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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 29, 2011

Remarks by the President at Reception Observing LGBT Pride Month

THE PRESIDENT: Hello, everybody! (Applause.) Welcome to the White House. (Applause.)

Nothing ruins a good party like a long speech from a politician. (Laughter.) So I'm going to make a short set of remarks here. I appreciate all of you being here. I have learned a lesson: Don't follow Potomac Fever -- (laughter) -- because they sounded pretty good.

We've got community leaders here. We've got grassroots organizers. We've got some incredible young people who are just doing great work all across the country -- folks who are standing up against discrimination, and for the rights of parents and children and partners and students --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: And spouses.

THE PRESIDENT: -- and spouses. (Applause.) You're fighting for the idea that everyone ought to be treated equally and everybody deserves to be able to live and love as they see fit. (Applause.)

Now, I don't have to tell the people in this room we've got a ways to go in the struggle, how many people are still denied their basic rights as Americans, who are still in particular circumstances treated as second-class citizens, or still fearful when they walk down the street or down the hall at school. Many of you have devoted your lives to the cause of equality. So you all know that we've got more work to do.

But I think it's important for us to note the progress that's been made just in the last two and a half years. I just want everybody to think about this. (Applause.) It was here, in the East Room, at our first Pride reception, on the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, a few months after I took office, that I made a pledge, I made a commitment. I said that I would never counsel patience; it wasn't right for me to tell you to be patient any more than it was right for folks to tell African Americans to be patient in terms of their freedoms. I said it might take time to get everything we wanted done. But I also expected to be judged not by the promises I made, but the promises I kept.

Now, let's just think about it. I met with Judy Shepard. I promised her we'd pass an inclusive hate crimes law, named after her son, Matthew. And with the help of Ted Kennedy and others, we got it done and I signed the bill. (Applause.)

I met Janice Lang-ben, who was barred from the bedside of the woman she loved as she lay dying, and I told her we were going to put a stop to that discrimination. And I issued an order so that

any hospital in America that accepts Medicare or Medicaid -- and that means just about every hospital in America -- has to treat gay partners just as they have to treat straight partners. Nobody in America should have to produce a legal contract. (Applause.)

I said we'd lift the HIV travel ban. We got that done. (Applause.) We put in place the first national strategy to fight HIV/AIDS. (Applause.)

A lot of people said we weren't going to be able to get "don't ask, don't tell" done, including a bunch of people in this room. (Laughter.) And I just met Sue Fulton, who was part of the first class of women at West Point, and is an outstanding advocate for gay service members. It took two years through Congress -- working with Admiral Mullen and Secretary Gates and the Pentagon. We had to hold together a fragile coalition. We had to keep up the pressure. But the bottom line is we got it done. And in a matter of weeks, not months, I expect to certify the change in policy -- and we will end "don't ask, don't tell" once and for all. (Applause.)

I told you I was against the Defense -- so-called Defense of Marriage Act. I've long supported efforts to pass a repeal through Congress. And until we reach that day, my administration is no longer defending DOMA in the courts. The law is discriminatory. It violates the Constitution. It's time for us to bring it to an end. (Applause.)

So bottom line is, I've met my commitments to the LGBT community. I have delivered on what I promised. Now, that doesn't mean our work is done. There are going to be times where you're still frustrated with me. (Laughter.) I know there are going to be times where you're still frustrated at the pace of change. I understand that. I know I can count on you to let me know. (Laughter and applause.) This is not a shy group. (Laughter.)

But what I also know is that I will continue to fight alongside you. And I don't just mean as an advocate. You are moms and dads who care about the schools that your children go to. You're students who are trying to figure out how to pay for going to college. You're folks who are looking for good jobs to pay the bills. You're Americans who want this country to prosper. So those are your fights, too. And the fact is these are hard days for America. So we've got a lot of work to do to, not only on ending discrimination; we've got a lot of work to do to live up to the ideals on which we were founded, and to preserve the American Dream in our time -- for everybody, whether they're gay or straight or lesbian or transgender.

But the bottom line is, I am hopeful. I'm hopeful because of the changes we've achieved just in these past two years. Think about it. It's astonishing. Progress that just a few years ago people would have thought were impossible. And more than that, what gives me hope is the deeper shift

that we're seeing that's a transformation not just in our laws but in the hearts and minds of people -- the progress led not by Washington but by ordinary citizens.

It's propelled not by politics but by love and friendship and a sense of mutual regard and mutual respect. It's playing out in legislatures like New York. (Applause.) It's playing out in courtrooms. It's playing out in the ballot box, as people argue and debate over how to bring about the changes where we are creating a more perfect union. But it's also happening around water coolers. It's happening at Thanksgiving tables. It's happening on Facebook and Twitter, and at PTA meetings and potluck dinners, and church halls and VFW Halls.

It happens when a father realizes he doesn't just love his daughter, but also her partner. (Applause.) It happens when a soldier tells his unit that he's gay, and they say, well, yeah, we knew that -- (laughter) -- but, you know, you're a good soldier. It happens when a video sparks a movement to let every single young person out there know that they're not alone. (Applause.) It happens when people look past their differences to understand our common humanity.

And that's not just the story of the gay rights movement. It is the story of America, and the slow, inexorable march towards a more perfect union.

I want thank you for your contribution to that story. I'm confident we're going to keep on writing more chapters.

Thank you very much, everybody. (Applause.)

END 6:10 P.M. EDT



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