Campaigns have finite time periods. And we said publicly, regularly, Evan would say it, you know, when we win marriage, Freedom to Marry will close. And I think people understood that, that we weren’t just like raising money for our salaries or for whatever, we were raising the money that we needed in order to win marriage, and then once that job was done, we would disband.

02-0:30:15
Meeker:

You’ve mentioned Blue State Digital a few times in the context of the Obama campaign, but also in the context of working with Freedom to Marry. Maybe it’s worthwhile to go back and give me a little bit of an overview about what they were, what they became after the Obama campaign. And then how it was that Freedom to Marry interacted with them, talking about, I guess, the business relationship.

02-0:30:38
Crawford:

Sure. So Blue State Digital is a digital agency. They were started by a number of folks who worked on the digital team for Howard Dean way back in the day, and they really grew in prominence working with the Obama campaign in ’08, and they also worked on is 2012 campaign as well. The way that Obama used the internet was unprecedented, and Blue State rightly got a lot of credit for helping the president win, and he gave them quite a bit of credit for helping him win.

So, you know, the president won in November 2008. Around that time, or shortly thereafter, Evan was thinking about the new Freedom to Marry, Freedom to Marry 2.0, and he was starting to understand that digital should play a key role in this new campaign. So prior to me joining the team, they contracted with Blue State Digital, figured out the scope of work, retainer, what services the agency would provide for us. Blue State Digital wrote my

job description, which was great and I'm really grateful to them. And they were part of the interview process for all the candidates for the job that I eventually got. And so the way that our relationship worked with them is, we had them on monthly retainer for strategy and content, and we were essentially partners in terms of building the digital program. Because as I said, when I joined the team, Freedom to Marry's digital footprint was pretty small. There was a hideous website, less than 7,000 people on the e-mail list, maybe 13,000 across social media platforms, and if you're going to win something as big as marriage, you need a much bigger digital footprint than that. So we worked over the remaining six years in order to build that.

02-0:32:39

Meeker:

Who were some of the key strategic partners there? Were there key staff members that you worked with kind of throughout the period of time?

02-0:32:48

Crawford:

Yeah, so probably the two people that we worked with the most and the longest were Jessalyn Kiesa and Alex Stanton. So, you know, in that five, six year period that we worked with them, we had a few account people, Alex being one of the key early ones who we were working with when we came up with the idea for "Obama Say I do" and then later "Democrats Say I do." Jessalyn Kiesa, who came a little bit later, and who we worked with until the end, you know, was really influential in campaigns like Team Marriage, which was a non-membership membership program, because we didn't really want members but we wanted to give people an opportunity to more fully invest in Freedom to Marry's mission. And we worked with them quite a bit in terms of, you know, figuring out video and making videos, figuring out how we could better incorporate storytelling, how we could leverage blogger support, et cetera.

02-0:33:54

Meeker:

You know, Freedom to Marry was a—I'm trying to figure out if I call it an organization or a campaign. I guess campaign. Because it kind of started out as an organization and then becomes a campaign. But let's just say Evan Wolfson had a very strong vision, kind of a prophetic vision.

02-0:34:11

Crawford:

He has very strong visions, yes.

02-0:34:21

Meeker:

So Evan has a very strong vision. I wonder when bringing in external strategic consultants, you know, that can sometimes be very illuminating and refreshing. Sometimes it can cause, you know, debates, whereas you have your visionary leader and then you have other people who come in as consultants, as, "Listen, you're bringing me in as a strategic expert, you know, we won—we got Obama the White House, this is our opinion." I don't know if conversations like that ever happened, but were there moments where the strategic

consultants maybe were challenging the vision that had already existed at Freedom to Marry?

02-0:35:11

Crawford:

Well, I want to say Blue State never came in and said, “Hey, we got Obama elected, so you should listen to us.” They were never that full of themselves. They were always quite humble. And yes, so there were, you know, tense conversations between me and Evan, between me and Blue State, between Evan and Blue State, between me and Blue State and Evan. Because when you have people who are trying to achieve a big goal and you’re trying to do something innovative and creative and build something really massive, people are going to have strong opinions.

I think Evan understood that digital needed to play an important role in the Freedom to Marry campaign. I don’t think he necessarily knew how that would play out from an implementation perspective. So he had the overall vision that there should be this strong role for digital. I’m not sure that he understood more than that. And so he hired me, he hired Blue State Digital in order to figure out what that piece looked like. And to advocate for what I thought was going to be best.

So yeah, there were tense moments, which is not unexpected, particularly in a campaign-like environment. We set ourselves a pretty audacious goal. We wanted to win the freedom to marry nationwide. When Freedom to Marry started, you know, ten, eleven years ago, there was only 37 percent support for marriage, and we wanted to win nationally. So there were tense conversations, there were things that I wanted to spend money on that Evan needed some coaxing to say yes, and there were some things that I wanted to spend money on, or that Blue State was recommending, where Evan said no. And that’s just how things work. And there were some things where, you know, Evan said, “Okay, I don’t necessarily agree with this, but I’m going to trust your judgment in this case, so go ahead and do it.” So there was give and take, but that’s to be expected.

02-0:37:23

Meeker:

Can you give any examples of any of those kinds of conversations? And I’m not just digging for conflict here, I think that it’s important—

02-0:37:32

Crawford:

Add a little drama to the oral history?

02-0:37:33

Meeker:

Well, you know, maybe that. But I think that it is important, because these kinds of things are inevitable in any campaign that happens, and, you know, it could result in the disintegration of a relationship, or it can be resolved in a reasonable way and it can move forward, and this is a good example of the latter.

02-0:38:00

Crawford:

Sure. So one of the places, I think, where there was intense discussion was around “Obama Say I do.” And so Evan—Marc may not remember this, but the “Obama Say I do” idea came from discussions that I had had with Blue State Digital. Because in its early years, Freedom to Marry sponsored Freedom to Marry Week, which was basically, you know, marriage activists across the country doing various things. And Blue State and I were going back and forth, you know, tossing ideas back and forth, trying to figure out, okay, what should we do for, you know, Freedom to Marry Week that was going to be big, exciting, that was going to help build our e-mail list, et cetera. And we came up with the idea of an open letter to President Obama asking him to publicly come out in favor of marriage.

Which took a number of conversations with Evan, Marc [Solomon], Thalia [Zepatos], Jackie Yodashkin, who was the communications director at that time. You know, they thought it was a little too aggressive, not the open letter part, but the part where I wanted to take all the names and then show up at the White House Easter egg roll and give them to the White House. So they were right on that point. And so, you know, it took a number of conversations to get to the point where we were all in agreement that we should do the open letter, and how we should do it and broaden it. Because the idea that came from me and Blue State Digital was really centered around the open letter, when there needed to be a much broader campaign and strategic thinking around the entire initiative, so that it wasn’t just about that open letter, but it was about what’s the earned media strategy that will support the whole effort, what kind of conversations with the administration needed to happen in order to maintain good relationships with the administration and to encourage President Obama to come out in support. And then also, what other kind of ancillary pieces of data, information, et cetera, that we could produce that would help to make the case.

Because the goal wasn’t to say, “President Obama, you come out for the freedom to marry,” but we really wanted to build this groundswell of public support calling on the president to come out for marriage. Because it was never about attacking President Obama, it was about creating this movement, particularly as he was preparing for his reelection campaign. And so rather than attacking, we wanted to say—we were saying, “You come out in favor of the freedom to marry, and you will ignite millennial voters in a way that’s going to help you get reelected.”

02-0:40:44

Meeker:

It’s not surprising that you brought this example up, because, you know, in reading about the history and all the different campaigns, this one, you know, strikes me as one of the most difficult and one of the specific campaigns that probably needed the most care, because, you know, Obama clearly was a friend. He didn’t run on supporting the freedom to marry, but he did get Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell overturned. And he was moving toward his evolving

acceptance and support of the freedom to marry. So the last thing won—an old-school activist organization would do more of the, “You’re being a homophobe,” or, attacking him, because he hadn’t reached like the gold standard of support. I think it’s kind of interesting because you have to really balance the message, which is clearly he’s a supporter and a friend, but how then do we actually still push him? Because there’s a long history of politicians resting on their laurels.

02-0:42:04

Crawford:

Right. And we, you know, didn’t think about it or talk about it as pushing the president. We wanted to show that there is this groundswell of support for him supporting marriage, and for him becoming the first president to publicly support marriage. So we didn’t see it as us pushing the president or us going on the attack against the president. We saw it as, you know, the president is trying to figure out how to get reelected, our goal, of course, is to win marriage nationwide, the president coming out in favor would really help us reach that goal. What can we do to show the president that he will have the support of millions of people, you know, if he publicly came out? And we said, “Okay, let’s build this movement to show President Obama the really strong grassroots support for him coming out in favor of marriage.”

