

Remarks at the Democratic National Committee LGBT Gala in New York City
June 17, 2014

Edith, Robbie, thanks for the wonderfully brief introduction. [*Laughter*] I mean that sincerely. The day that the Supreme Court issued its ruling, *United States v. Windsor*, was a great day for America, a clear victory for human decency and equality and justice and freedom. So we thank you for your courage and your inspiration. Give them a big round of applause.

I want to thank Debbie Wasserman Schultz for the great job she's doing as chair of the DNC. Andy Tobias, making sure the money goes to the right places. Yay, Andy! Henry Muñoz—thank you, Henry. Thanks to Sia for the beautiful performance. Our emcee, Jesse Tyler Ferguson. Jesse, congratulations on both your weddings. [*Laughter*] Mitch and Cam finally tied the knot. Michelle and the girls were crying. [*Laughter*]

There are other newlyweds here. Eric Johnson and Mark Parker were married a couple of hours ago. They decided to make this their after-party, pretty cool. If you've got a glass, raise it for Eric and Mark: A lifetime of health and happiness to them.

So Pride Month is a time for celebration, and this year we've got a lot to celebrate. If you think about everything that's happened in the last 12 months, it is remarkable. In nine more States, you're now free to marry the person you love. That includes my two home States of Hawaii and Illinois. The NFL drafted its first openly gay player. The U.S. Postal Service made history by putting an openly gay person on a stamp: the late, great Harvey Milk, smiling from ear to ear.

So now you flash back 10 years ago. Maybe no single issue divided our country more than same-sex marriage. In fact, the Republican Party built their entire strategy for 2004 around this issue. You remember? They calculated, if they put constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage on State ballots, they'd turn out more voters, they'd win. And they frankly were right. People flocked to the polls. Those amendments were on the ballots in 11 States. They passed in every single one.

Now, here's a good bet. They're not going to try the same strategy in 2014. When I took office, only two States had marriage equality. Today, 19 States and the District of Columbia do. There are court rulings pending in other States as well. And despite the great work of some incredibly talented and courageous lawyers, it is important to understand, it's not just the laws that are changing, it's hearts and minds.

The conventional wisdom says that all this change is due to young people growing up with different attitudes and their parents—than their parents and their grandparents had. And anybody who has kids knows that there is some truth to that. The basic attitude is, I'm sorry, what is it that you're talking about here? What's the big deal? But what's been remarkable is the way Americans of all age groups are increasingly embracing marriage equality. And they understand love is love. And for many people whose minds have changed, it was love that did it: love for the child or the grandchild or the friend or the coworker who sat down one day and held their hands and took a deep breath and said, I'm gay.

Almost everybody in this room was that child or grandchild or friend or coworker at some point. And you may not have known it at the time, it may have seemed like an individual act, but in those moments, when you summoned that courage and reached out with that hopeful

love, you were doing it for everybody. And that's why I'm here tonight, to say thank you for helping make America more just and more compassionate.

And I want to thank all the incredible friends in the room for the support and guidance that so many of you have offered my administration over the past 5½ years. Now, sometimes, you guys were a little impatient. *[Laughter]* Sometimes, I had to say, will you just settle down for a second? We've got this. *[Laughter]* But because of your help, we've been able to do more to protect the rights of lesbian and gay and bisexual and transgender Americans than any administration in history.

We repealed "don't ask, don't tell," because no one should have to hide who you love to serve the country we love. We reauthorized the Violence Against Women's Act with new protections. And I signed a hate crimes law bearing Matthew Shepard's name, because hate-driven violence has taken the lives of too many in this country. It has to end.

I lifted the 22-year ban on people with HIV traveling to the U.S. and prohibited discrimination in hospitals and housing that received Federal funding, because stigma and fear have no place in our laws. We've made it illegal for health insurers to deny coverage to people based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Starting next year, insurance companies that offer coverage to straight couples have to offer it to gay couples too.

We've worked to address and prevent bullying, because it's not enough to say it gets better. We've got to make it better. And today the Senate confirmed two openly gay judges in the same day. Before I took office, only one openly gay judge had been confirmed in history. We have 10 more.

And as I said in my second Inaugural Address, if we're truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well. That's why we stopped defending the so-called Defense of Marriage Act in the courts and argued alongside Edie and Robbie before the highest court in the land. That's why we're working to implement the Court's ruling to extend benefits to married same-sex couples wherever, whenever possible. People have been waiting a long time for justice, and we're working to deliver on it as fast as we can.

So we've got some pretty good reasons to celebrate. That doesn't mean, though, that we can grow complacent. Progress doesn't just have to be fought for, it has to be defended. Today, a lawmaker in Oklahoma is trying to ban all marriages rather than recognize same-sex marriage. *[Laughter]* Now, that seems a little over the top, but that's just my opinion. *[Laughter]* The Texas Republican Party's State platform endorses gay conversion therapy in 2014. Fierce legal fights are underway to stop marriage equality from expanding any further or to prevent court rulings from taking effect. And most of all, there are still Americans out there who are vulnerable and alone and still need our support.

So we can't stop. We've got to keep fighting. We've got to keep fighting for the human rights of people around the world, to those who face violence and intimidation every single day and who live under governments that have made the existence of anybody who's LGBT illegal. We need to send a message to those folks. I want them to hear from the President of the United States: We believe in your dignity and your equality, and the United States stands with you.