So for us, it wasn’t about pushing the president or about attacking the president. And we don’t get involved in electoral politics, so it wasn’t like we were saying, “Oh, if you don’t support us, we’re going to go off and support Hillary Clinton,” or anything like that. We really wanted to show that there was strong support for him coming out in favor of marriage.

02-0:43:19

Meeker:

That’s a great idea, but how is that done in practice in a way that neither the president nor his people feel like there’s this external pressure from people that they felt like they would have expected a little more freedom?

02-0:43:40

Crawford:

Well, it’s interesting, because there were some old-school activists and people who were encouraging us to be quiet and to tamp it down. But, you know, part of what happened was, we were very careful about how we framed things, so we weren’t saying like, “You need to do this,” we were saying, “Join us in publicly supporting marriage.”

There was one project where we worked with President Obama’s former pollster, the former pollster for President Bush, got them to look at how the president coming out in favor of marriage would impact voter excitement. News flash, it would energize the millennial voters, and we communicated that, that message, to the president. They did it in meetings with the administration. We did it online, we did it in earned media.

We were very intentional about everything we say at Freedom to Marry, and we were exceptionally careful about this piece, not to the extent that we were

overly cautious and were really like scared of what we were saying. I mean, we knew very clearly what we wanted to happen, we communicated that in a very affirmative kind of way, because we are an affirmative organization. You can't run around saying, you know, love, commitment, and marriage and not be affirmative.

So we were really intentional about wanting to show that there is this massive amount of support in the country for the president's support of marriage. So everything that we did, whether it was the sign-on letter, the meetings with the administration, the work we did around earned media, the other voices that were asking to ask the president to support marriage, we were all thinking about—as we did all those things, we were thinking about how is it that we can show the administration that there was this groundswell of public support for him coming out for marriage.

02-0:45:50
Meeker:

Were you having any behind-the-scenes dialogue with anyone in the administration or around the administration to learn that, in fact, this was how they were seeing your efforts?

02-0:46:01
Crawford:

Evan can speak to that better. So my job was to generate the online, you know, excitement and energy around that kind of campaign, so a lot of the grassroots-y kind of stuff I was responsible for, because that's a lot of what we did online. But I know that Even, I think maybe Marc as well, had regular conversations with the administration to make sure that they understood what we were doing and why we were doing it.

And I also think that that may be why, one of the things I mentioned earlier was that there were multipole conversations before we launched the campaign, and I think that was one of the reasons why Evan was very hesitant about my idea to go to the Easter egg roll and say, We want you to come out in favor of marriage, because he felt like that would be too aggressive a posture. I think he was right. I mean, at the time I didn't think he was right, but I think he ended up being right and smart strategically.

02-0:47:05
Meeker:

You know, it seems like “Obama Say I do” in the way in which you're talking about it is very much a carrot as opposed to a stick, right? One might say, though, that the “Democrats Say I do” campaign to get freedom to marry on the plank before 2012 was in some ways a stick, because once it was clear that it was going to make to the plank of the platform, that would've put Obama in a difficult position if he somehow was not in agreement with a major plank.

02-0:47:45
Crawford:

It's also another example of showing how there was broad support for the president taking that action, right? So you had the people, the public, the grassroots public, saying please do this. Then you had the Democratic Party

saying, “We’re on board with this,” which is another way of saying please do this, because this is what our party stands for. So for me, the pieces fit together. Even urging the Democrats to add marriage to the party’s plank wasn’t a stick aimed at Obama, it was another avenue for showing that there was that broad public support. And in this case, in the Democratic Party.

02-0:48:27

Meeker:

Where did that campaign come from?

02-0:48:29

Crawford:

So that campaign was launched as kind of a companion piece to “Obama Say I do.” It didn’t come from the digital team this time. I think it came from a mixture of Evan, Marc, and then our federal director, Joe Deutsch, they came up with that idea. And so I actually handled the digital portion of that, and similarly with “Obama Say I do,” there were conversations with party officials, which I wasn’t a part of because I was busy amping up grassroots support. But the same goal, to get public support for the freedom to marry.

And again, even that like ties back to our road map strategy, particularly around building public support and ending federal marriage discrimination. So, you know, and I know I sound like I’m a scratched record when I keep repeating road map to victory, but everything we did really came back to the road map to victory, and I think that was one of the smartest strategic things that Evan did, to craft that road map and to make it, to compose it in such easily understood language, you know, three simple points that anybody could understand. That really helped, you know, to take the vision and add a layer of, Oh, this is how that actually happens, to it that made people see that it really is possible. Even though we had to do a lot of steps along the way in order to achieve the strategy and make it real, but it provided a kind of north star, so to speak, so that people could see, okay, this is how we’re going to win.

And one of the things that’s interesting about other LGBT issues right now is that we don’t see that kind of road map strategy, you know, around nondiscrimination. I think it may be in process, but, you know, having that kind of road map is a really, really powerful thing when you’re trying to achieve something really big.

02-0:50:36

Meeker:

Well, it’s not surprising to me that you keep coming back to the road map, because in all of my research and talking to people, it’s very clear that one of the core competencies of Freedom to Marry is message discipline. I think that certainly comes from the top, and I’m wondering how was that value, that competency, that skill taught to you or inculcated here in this culture? I mean, how does that become sort of a core part of the culture of this campaign?

02-0:51:12

Crawford:

Yeah, well, I mean, Evan is extraordinarily persuasive, and so, you know, obviously we’ve had lots of internal discussions about messaging, about

strategy, about how we say things, how we frame things. I mean, we had endless conversations about those kinds of things, not because we just like to talk amongst ourselves, but because we recognized the importance of the message and communicating, you know, who Freedom to Marry was and what our strategy was and how that strategy was going to lead to a national win.

And so we worked really hard at making sure that everybody was on board, you know. When you joined the staff at Freedom to Marry, part of the training that you went through was around messaging and research and how we communicate things, how things are said in the media, how they're said online, et cetera. So that when people come into the organization, there's no doubt about how we talk about things. Like we rarely attacked even the opposition. Evan would do it sometimes in debates and so on, but that's a debate kind of format. But generally speaking, we were very affirmational, we were very like positive, we were very, very focused, and we saw, as one of our key goals, focusing the movement. We wanted to make sure that people were keeping their eyes on the prize.

Even as the larger LGBT movement was working on all of these other issues and other people had other thoughts about how we win marriage, we wanted to keep people focused on the prize and the strategy, and that being reaching the Supreme Court and winning by a Supreme Court decision. You know, when Evan talks about the road map, it just made sense, right? So I talked about how we would communicate to our supporters, you know, this is what the road map is, this is your place in terms of helping to fulfill that strategy. It was a very similar thing with Freedom to Marry staff. Evan's like, "This is the road map strategy, this is your part in helping to achieve that strategy, now go and make it happen."

So we would have ongoing conversations about messaging, Thalia would work on newer pieces of messaging research, having informational sessions with staff where she presented the research. We would talk about it, ask questions, figure out what it meant for earned media strategy, figure out what it meant for our digital strategy. And it worked. And it worked in part because we all trusted one another. So we were all very focused on that goal, and so it wasn't so much about, you know, what we individually thought, it was like, okay, what's going to help us achieve that goal. And message discipline was one of those really important things.

02-0:54:09

Meeker:

Can you tell me more about the training and the onboarding and how you like actually specifically learned these kinds of things?

02-0:54:16

Crawford:

Sure. I actually have one of the messaging documents on my desk, a book of like all the kinds of stuff. So, I mean, you'd come in and obviously you'd do

all the paperwork to make sure that you get paid and those kinds of things. Then you would get a messaging overview from Thalia, which lasted a few hours, plus you would get other materials. As we got a little bit later into the organization, my team would share videos and stories with the new staff members to make sure that they see not just the messaging talking points, but about how they played out in real life.

And then there was also, you know, ample opportunity for people to ask questions. Not just doing that orientation week or whatever, but even now, if I was trying to figure out how to explain something in an e-mail or like a piece that I'm writing for the new website that's going to go under Evan's byline, I could pop into his office and we could go back and forth and talk about it to make sure that we were hitting that right point.

So Evan was very clear that his door was always open for those types of conversations, and I think eventually it became kind of secondhand, so that, you know, we didn't need to go to Evan so much to figure out messaging points, and I think he also trusted us to communicate the message in ways that were going to represent the organization well and that were going to help move us forward. Because like particularly with the amount of content that we created for websites and social media and video and all that kind of stuff, we were pumping out a lot of content, you know. So we would really work with that messaging framework, but also tease out insights from the messaging research and use that to create content to target specific demographics.

So you'd come into the organization, you'd be briefed on the messaging, you'd have a chance to ask questions, not just during that period but the entire time that you spent at Freedom to Marry, and Evan's door was always open.

02-0:56:22

Meeker:

Can you tell me about building out your team? I know that you hired some people to work with you in addition to working with Blue State as an external consultant.

02-0:56:33

Crawford:

Yeah, so when I started, I was the only person on the digital team, so we didn't really have a team, we just had a me. We worked with Blue State Digital at that point. Now we have six people on the digital team. The thinking around the first hire was to find someone who could help with blog-related content and start to oversee more stories, more communicating news, et cetera, with a primary focus on the blog. We eventually found Adam Pulaski, in one of the best decisions I ever made. We hired him a month before he graduated college. He joined the team the week President Obama came out in favor of marriage. And Adam grew to overseeing pretty much all the content on the website.

The first person that I hired, who was the second person on the digital team, was Cameron Tolle, who grew from being online organizer to director of digital action. And he was hired to be an online organizer, to figure out how we bring in more people, and more importantly, how do we put them to work in the field in order to, you know, pass legislation or win at the ballot and so on.

Then we started to think more about how do we tell more stories, how do we create more content, how do we create more visual content, because at this time the social web was starting to become more visual, and we wanted to be ahead of the curve rather than behind the curve. So we added graphic designers, we added writers, and then somewhere around 2013, early 2013, we started to split the digital team's work into two discrete pieces, one focused on all of the Freedom to Marry branded stuff, so the websites, video, online fundraising, social media, e-mail program, et cetera. And then the digital action center, which focused on running state digital campaigns for the state marriage campaigns that Freedom to Marry was a part of.

And all of the work of the digital action center was done under the respective names of the state-level coalitions. So even though the staff was paid by Freedom to Marry, housed at Freedom to Marry, you know, when they traveled to the states, all of that was taken care of by Freedom to Marry, all the work that they did was under the guise of, you know, organizations like Utah Unites for Marriage, New Mexico Unites for Marriage, X State Unites for Marriage kind of concept.

02-0:59:31

Meeker:

Were these 501(c)(4) employees, or—

02-0:59:34

Crawford:

It was a mixture of both. So, you know, when I started at Freedom to Marry there was a 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4) as we started to engage in more state-level work, and then we made that more complicated for Scott, our chief operating officer, to handle all those kind of regulations and so on, which he's much better at than I am. But, you know, we were running public education campaigns like Why Marriage Matters Ohio, or Why Marriage Matters Arizona, working on, you know, (c)(4) campaigns to help pass legislation in various states, and also running state-level digital campaigns to help win at the ballot.

02-1:00:20

Meeker:

So, that's how you grow to six people, basically, by now.

02-1:00:28

Crawford:

Yeah, so we built because we needed to add capacity in order to do the work better. So everything was about, okay, we need to do this piece of work, what do we need in order to do that to the best of our ability? Of course I kept asking for more staff, and Evan, you know, understood the importance of it.

As we started to really launch more sophisticated Freedom to Marry branded digital campaigns and as our work in the states, you know, deepened and deepened and deepened and we were doing more work there, that crystallized in the digital action center, we needed staff who could actually do that work.

02-1:01:15

Meeker:

You had mentioned one of your goals was to help the LGBT movement recognize the diversity around race and gender and age and other categories. Were you successful in doing that in your hiring program and what efforts are needed to be done in order to make that a reality?

02-1:01:39

Crawford:

I think we were less successful in terms of hiring on that, at least from a digital point of view, and I think Freedom to Marry more broadly. I think, you know, in terms of the output, the creative output from the digital team, we definitely did a much better job in presenting a richer and more diverse face for same-sex couples. I think in terms of what's needed to bring more diversity to LGBT organizations is, I think there really needs to be a change in leadership thinking. I think that there is more talk than there is walking the walk. So I think the LGBT community has a big challenge, not just in terms of hiring for its organizations, but how it relates specifically to communities of color. Because the expectation among LGBT people is that people of color should support LGBT issues, but LGBT organizations and people are not necessarily there on issues that are important to people of color.

So I think in order for LGBT organizations to diversify, they need to be intentional about it and not just like put people of color in the diversity team. Which is something that I've resisted my entire career. I mean, there needs to be a really intentional effort into making it happen and not something that is done to say, "Oh, we have this chief diversity officer," or "Oh, we care about, you know, the broader LGBT community," when that's not reflected on staff. So I think the LGBT community has challenges in terms of its organizations, and it's going to require a real shift in thinking at the top levels, the C-suites, in order for that to change.

02-1:03:39

Meeker:

Let's talk about the campaigns in some more depth. I mean, we've already talked about "Obama Say I do," "Democrats Say I do," but there are a couple of other campaigns that are still featured prominently on the website, and it's been a few weeks now, but I kind of went through and watched the videos and cried—yeah, it worked. I mean, I'm an easy target. You know, I don't know exactly if there's a specific order to go in, but the campaigns that were pretty prominent, at least I noticed, were the "Freedom to Serve, Freedom to Marry," "Southerners for Freedom to Marry," the Obama and Democrats campaign, and "Love Must Win," which I think was around the Supreme Court. Is there a particular order that those should be discussed in?

02-1:04:28

Crawford:

Well, we can do it chronologically. So “Obama Say I do,” then “Democrats Say I do,” Freedom to Serve, Freedom to Marry, then I think you mentioned southerners, and then Love Must Win.

02-1:04:45

Meeker:

Well, let’s talk about Freedom to Serve, Freedom to Marry, because I think we’ve done the Obama campaign. Can you tell me what the goal here was with this particular campaign?

02-1:04:55

Crawford:

Sure. So Freedom to Serve, Freedom to Marry was a multimedia campaign that was really designed to highlight how harmful DOMA was to same-sex couples. The campaign was launched in partnership with Servicemembers Legal Defense Network in 2012. So in advance, actually, even before we knew the Supreme Court was going to hear a DOMA-related case in 2013.

So the idea was to come up with really amazing stories, primarily driven by video, that highlighted how DOMA harms same-sex couples, and particularly using the families of gay servicemembers as the opportunity or that kind of, wedge point is not exactly the right phrase, but to use that as the opportunity to tell those kinds of stories and to show how DOMA harms same-sex couples. So, you know, for me, and I think one of the things that we’ve done well from a digital perspective, is figure out what are going to be those kinds of stories that are going to really resonate with people.

Basically we’re told, you know, okay, here’s the general kind of messaging that we want. I would go through, or a member of my team would go through, and we’d come up with like, okay, this insight here works really well, how can we create content around this or create a campaign around this? And that’s how I came up with the idea for Freedom to Serve, Freedom to Marry. Really, you know, because at the same time we had been doing an increasing amount of content around binational couples, which again is another kind of niche that really shows how harmful DOMA was, because you think of the idea of having a couple or a family ripped apart because of DOMA, right? People would get that, they could understand it, it would make them cry and get really emotional, which is the kind of reaction that we wanted.

And when you think about servicemembers, no matter what their sexual orientation, they signed up to protect our country. And so, you know, and it doesn’t matter if you’re gay or you’re straight, when you’re sent overseas to fight in a war on behalf of our country, you’re putting your life at risk to protect us. And so, plus, servicemembers, the military plays an outsize role in the American imagination, and so I knew that that would be a fertile area for storytelling. And we partnered with Servicemembers’ Legal Defense Network in order to find those stories.

So we launched the campaign with the motion graphics piece that we did with Blue State Digital. And it's interesting, because we launched it in 2012, shortly after Facebook had unveiled Timeline, which is the current way we experience Facebook, but it was new then. So we created this story of a female servicemember who meets a woman and we watch them fall in love and marry and, you know, the servicemember deployed, in a Facebook time-like kind of video. It was great. It made people cry, which is awesome, and we used that to launch the campaign.

And so for the campaign, we did a mix of, you know, motion graphics videos, some more conceptual pieces, some mini documentaries, and I think over the course of about a twelve-month or so period, we released somewhere around fifteen or so videos.

02-1:08:39

Meeker:

Can you tell me about developing a partnership with SLDN?

02-1:08:43

Crawford:

Sure. So, you know, as soon as we figured out that we really wanted to amplify the military angle, we knew that we needed to work with a partner that had credibility in the military space. SLDN had been one of the organizations working to repeal Don't Ask, Don't Tell, and I should also say that, you know, we launched the campaign after Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed, so there really were openly gay servicemembers serving who were married, because we had had marriage in a handful of states by then. So Evan made the proposal to their then executive director. He was like, "Great, let's do it." I worked with their communications director on the actual planning out of the campaign, choosing which couples would be featured, which couples and families would be featured in the mini documentaries, the release schedules for the different videos, the landing page that we created. And on the landing page, you know, quite a bit of the information, the technical information about gay servicemembers and DOMA, came from SLDN.

So it was a real partnership in that they had a lot of the expertise around gay servicemembers and around how DOMA impacted military families, we had the expertise around digital communications, messaging, and content creation, and it worked really, really well for both of us. We won three, four awards for the video content that we created as part of that campaign.