And we've got to keep fighting to protect the lives of our brothers and sisters here at home. Last week, I got a chance to watch the film version of "The Normal Heart." And I actually called Ryan Murphy afterwards to tell him to how much I admired it. It's more than just a story from our past. It's a reminder that we have to stay vigilant in the fight against

HIV/AIDS, which still claims the lives of too many Americans, especially low-income Americans, especially the minority LGBT community that doesn't have all the resources, doesn't have all the information they need. It still takes a toll.

Now, I know that many people in this room have photographs with smiling friends from days gone by, and a lot of those friends are gone, taken before their time, both because of a disease and because there was a Government that failed to recognize that disease in time. And that can happen again if we're not careful.

And that's why my administration created the first comprehensive national HIV/AIDS strategy. That's why we're working toward an AIDS-free generation, so fewer people have to know the pain of this disease and so our country doesn't lose any more of its sons and daughters.

We've got to keep fighting for equality in the workplace. Right now there are more States that allow same-sex marriage than there are States that prohibit discrimination against LGBT workers. Think about that.

We have laws that say Americans can't be fired from their jobs because of the color of their skin or for their religion or because of a disability. But every day, millions of Americans go to work knowing that they could lose their job, not because of anything they did, but because of who they are. That is not right. It is wrong.

Now, Congress has been considering legislation to protect LGBT workers for decades. I want you to understand: for decades. Last November, it finally looked like we were getting somewhere. The Senate passed ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. Had strong bipartisan support. But shockingly enough, the House refused to act. Meanwhile, millions of Americans are still waiting. It's been decades.

The majority of Fortune 500 companies, small businesses, already have nondiscrimination policies that protect their employees, not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it helps them attract and retain the best talent. They're right. We don't benefit as a country or an economy, businesses don't benefit if they're leaving talent off the field.

And that's why I've directed my staff to prepare for my signature an Executive order prohibiting discrimination by Federal contractors on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Because in the United States of America, who you are and who you love shouldn't be a fireable offense. It would be better, by the way, if Congress passed a more comprehensive law that didn't just cover Federal contractors. And we need to keep working on that, so don't take the pressure off Congress.

This seems to be a pattern these days. Everybody has just given up so much on Congress that we end up doing something through Executive order. And that's helpful, but it doesn't reach everybody that needs to be reached. Congress needs to start working again, so let's make sure that we keep the pressure up there.

This is a country where no matter who you are or what you look like or how you came up or what your last name is or who you love, if you work hard and you take responsibility, you should be able to make it. That's the story of America. That's the story of this movement: people who stand up and come out and march and organize and fight to expand the rights we enjoy and extend them to other people; people who work against the odds to build a nation in which nobody is a second-class citizen, everybody is free to who—to be who they are and that you're judged based on, are you kind and competent and work hard and treat each other with

respect and are a team player and look after your community and care and love and cherish your kids? That's how we're supposed to be judged.

That's the fight that brought all of us here today. That's what made it possible for me to stand up here as your President. It's what gave many people in this room the freedom to live their lives freely. It's what should inspire us to keep working to make sure all our children grow up in an America where differences are respected and even celebrated and where love is love.

And it is also why those of us who in the past might have not always enjoyed the full liberty that this amazing country of ours has to offer, that we've got to be thinking about others who are still struggling. That's why this community has to be just as concerned about poor kids, regardless of sexual orientation. That's why this community should be fighting for workers who aren't getting paid a minimum wage that's high enough.

That's why this community has to show compassion for the illegal immigrant who is contributing to our society and just wants a chance to move out of the shadows. That's why this community should be concerned about equal pay for equal work, straight or gay. That's why this community has to be concerned about the remaining vestiges of racial discrimination.

If you've experienced being on the outside, you've got to be one to bring more folks in even once you are inside. That's our task. That's our job. That's why we're here tonight.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:36 p.m. at Gotham Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Edith Windsor, plaintiff in the U.S. Supreme Court case *United States v. Windsor*; Roberta A. Kaplan, partner, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP, who argued before the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of Edith Windsor in *United States v. Windsor*; Andrew Tobias, treasurer, and Henry R. Muñoz III, national finance committee chairman, Democratic National Committee; singer Sia Furler; actor Jesse Tyler Ferguson, who portrays the character Mitch in ABC's "Modern Family" program; Dallas, TX, residents P. Mark Parker and Eric Johnson; Michael Sam, defensive end, National Football League's St. Louis Rams; Darrin P. Gayles, U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Florida; Staci M. Yandle, U.S. District Court Judge for the Southern District of Illinois; Deborah A. Batts, U.S. District Court Judge for the Southern District of New York; Oklahoma State Rep. Mike Turner; and filmmaker Ryan Murphy, producer and director of "The Normal Heart."

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee LGBT Gala in New York City.

Locations: New York City.

Names: Batts, Deborah A.; Ferguson, Jesse Tyler; Furler, Sia; Gayles, Darrin P.; Johnson, Eric; Kaplan, Roberta A.; Munoz, Heñry R., III; Murphy, Ryan; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Parker, P. Mark; Sam, Michael; Tobias, Andrew; Turner, Mike; Wasserman Schultz, Deborah; Windsor, Edith; Yandle , Staci M.

Subjects: Civil rights : Civil rights movement; Civil rights : Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, equality; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Education : Bullying, prevention efforts; Government organization and employees : Federal Government contracting policies, reform; HIV/AIDS : Domestic prevention and treatment strategy; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: United States v. Windsor ; New York : Democratic Party events; New York : President's visits.

DCPD Number: DCPD201400466.