The idea was not just to create a video that would solely live online and get us online buzz. We also came up with stories or angles that would help us get earned media as well. So, you know, in the same way that we partnered with SLDN, the digital team partnered with the communications team at Freedom to Marry in order to really aggressively push out the video and the related stories. And then because we were working with real couples, real families, we were also able to pitch those folks as well as additional contacts that SLDN had, so we were really able to bring servicemembers and how they

were negatively affected by DOMA to the spotlight, and that was really helpful.

And one of the interesting things is that when President Obama announced that he was in support of the freedom to marry, one of the reasons he used in his explanation was serving gay servicemembers.

02-1:11:18

Meeker:

Yeah, that's interesting. I watched a lot of these videos, the freedom to serve and the southerners freedom to marry, and you're working with a lot of individuals, and, you know, messaging is very important, and as an organization, as a campaign, you have to be careful about not letting things that may come out about the individuals distract from the overall messaging. I can't remember who I was conducting a pre-interview with but early on, I think, there was an effort in New York to do a legal challenge, but, the people who were coming forward were both ex-cons or something like this.

Was there like ever a kind of a list of qualities you're looking for, and these are the qualities you don't want in the spokespeople? What was that, and how was that developed?

02-1:12:40

Crawford:

Yeah, so, should I stick with Freedom to Service, Freedom to Marry?

02-1:12:44

Meeker:

Yeah, use that as an example. Whatever is best. We can move on to another one if you want to.

02-1:12:52

Crawford:

Okay, great, that makes it a little bit easier. So, you know, one example of how we cast a video or a story that we really wanted to amplify big time was, video that we created as part of the Southerners for the Freedom to Marry campaign. I came up with this idea that we should do—and this also goes back to an earlier question you asked about whether or not there were—you didn't frame it quite this way, but whether or not there were somewhat intense conversations where we needed to persuade Evan to see our vision on things.

You know, I came up with the idea that we should be doing a series of videos focused on couples and families in southern states with an eye towards building support among people of faith, African Americans, and then I think the third group I wanted to do was around more conservative type people. So I go to Evan, I say, "This is what I want to do, this is how much it's going to cost," but, you know, and we talked it through. Eventually we didn't do all three of those videos, but we did decide to focus on the one on an African American family.

So once I got approval for that, I started to do a casting process. And we worked the casting process in a couple of ways. One, we worked all of

Freedom to Marry's contacts with state groups and with individuals in like six or seven states across the South. One of the people on the video team at Blue State Digital had traveled across the South to do work on an unrelated series of short films focused on southerners, so she worked the contacts that she had from that campaign. We also reached out to LGBT community centers, LGBT affirming churches, et cetera, across, you know, six or seven states.

We knew that we were looking for—that we wanted to create a piece of content that would be focused around African Americans, and in particular how we build support among African American women. And so in my head, as we were undergoing the casting process, I wanted someone who my grandmother could look at and say, "Oh, that's my grandbaby." That kind of thing. So we wanted to find someone that would elicit that kind of emotional connection, that kind of emotional response.

We had a preference for a couple with kids, at least one kid, preferably a pet as well. We were looking for people who were engaged in more of the helping kind of professions, so teacher, social worker, people who were actively engaged in their communities. We were looking for people who were also people of faith, because faith is important in the South, it's extra important among African American people in the South. So we looked at dozens of families, and we talked to them, got a better sense of what their stories were, had them send in photos, et cetera, because we wanted to get an idea of how they would look on camera.

We narrowed that down to a couple of different families, had additional phone conversations with them, talked to some of them via Skype so we could see how they would look on moving images. We ended up narrowing it down—ended up choosing an African American lesbian couple in Birmingham, Alabama, who had a super adorable seven-year-old daughter, and the daughter was one of the selling points. She was extremely articulate and was really excited for the thought of her moms getting married.

So we were really thinking about what is it—what kind of story is going to be needed in order to move African American women in Southern states, and that was our focus. So in terms of other video content that we created, it's that same kind of process. What's our target audience, what's it going to take in order to reach that target audience and move them to where we wanted them to be. So everything as we were thinking about video content, it wasn't just like, "Oh, here's this great couple, we should do something around that." It was more like, "Okay, who do we want to reach and what's going to be the best kind of story, couple, concept in order to reach those people."

02-1:17:20
Meeker:

How were those linked, then? So you have the demographic group that you want to reach, how do you understand what is going to resonate with them?

02-1:17:32

Crawford:

Part of it is guts. I mean, I'm African American and from the South, so in that context I had a really strong feeling of what would appeal to people like my mom and my grandma. In other cases, it was less about a demographic and more about a theme that we wanted to communicate. So like with Freedom to Serve, Freedom to Marry, it wasn't so much about a demographic as this overarching kind of narrative that we want to communicate around Don't Ask, Don't Tell has been repealed, servicemembers are able to serve openly, but the military is forced to treat them differently because of DOMA. Here are some of the stories of people that are negatively affected.

So it kind of depended. It wasn't for every video that we were aiming towards a target demographic. Sometimes it was with an eye towards continuing or advancing a certain narrative, and then we'd figure out what that kind of touchpoint was.

02-1:18:36

Meeker:

I think I know the video you're talking about, as far as the two women from the South, one of the ones that made me cry. You went back to them, didn't you, after marriage was won and did another video with them?

02-1:18:48

Crawford:

No. So here's what we did. So we shot that initial video with them, released it in, I believe, September, early October 2014. A few weeks after that, there was a court ruling overturning the marriage ban in Alabama. The state officials tried to defend the marriage ban. We took the two-and-a-half-minute video that we had created and released a couple of weeks before and we cut it down to a thirty-second video—I mean a thirty-second TV ad, which we immediately put up on the air across the state, again showing that these are the kinds of families that are harmed by marriage bans.

And in that case, when we were putting the TV ad on air, we weren't just targeting African Americans, we were really saying, "Okay, this is the kind of people that you're discriminating against when you defend these kinds of bans." And so that was more of a rapid response thing. And in addition to the video and the TV ad that we did with the couple, they also worked with us on e-mails to our list, et cetera, continuing to tell their story, and as part of that telling their story, showing the value of the work of Freedom to Marry, and also, even in those e-mails, they wrote about the road map to victory, I guess in part because I wrote the e-mail language for them.

So again, we used that kind of video content, the couple in a video and then later a TV ad, we used them in our e-mail communications, we used them in our social media outreach, so we were simultaneously telling this really great, warm, emotional story that makes people cry and that really helps them to see why marriage is so important. But that same couple and family is explaining, in their own words, why marriage is so important to them, why the work of Freedom to Marry is so important. In a couple of cases, we used that same

family for donation-related e-mails, because people had started to know them a little bit and they had a really great story, and they could say, “This is how the work of Freedom to Marry helped us in our state.”

02-1:21:04

Meeker:

I’m thinking about the appeal to specific demographic groups, like you were talking about, that can be community influencers or provide a swing in a community. Were there conversations about if like a specific individual would, while it might appeal to a specific demographic group, might alienate a broader demographic group, I mean kind of trying to balance those perhaps countervailing tendencies.

02-1:21:35

Crawford:

Yeah, yeah. I mean, there were discussions around like, you know, obviously we had a program Young Conservatives for the Freedom to Marry, and some of the people that would appeal to conservatives are not likely to appeal to, you know, more liberal people. And so there were conversations around how we balance that. And I think, you know, in those cases it was really important for us to frame the issue of marriage as a nonpartisan one. I mean, because, you know, at that time, particularly as we started to ramp up the Young Conservatives for the Freedom to Marry kind of work, we were framing Freedom to Marry as the organization that was uniting the country around marriage.

I think when we were sending out, pushing out that kind of content, we were explaining to people why we needed to do that in order to achieve that big win. Because we had already been drilling it into people’s heads about the road map to victory and the need for increasing public support. An area where we could increase public support was among conservatives, particularly as we were trying to show the Supreme Court that all of America was ready for the freedom to marry, and we explained it to people in that way.

02-1:23:01

Meeker:

Is there anything else you want to say about the Freedom to Serve? Is there anything that I’m not asking about that you think is a significant component?

02-1:23:21

Crawford:

I’ll just sum it up really quickly. So with Freedom to Serve, Freedom to Marry, we released about fifteen videos over, you know, maybe a fifteen-, sixteen-month period. It helped a lot in terms of generating earned media, it helped a lot in terms of building online buzz and defining DOMA as something that was bad and that was negative and that needed to go. It provided, you know, some of the mini documentaries about couples, provided content that our federal director could show in lobbying meetings with members of Congress, which is a great added benefit. And it also helped to build our e-mail list.

All the kinds of digital campaigns that we were doing, we had multiple goals and multiple reasons for doing them, which included, you know, building a

broader base of support for the organization. And so I think that Freedom to Serve, Freedom to Marry was another defining digital campaign for us that worked really well and that helped to, you know, lead into the Supreme Court oral arguments and subsequent ruling gutting DOMA, because we had helped to ratchet up the issue of military servicemembers and how DOMA hurt them.

02-1:24:43

Meeker: Did the military itself help you out?

02-1:24:49

Crawford: The military did not help us out. There were people that were active duty military who appeared in the videos, but the military itself didn't help us.

02-1:25:01

Meeker: Were any of those people military brass?

02-1:25:04

Crawford: So we did one with an admiral, but I don't remember if he was active duty at that point.

02-1:25:13

Meeker: Gay or straight?

02-1:25:14

Crawford: He was straight. So we did a video that was specifically focused around allies, so people who either were in the military or were veterans. We did a video around them, so included like former congressman Patrick Murphy, you know, and we did a video specifically around them talking about how the value that their gay colleagues in the military had.

02-1:25:49

Meeker: I want to ask more about the southerners campaign. What was the goal with this particular campaign? I mean, you know, I imagine when it was launched at that point in time, there wasn't much expectation that really any of the states would've come up with a legislative solution or a legislative win. So what was the goal of the southerners campaign?

02-1:26:14

Crawford: Sure. So we launched Southerners for the Freedom to Marry, I believe, in February 2014. We had been working with the Campaign for Southern Equality for a couple of years by that point, you know, telling stories of couples and families living in the South, helping to amplify the Campaign for Southern Equality's video content, et cetera. And at the time that we launched Southerners for the Freedom to Marry, it was when we were, you know, winning on both coasts, we'd started to win in the middle of the country, we knew that that South was an area where we needed to build public support. So a big focus of the campaign was figuring out how we grow public support in southern states, and then how we put that public support on display. Because a lot of people wouldn't believe that there are actually people in the South who support, you know, same-sex couples being able to marry.

So it was a campaign that had both a digital component and then an offline component, I oversaw the digital component and my former colleague Jake Losch oversaw the offline component.

021:27:27

Meeker:

So you had told the story about the African American female couple, and it's very clear that you had kind of a demographic idea in mind and how they would be effective. But more broadly, did you have kind of a guiding principle on what a southern story would be?

02-1:27:48

Crawford:

There were different southern stories, right? So Southerners for the Freedom to Marry launched with the goal of building support in the South. We also dovetailed that campaign with other campaigns that we were running. So campaigns like Mayors for the Freedom to Marry, for example, Young Conservatives for the Freedom to Marry.

And so when we were thinking about the stories that we were telling in the South, there were stories like the story that we told of the African American lesbian couple in Birmingham, but there were also the stories of young people, young conservatives in southern states who publicly supported marriage. There were, you know, amplifying the number of mayors in southern cities that supported marriage. When we launched Southerners for the Freedom to Marry, we did it with a press conference in Atlanta featuring the mayor of Atlanta and couples and so on. But at the same time, we also released a video from Congressman John Lewis, civil rights legend and proud southerner.

So there were a number of different kinds of stories that we were telling in the South, because there is no one southern story, right? There are all sorts of people. And with Southerners for the Freedom to Marry, we wanted to amplify that support and grow that support.

02-1:29:06

Meeker:

To be a southerner, do you have to have been born there? I mean, is that part of the requirement? I guess that's kind of what I'm getting at. Like what makes a southerner?

02-1:29:16

Crawford:

So most of the people that we featured or elevated, they were people that were born there, they were born in southern states.

02-1:29:22

Meeker:

And that was on purpose.

02-1:29:25

Crawford:

I think in some ways it was on purpose, but in some ways those were where the best stories came from, right? Because again, kind of like, you know, servicemembers occupy a unique position in the American imagination, the South does as well. And so, you know, being able to tell those stories of

southerners, who haven't necessarily always had the most progressive views on civil rights issues, to be able to tell those stories of those people who were supporting the freedom to marry was great and was powerful. Because again, it was with the whole overarching theme, you know, thinking about the Supreme Court and wanting to show the Supreme Court that America is ready for the freedom to marry.

And by that point, we had majority support across the entire country. It was a little bit more—well, it was less in the South, and we really needed to grow that and to show that there was enough support in the South so that if the court were to rule in favor of marriage, there wouldn't be some kind of uproar among southern states.

02-1:30:32

Meeker:

Did earned media prove to be more difficult in the South?

02-1:30:35

Crawford:

Not necessarily, right? Because, you know, getting, for example, a former campaign operative for President Bush to come out for marriage, and work with him on op-eds and so on, getting dozens of mayors across southern states generated great stories—like the video we did of the African American lesbian couple from Birmingham got great earned media.

Part of what I think worked really well in that context was one, we had a really strong communications team who were just so good. But also we were intentionally choosing really great stories. And when you think about the role that storytelling plays in any kind of modern movement, well I don't think a lot of movements are doing it really well, and our opposition wasn't doing it at all. I mean, they were trying to come up with people that were hurt, but, I mean, you can't really see it. And so I think we were very smart about how we chose those stories and those messengers, and we were really looking for people with powerful backgrounds, powerful points of views that would be appealing to people in southern states.

02-1:31:55

Meeker:

What made a good story then?

02-1:31:57

Crawford:

So, some kinds of hardship. So whether it was a couple that had been together for four decades and, you know, were approaching their final years, and they were essentially running out of time to marry. There was, you know, a story that we did, a TV ad around, I believe it was in Tennessee, a military surgeon, you know, who wanted to marry his partner, who was also a conservative, you know, a conservative military surgeon who was like, "I put my life on the line for our country and I want to marry my partner. Why won't you let me?" Or, you know, Congressman Lewis, a civil rights legend who was nearly beaten to death fighting for civil rights, talking about why he was proud to be a Southerner for the Freedom to Marry, that's the exact quote from the video.

So those kinds of stories, I mean, we were really aiming for things that would elicit an emotional response. And when you see, you know, those kinds of great stories, I mean, people get them and they understand. And it's harder than it looks to find those kinds of stories, but, you know, we worked really, really hard at, you know, finding those stories and—so a lot of the focus around couples stories and so on came from the digital team. And so we were talking to, you know, hundreds of people who've told hundreds of stories, and we tested those out on social media, you know, seeing which ones people responded really strongly to, where they were sharing the posts and really great comments, and at times we'd hand those folks off to the communications team so they could elevate those stories, or we'd use some of those folks in a video, or we'd do other kinds of work with them. So we were always constantly on the lookout for those really great, strong, emotional kind of stories that really rang true, right?

I mean, like even in the photos that we posted on our website and on social media, we didn't use stock imagery, we used images of real people, because we wanted that kind of authenticity. And when you get that kind of, you know, authenticity and that kind of emotion, you have the makings of a really great story. And then it becomes about how to tell that story in a really great way that's going to travel well online, that's going to do potentially well in earned media, and that's really going to hit people in the heart.

02-1:34:34
Meeker:

As somebody who does some interviewing, I'm curious about actually the process of speaking with these people and coming up with these stories, in essence allowing them to communicate a compelling story or narrative. It's not always the easiest thing to do.

02-1:34:54
Crawford:

No, no, it's not. So—

02-1:34:57
Meeker:

Who was interviewing these people and, you know, what kind of skills were they, and questions were they bringing into the setting?

02-1:35:06
Crawford:

Yeah. So the way it would work, so the primary interviewers and writers were Adam Pulaski and then Lily Hoyt Millis a little bit later. And so Adam was great. We hired him a month before he graduated college, his major is in journalism. So he brought that kind of journalist kind of perspective to the work, but he hadn't worked for newspapers, so he wasn't quite jaded and cynical in that way. And the way things would work is, we would talk about—have editorial discussions around what stories we needed to be telling, how we needed to be telling them, what experiments we could do to try to tell those stories more effectively to get them to travel better online, to get them to better communicate Freedom to Marry's message, and so, you know, what

demographics we were aiming for, how do we provide that kind of racial, age, gender, et cetera, diversity that we were aiming for.

Adam and/or Lily would interview the couple—so the way we found a lot of the couples were, initially in the early years of my time at Freedom to Marry, we would send out communications to our supporters saying, We're looking to tell stories. You know, we'd send e-mails to our e-mail list, we'd post on social media, build a landing page, people would come, they'd fill out all the information that we were asking for, we'd leave a freeform spot where they could tell their story in their own kinds of words, and we'd ask them to upload pictures. And we'd also ask if they were comfortable talking to the media.

And so, you know, what was on that particular story form was influenced by what kind of stories we were looking to tell. So as it got closer to, for example, the launch of Southerners for the Freedom to Marry, we were really focused on finding stories from southern states. So we were really looking for things like whether or not people were people of faith, we were looking for, you know, families with kids. At a certain point we were looking for people who either were first responders or police officers, EMT, et cetera, or who knew those kind of people, and we'd go specifically out asking for those kinds of stories.

After a little while, people would see the response to stories we were getting on social media particularly, and they were like, "Wow, this is great. I want to be a part of that." And people started to share their stories with us. And so, you know, we'd send an e-mail out, we'd get 1,000 responses. We'd go through the responses and the things people said, both the demographic information as well as what they told us about their personal stories, figure out who Adam and Lily should interview, and then Adam and Lily would interview those people.

I think quite a few of those stories didn't end up as written profiles or videos, but we included them in a different kind of round-up. Because we were looking for, you know, the kind of really hardcore emotional kind of stories, and, you know, you'd talk to people for a while and you're like, Oh, this story is not as interesting as it may have sounded at the beginning. But the stories that were really interesting, Adam or Lily would then craft a written story around and ask the family for photos, so that we had a number of photos to choose and they would coach them around the kind of photos we were looking for. Photos with pets, photos with kids, photos that showed the extended family, not just the couple, but the couple in their community with their, you know, with Grandma and all the other members of the family. And we'd post those online.

Eventually we brought a lot of those together in what we called our story center, that highlighted the different stories in different categories. And then we posted those stories to social media. And the ones, particularly the ones we

had multiple photos, we could post that story multiple times on social media. The ones that did really well, we could then follow up with, do additional pieces on. If it was kind of a demographic or kind of story that the communications team was looking to elevate, we could connect the two of them, so that they could then go on and tell that story from a broader perspective.

If it was something that we wanted to do an e-mail around or something, then we'd ask the couple about that. In a couple of cases, we ended up doing video around those kinds of couples. So it was really a situation where we were like, "Okay, we're going to go out and look for these stories and we're going to look to tell amazing stories, we're going to cast a wide net initially," and as our needs changed, meaning as we started to grow support among certain demographics or in certain regions of the country, we needed to tell different kinds of stories, and then we would go out specifically looking for those kinds of stories. But along the way, our supporters got super excited about sharing their stories, and they just started sending us tons of stories and photos, et cetera.

02-1:40:29

Meeker:

A thousand initial forms to go through is quite a bit. How did you manage that?

02-1:40:33

Crawford:

Well, I mean, because we were also asking demographic information. So if we were looking for, you know, stories that specifically—that we could tell around people of color and both parties in the couple were white, it was pretty easy to say, "Okay, well, not this time." Or if we were looking to highlight, you know, couples with kids and, you know, people didn't have kids, or if we were looking for, you know, people who were veterans or, you know, that kind of thing, so there were all these kinds of things that we were looking for, we cast a wider net than we actually probably needed to in order to get as many stories as we could, just in case there was something that just popped up.

And then we would split the responses so that we'd go through them and read all of what they said. We'd also look at their photos. Because again, you know, the web is highly visual, so we wanted to make sure, and this sounds somewhat shallow, but we wanted to make sure that, you know, they had photos and a kind of look that would convey strong emotion, love, et cetera, and we'd make choices that way.

02-1:41:40

Meeker:

And again, those responses were in some ways intuitive, right?

02-1:41:45

Crawford:

Yeah. So in some ways they were intuitive, in some ways they were dictated about the kinds of stories that we needed to tell. So if the communications team came to us and said, "Okay, who do you have that's a conservative veteran in Alabama," and we didn't have anybody in our story bank, we

would have to go and find those kinds of stories. So part of it was like gut, and part of it was like dictated by the needs of the stories that the organization needed to tell, and part of it was also by what we were seeing played well on social media.

So if there were certain kinds of stories that were going viral on social media, we wanted to tell more of those stories, in part because that would keep our supporters engaged in sharing that kind of content, which would help us to scale, which would help us to grow public support.

02-1:42:37

Meeker:

Could you estimate roughly how many stories you acquired or captured? I mean, even just individuals who filled out, you know, an initial form.

02-1:42:48

Crawford:

Yeah, that I don't know. I know that we told hundreds of stories on the website, meaning that Adam or Lily interviewed the couple and then wrote a profile of them. How many we got, even where people just, yeah, filling out the form, that I don't know. But it's thousands. Probably likely tens of thousands. Tens of thousands, yeah.

02-1:43:08

Meeker:

Wow, that's amazing.

02-1:43:12

Crawford:

Because one of the things about Freedom to Marry, one big difference between the old Freedom to Marry and the current Freedom to Marry was a big shift around messaging, and also a big move into storytelling. A lot of that storytelling happened online, so we needed to find lots of stories. So in a sense we were operating like a media company. We needed to find, you know, what was going to be that hit story that would help us, you know, advance the overall narrative of the organization or reach a certain demographic or help to generate the kind of earned media that we were looking for. So we really did need to find and tell a lot of stories.

02-1:43:56

Meeker:

Internally, what was the engagement between your program and, say, you know, Thalia's program? Because it's interesting, I mean, you're in some ways kind of crowdsourcing, you know, opinions about what's effective and maybe what's less effective. And I know Thalia's taking a much more scientific approach to it, whereby they're doing focus groups and, you know, or political research approach to things. What was the interaction between the two methods?

02-1:44:30

Crawford:

So, our teams worked together in terms of the general messaging for the organization, so, you know, Thalia would say we need to be talking about love and commitment and marriage. We're like, okay, great, we can show love, commitment, marriage. So there was less of us saying, "Okay, we see this

working our really well online, you should try this in the focus groups that you're doing." I do think that there was, you know, an earlier part where shortly after there was a shift to talking about love and commitment happened, that was primarily what the organization was talking about, but online—and less about the protections that are associated with marriage. But online, we were pushing stories that were about love and commitment but that had a layer of protection, so like the stories that we were pushing out around like binational couples or servicemembers affected by DOMA and that kind of thing. So we were figuring out ways of telling those kinds of stories of love and commitment and how the denial of those protections hurt those couples and families.

And I think that we maybe moved a little bit faster than the rest of the organization in terms of pushing that kind of message, but that wasn't necessarily an intentional thing, it was more guided by, "Oh, these are working really well, we should be telling more of this," plus a gut-level instinct, "Okay, this is going to play really, really well." And of course we were trying to increase our numbers on social media and our e-mail list and all that kind of thing.

02-1:46:19
Meeker:

The social media landscape changes immensely during this period time, expanding. You start out with Facebook and then you've got Twitter and now it's like Instagram, and I'm forgetting many of them, I'm sure. But how did you learn the differences between the various social media outlets? I mean, the differences in the sense, what are the best ways to engage on Facebook versus Twitter, for instance.

02-1:46:59
Crawford:

So the way we learned about what works well on what platform was by trial and error. So Facebook is a much more visual platform that's, you know, much more about people, it's much more about people showing, presenting their best selves, so presenting themselves as smart, as funny, as politically engaged, as fun. Whereas something like Twitter is really about the sharing of news and one-off snarky kind of comments, particularly around like awards shows and so on. And so when we thought about like Facebook, we really emphasized visuals and personal stories, and when we think about Twitter, we emphasized much more news, so news stories that are coming out about Freedom to Marry, about any of the states, about the Supreme Court, you know, Evan will make a statement in response to something, we'll tweet that out. There was a court ruling about something, we tweet out excerpts from the court ruling.

So we used Twitter much more as a way of advancing Freedom to Marry's organizational narrative and our perspective on news and what was happening. We used Facebook in a much more storytelling kind of way, in that, you know, it's where we got the most views on our videos, it's where, you know, photos

and graphics and infographics, et cetera, played the best. A little bit later we started to use Tumblr, we used that particularly during the—around the 2013 Supreme Court case. We use it as a home base for social content, where we created lots of content, shared lots of stories, photos, et cetera, and then our supporters could easily share from Tumblr to other social platforms.

When we started to use Instagram, it was more focused on adorable, great photos of adorable couples, because it is a visual platform, and so it's much warmer. So we looked at what was working well for us on each platform, then crafted content for each of those platforms that would help us to reach a specific goal, whether it was amplifying the stories that showed why marriage matters with Facebook, or offering Freedom to Marry's perspective on the news via Twitter.

02-1:49:35

Meeker:

Was there a certain threshold that a platform crossed that you decided yes, it's time to engage with this? I mean, how did you decide what was worth your time?

02-1:49:47

Crawford:

Well, it was both in terms of reach, so number of people that were using it, but also if we could figure out a way of connecting it back to the road map. So like Instagram, you know, still has the issue where you can't really link out to an external website, so in a lot of ways you're really just talking to your base. And one of our key goals was to build public support, and Facebook and Twitter just happen to be better platforms for that, which is why we jumped on Instagram later, and primarily around the Love Must Win campaign. So we would look at reach, but also look at what we could actually do with the platform that would tie back to the road map.

02-1:50:30

Meeker:

Well, let's talk about that Love Must Win campaign. What was the basis of this campaign and its goal?

02-1:50:38

Crawford:

Sure, so we came up with Love Must Win in advance of Supreme Court oral arguments on the marriage cases. We knew we wanted to figure out a way of communicating the excitement and the urgency around the issue, and we knew that we'd have a much better chance of doing that if we engaged our supporters and didn't just count on Freedom to Marry to do that.

So we came up with #LoveMustWin as a user-generated social media campaign where we invited our supporters to craft content showing why love must win, and then post it to their platform of choice. So Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Vine, et cetera. And we seeded the campaign with pieces from some influencers, so like Jeffrey Marsh, who's like a big deal on Vine. We also seeded it with content from some of our Freedom to Marry colleagues, so like Marc, one of our colleagues, baked cupcakes that said

“love must win” and we started to post that to social as a way of demonstrating to people what were the possibilities around it, and then inviting them to create their own stuff.

Now, as part of that, we were also reaching out to, you know, celebrities and so on and so forth, but we were having a difficult time with that. And so we would get, you know, because they just, they weren’t getting back to us or, you know, we couldn’t get their attention. And so we would take, you know, even the smaller ones that we got, like Jeffrey Marsh, who did a great Vine piece for us, and then leveraged that in order to get other social influencers to create pieces for us. And after a while it started to build on itself. So we were reaching out to like people in Hollywood, et cetera, but then we were like, “Oh, wait, we just got this Broadway show to agree to do some content around it, so let’s go hard on Broadway and leverage this Broadway show to get other Broadway shows to create content.”

So we ended up with shows like Gloria Estefan’s “On Your Feet,” “Kinky Boots,” “Fun Home,” et cetera, all doing content, and in part because we would leverage one Broadway show in order to get other pieces. We’d do the same thing around elected officials, where initially we were getting people like mayors and so on, and, you know, when people submitted content to us, we would take the best of that content, feature it on Freedom to Marry’s website on a special Love Must Win page that we created, we would share it on our social media platforms. So people would be getting social media love, and they would see, you know, people were excited about it, so other people would submit content and so on.

And I worked with elected officials, too, where, you know, we ended up having like members of the congressional Hispanic caucus create content, secretary—

02-1:53:30
Meeker:

What did they create?

02-1:53:32
Crawford:

So they took photos of themselves with signs saying some aspect of Love Must Win, sometimes it’s in English, sometimes it’s in Spanish. Senator Elizabeth Warren took a photo holding a sign that says “America is ready for the freedom to marry.” And so we could then leverage those kinds of influencers, you know, Hillary Clinton, et cetera, to get earned media, which got greater awareness for the campaign. We ended up making the hashtag Love Must Win become a national trending topic on Twitter and on Facebook. We got about a dozen like major earned media hits from it, which was great because, I mean, our communications team was focused elsewhere, so they didn’t have capacity to really help us push this campaign. So that was really cool.

Ben and Jerry's participated, Chobani yogurt, so we had brands, elected officials, Broadway performers, regular people, and I think we ended up having nearly 40,000 uses of the hashtag in the days surrounding Supreme Court oral arguments.

02-1:54:41

Meeker:

The earned media. What were those earned media stories about?

02-1:54:56

Crawford:

So, it's really great when Hillary Clinton uses your hashtag. So a lot of the earned media stories were about elected officials like Senator Clinton and Elizabeth Warren, or brands like Ben and Jerry's taking up the cause for marriage and, you know, using Love Must Win and about Love Must Win becoming a trending topic. And it's great, because, you know, they mentioned Freedom to Marry in the same breath, so we looked really great and we were in the thick of it, because, you know, one of the other goals was to help center Freedom to Marry as part of that national conversation that was happening as oral arguments were happening, because, you know, we weren't litigating at the Supreme Court, we were doing more other stuff around it. And so at the same time that the earned media team was pushing out Evan and Mark and so on, my team was pushing out digital content, and we got earned media both from Evan and Mark, we got earned media from our social efforts as well.

02-1:56:02

Meeker:

So this was in advance of *Obergefell*, not the *Windsor* and *Perry* cases in 2013.

02-1:56:07

Crawford:

Yeah.

02-1:56:06

Meeker:

Okay. I'm curious, this campaign wouldn't necessarily have any influence on the justices, or was there an idea that maybe it would contribute to the overall zeitgeist that the justices were going to experience in some fashion during the time that they were thinking about it.

02-1:56:28

Crawford:

Well, at the time, so Freedom to Marry's larger organizational narrative for, you know, months before oral arguments we that America is ready for the freedom to marry. And, you know, we were constant drumbeat of that. And so Love Must Win was just another kind of iteration of that. And so the idea being that we create this online and earned media firestorm and add to that zeitgeist, I mean, because it's not like the Supreme Court justices live in hermetically sealed bubbles, right? They see newspapers, they see TV shows, they're talking to friends, they're hearing about what's happening, and all of that kind of viral chatter, viral communication, helps contribute to the kind of climate that we were already trying to create to get the Supreme Court to do the right thing.

02-1:57:26

Meeker:

Around this and just use of Twitter in general: I think the equation I read somewhere was provide the framework and then let go. Use of hashtags means that, you know, you, the organizer, loses control of it, and I think I noticed on your website, you know, there's like an automatic feed or something like that of the last person who used it, and it's associated with that person. And I remember coming across one that had, the handle was "Ecstasy Made Me Gay." I mean, was there much conversation about, okay, for an organization or a campaign that's so highly disciplined, you're going to have to let some of that go when it comes to Twitter. Were there any conversations around this and how to deal with it?

02-1:58:31

Crawford:

Yes. So as you pointed out, we are very focused on messaging, and so it did take a number of conversations to get Evan to the point where he would—he agreed to allow us to do this. But I think, you know, a couple of things had happened. You know, by that point, Evan was trusting us to not mess up and to do things thoughtfully. Two, he had begun to understand Twitter better and how Twitter works, and he's actually pretty good at it now. And so we did have those kinds of conversations, but we also knew about the content that we were going to be amplifying as an organization, which is more the stuff that would be aligned with Freedom to Marry, you know, in the public's mind.

I think people generally understand that anybody can use a hashtag, but the content that we were specifically amplifying as Freedom to Marry was stuff that was on message, and so that's the stuff that got the widest reach. So, you know, yeah, we created the framework and we let go. It was a little nerve-racking, but, you know, it worked out really well for us.

02-1:59:43

Meeker:

Were there any examples of that kind of getting out of hand and you had to, you know, ban some people or anything along those lines?

02-1:59:51

Crawford:

No. I mean, we didn't ban anybody, and particularly on the day of oral arguments, I mean, uses of the hashtag were coming in so quickly. Like at its highest point there was a use of the hashtag every four seconds. So there's no way that we could see everything and ban, because we generally didn't ban people on our social media platforms. So we weren't even thinking about that, we were more thinking about what are the pieces that we can—that are really great and really powerful that we could elevate. What are the pieces that were coming from our communications team that we could amplify. And at the same time, as we were running the Love Must Win campaign, we were also running a live blog on our site about what was happening at the Supreme Court.

So we had a lot going on, even with the digital team of our size, you know, plus, because part of our team was also focused on doing, you know, similar

kind of work for the state-level campaigns, you know, we were a little too busy to focus on banning people, although we didn't ban people generally anyway.

02-2:00:57

Meeker: Only in extreme circumstances.

02-2:01:00

Crawford: Yeah, yeah.

02-2:01:03

Meeker: You know, in our pre-interview, you had told me about a campaign that was run for the Latino community, Familia y Familia, and this was a campaign developed internally, but it was done in a coalition with many different Latino organizations. Can you tell me a little bit about this campaign, and I don't know, the degree to which you were involved in it?

02-2:01:33

Crawford: Sure. So just to say Thalia is going to be a much better source. So it was a campaign focused on building support and showcasing support for marriage among the Latino community. It was run by our director of Latino programming, had its own website, its own Facebook, its own Twitter. A lot of it focused around amplifying personal stories, you know, in a Freedom to Marry kind of way, though the campaign was a partnership between Freedom to Marry and twenty-one Latino civil rights organizations.

And they did a lot of great stuff, including TV advertisements on Univision, et cetera, all with the goal of increasing support and acceptance of LGBT people and particularly of the freedom to marry among the Latino community.

02-2:02:23

Meeker: Was there like a Spanish-language new media online program?

02-2:02:31

Crawford: They did some stuff that was in Spanish. So one of the interesting things about the Familia program, even its digital stuff, is that my team didn't work on it, which is why I know less about it.

02-2:02:48

Meeker: Well, one of the reasons I ask is that you had mentioned in our pre-interview that you advocated for doing something similar for like a broad African American program, and that wasn't pursued for one reason or another. Can you tell me about what your idea was for doing this?

02-2:03:06

Crawford: Sure. The idea was to create a website, web content, focused around building support among African Americans for LGBT people. So it would've been a little bit broader—it would've been broader than marriage, and with the goal of, you know, a lot of storytelling in the same way that Freedom to Marry did, but it would be a branded kind of program that was focused on building

support among LGBT people—well, building support for LGBT people and LGBT issues among African Americans, and marriage would've been included as part of that work.

02-2:03:43

Meeker: Oh, but it wasn't specific to marriage.

02-2:03:44

Crawford: Yeah, yeah.

02-2:03:44

Meeker: Is that why it wasn't approved, or?

02-2:03:47

Crawford: I'm not quite sure why it wasn't approved. I can pitch ideas, I don't often get to be the deciding factor.

02-2:03:56

Meeker: Was it very often that you were pitching ideas that they weren't approved?

02-2:04:03

Crawford: Sometimes. I mean, but I think that's for two reasons. One, I pitch a lot of ideas. I mean, like, I think, you know, my team, more creative energy and more creative output than the rest of the organization combined. And that's just the nature of our work, not because we're like super awesome like that. It's just the nature of our work.

02-2:04:27

Meeker: You're creative people.

02-2:04:28

Crawford: Yeah, yeah. Well, we have to be, the storytelling and content creation like all day long. And, you know, they couldn't spend the entire organizational budget on digital, as much as I may have wanted that. So but then sometimes I think some of the ideas that I pitched didn't necessarily fit into strategic priorities, or I don't think I explained them well enough to get a yes.

02-2:04:56

Meeker: One thing that I think is pretty interesting, and I've been thinking about this a lot in response to what happened in Houston [Houston Equal Rights Ordinance, November 2015] last week, but I think about it a lot in general, is the way in which we have this broad identity with vast internal differences called LGBT, Q even. When it comes to the issue of the freedom to marry, which some also call marriage equality or same-sex marriage, although I know that's not on message, that really just pertains to the L and the G part of it.

02-2:05:39

Crawford: No. Some people think that it does.

02-2:05:44

Meeker: All right, correct me, then.

02-2:05:45

Crawford: But bisexual people want to get married. I know bisexual people who are married. Transgender people want to get married. I know transgender people who are married. So I think, you know, I think the issue of marriage is broader than some people think, and yeah, there was an internal criticism around it, but we achieved a big thing that's having rippling effects around, I think, the broader LGBT movement and issues. So when people say, "Oh, well, it only affects gay people," well, no, it doesn't. Because it's not like bisexual or transgender people don't think about getting married, don't think about falling in love, or spending their lives, you know, with someone or having a family and being able to take care of their family.

02-2:06:36

Meeker: I guess bisexuality is interesting, and I can see your point. With transgender, well, I guess I don't know the laws around all the states, but if, you know, I suppose it depends on where the person is situated, if they are gay or lesbian identified as their transgender or not. And, you know, so, for instance, a close colleague of mine is male-to-female, and she is a lesbian with another woman. So if they wanted to get married, I don't know if they do, but if they wanted to get married, that would be, in essence, a same-sex marriage issue.

02-2:07:31

Crawford: Depending on the state that they lived in. So, because it varies by state in part because states have different laws around gender identification.

02-2:07:43

Meeker: Okay, all right, so what kind of conversations were had about that in here, in this organization? Was there an attempt to represent, for instance, you know, transgender couples and their unique issues around that, such as, you know, a state that doesn't, you know, there's not consistency around states recognizing gender identity.

02-2:08:09

Crawford: I mean, there wasn't much conversation that I was a part of. I mean, there could have been conversations with just me not being included. I think we may have done a couple of stories that included transgender people and partners, but it didn't necessarily focus on, you know, the gender identification issue and the laws in respective states, because that's kind of a different thing, when we were pretty much focused on same-sex couples being able to marry. So we didn't necessarily focus on that other issue around like gender identification laws and so on.

02-2:08:51

Meeker: Okay. Is there anything else that is to be said about that? I mean, I think it's kind of interesting in the sense that this is something that is, you know, being wrestled with very much today.

02-2:09:00

Crawford: Yeah. I mean, like I say I wasn't a part of conversations around that at Freedom to Marry. That's a question you should definitely ask Evan.

02-2:09:09

Meeker: Okay, I will. Well, you know, I have a few final questions. You had mentioned that Yale is going to be archiving the website. Can you tell me a little bit about the process around this and what you're hoping future people will be able to engage with?

02-2:09:41

Crawford: Sure. So, Yale is going to be actually getting all the paper and digital archives for Freedom to Marry, and that's a process that, you know, Evan, our COO [Scott Davenport], has been working on for quite a while. In terms of the digital stuff in there, various websites, social media presences, et cetera, they're going to take digital copies, digital copies of digital things, and they're going to keep them as is in some kind of storage so that if journalists, historians, students, et cetera, want to access them, they can through Yale. Because we're going to take the current site offline and Yale is going to archive that. But that's not why we're taking it offline. We're taking it offline because we're building a new site, where we're going to tell the story of how marriage was won, plus we're going to share a whole bunch of lessons that we learned along the way.

So with respect to the new site, we're hoping that people, particularly people in other progressive movements, will be able to learn from what we accomplished, and it'll be able to help, you know, move forward their respective issues. With respect to the archives that Yale's going to be handling, we just want there to be a record of what we did for historians, for journalists, or whoever may be interested later.

02-2:11:03

Meeker: What about the social media?

02-2:11:03

Crawford: Yeah, so they're going to take photos, I guess, of it, and they're going to keep that as well. The social media will stay up. We'll put a note saying that Freedom to Marry is closed, we're out of business, we achieved this great thing. If you want to know more about, you know, how marriage was won, click here to go to the Freedom to Marry website, which will then be the new website.

02-2:11:33

Meeker: Where were you when the decision came down in June 2015?

02-2:11:39

Crawford: We were all here in this conference room, and we were all around this table, huddled, watching Twitter, actually. So we were watching Twitter and

watching the news, and refreshing SCOTUS blog, all trying to find out what was happening.

02-2:11:59

Meeker: Did you have a particular intuition, were you hopeful or slightly pessimistic or just unsure about what was going to happen?

02-2:12:08

Crawford: I personally was optimistic. I mean, I felt like, you know, the lawyers were our side, made a fantastic case. I felt that we had done a really strong job of making the case in the court of public opinion. But I also knew that even if the court decision didn't go our way, then we would immediately pick up and continue the fight.

02-2:12:33

Meeker: And that would be what, through legislative means?

02-2:12:37

Crawford: Through ballot campaigns in a number of states. We'd continue to work on public opinion, we'd continue to try to win more states. So yeah, in those means. I mean, at that point I don't think there were—yeah, there were no legislative opportunities, but there were some potential opportunities around ballot campaigns.

02-2:12:56

Meeker: Was there ever a point at which that you felt like it was inevitable, maybe it wasn't going to happen in 2015, maybe it was going to be the 2020 end game? But was there a point that you felt like, yes.

02-2:13:14

Crawford: Well, I guess the point where I felt like yes was the point when the decision was actually announced. I mean, I don't think any of us operated under the kind of it's inevitable kind of mindset. I mean, in the sense that we weren't sitting around thinking, Oh, we can just coast because it's inevitable. We were always thinking that in order to make it inevitable, we have to work our asses off to make it inevitable. And so we were consistently doing everything that we could think of in order to push it forward, which is why I can say that even if the Supreme Court decision hadn't gone our way, we would've picked up the next day and continued our work.

02-2:13:58

Meeker: What's next for you?

02-2:14:00

Crawford: I still have no idea. I don't know yet. You know, I'm with Freedom to Marry for a little bit longer, until we get the new site up and running and make sure it has no bugs. And then I'm not sure what's next.

02-2:14:13

Meeker: Do you want to continue to work in the social justice sector, or do you have other goals in mind?

02-2:14:19

Crawford: I have other goals in mind. So it may involve the social justice sector, but yeah, I definitely have other goals in mind.

02-2:14:28

Meeker: Do you have any final thoughts you want to leave us with?

02-2:14:30

Crawford: I know that I talked a lot about storytelling and the importance of storytelling to our work in winning marriage, and I just want to underscore that again. I think, particularly in modern movements, if you want to build a successful modern movement, storytelling needs to be at the core of your work. And when I say that, I don't necessarily mean the kinds of stories that we told around couples, but storytelling in its broader sense.

So, for example, think of the road map to victory as Freedom to Marry's story of how we would win marriage nationwide, distilled to its essence. And so when you think about how do you sketch out those kinds of narratives for people, it's a lot easier for people to understand where you're going, how you get there, and their role in it, and when you can make it—when you can explain things in that way—because I do believe that people are kind of hard-wired to get and to connect to stories, then that gives you a leg up on movements or organizations that don't have storytelling at the heart of their work.

02-2:15:36

Meeker: The example of Obama evolving is so central there.

02-2:15:40

Crawford: Exactly. Yeah, yeah. I mean, Obama's evolution was, you know, a story in and of itself, with highs and lows and, you know, encouragement coming from organizations like Freedom to Marry, stumbles from the president, then the president coming through in the end. So everything's a story, and I believe that whoever is telling the best stories, the better stories, is the movement or the organization that's going to be successful.

02-2:16:08

Meeker: Thank you very much.

02-2:16:10

Crawford: Thank you.

[End of Interview]