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President Uribe. No, but let me make some comments about this question. I brought to the table some topics that I call topics of internal debate in Colombia at this moment. And one of the topics I brought to talk about it with President Obama is this topic. And I want to summarize.

I said to President Obama, first, I am concerned, because I am a member of one generation of the four or five generations that have not lived one single day in peace in Colombia or prosperity. Therefore, I consider that Colombia needs to extend in that time security, democratic values, investment in social responsibility and social cohesion, with adjustments.

I don't believe in the stagnation, and I don't believe in gross changes. I believe in one goal, in one mission, with dynamism, with daily adjustments. And I have said in the second point of this comment that I consider that this is—[*inaudible*]—it is necessary to extend these policies. It is not convenient to perpetuate the precedent.

And I have said to President Obama what I want to say to you. Colombia is a country of solid democratic institutions. When we speak about institutions, we cannot speak in abstract about institutions. We have to speak about institutions in concrete terms. We have 1,102 mayors directly elected by the people; 32 Governors. The regions in Colombia invest 51 percent of the public expenses. My Government has built governments with all the regional Governors and mayors regardless their political allegiance, and they have many, many political allegiance.

The justice administration is independent in Colombia. Colombia has solid free press. Colombia has bodies, independent bodies, for control. Colombia is a country with very solid institutions.

I beg you, journalists, to separate the convenience or inconvenience of perpetuating the precedent with the qualification of our institutions. Anyway, our democratic institutions are totally solid.

President Obama. Well—and the other thing I should say is that if I were to serve two terms, I'm fairly confident that I would not have the 70 percent approval rating that President Uribe has. [*Laughter*]

All right, thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:43 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A reporter referred to President Hugo Chavez Frias of Venezuela.

Remarks at a Reception Honoring Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month

June 29, 2009

The President. Hey. Good to see you. I'm waiting for FLOTUS here. FLOTUS always politics more than POTUS.

The First Lady. No, you move too slow. [*Laughter*]

The President. It is great to see everybody here today, and they're just—I've got a lot of friends in the room, but there are some people I want to especially acknowledge. First of all, somebody who helped ensure that we are in the White House, Steve Hildebrand. Please give Steve a big round of applause. Where's Steve? He's around here somewhere.

The new Chair of the Export-Import Bank, Fred Hochberg; where's Fred? There's Fred. Good to see you, Fred. Our Director of the Institute of Education Sciences at DOE, John Easton; where's John? A couple of special friends—Bishop Gene Robinson; where's Gene? Hey, Gene. Ambassador Michael Guest is here. Ambassador Jim Hormel is here. Oregon Secretary of State Kate Brown is here.

All of you are here. Welcome to your White House. So——

Audience member. [*Inaudible*] [*Laughter*]

The President. Somebody asked from the Lincoln Bedroom here. [*Laughter*] You knew I was from Chicago too. [*Laughter*]

It's good to see so many friends and familiar faces, and I deeply appreciate the support I've

received from so many of you; Michelle appreciates it. And I want you to know that you have our support as well. And you have my thanks for the work you do every day in pursuit of equality on behalf of the millions of people in this country who work hard and care about their communities and who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.

Now, this struggle, I don't need to tell you, is incredibly difficult, although I think it's important to consider the extraordinary progress that we have made. There are unjust laws to overturn and unfair practices to stop. And though we've made progress, there are still fellow citizens, perhaps neighbors or even family members and loved ones, who still hold fast to worn arguments and old attitudes; who fail to see your families like their families; and who would deny you the rights that most Americans take for granted. And I know this is painful, and I know it can be heartbreaking.

And yet all of you continue, leading by the force of the arguments you make but also by the power of the example that you set in your own lives as parents and friends, as PTA members and leaders in the community. And that's important, and I'm glad that so many LGBT families could join us today. For we know that progress depends not only on changing laws but also changing hearts. And that real, transformative change never begins in Washington.

[*At this point, a cell phone rang.*]

The President. Whose duck is back there? [*Laughter*]

The First Lady. It's a duck.

The President. There's a duck quacking in there somewhere. [*Laughter*] Where do you guys get these ring tones, by the way? [*Laughter*] I'm just curious. [*Laughter*]

Indeed, that's the story of the movement for fairness and equality, not just for those who are gay, but for all those in our history who've been denied the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; who've been told that the full blessings and opportunities of this country were closed to them. It's the story of progress sought by those who started off with little influence or power, by men and women who brought about change through quiet, personal acts of compassion and courage and sometimes defiance wherever and whenever they could.

That's the story of a civil rights pioneer who's here today. Frank Kameny, who was fired—[*applause*]—Frank was fired from his job as an astronomer for the Federal Government simply because he was gay. And in 1965, he led a protest outside the White House, which was at the time both an act of conscience but also an act of extraordinary courage. And so we are proud of you, Frank, and we are grateful to you for your leadership.

It's the story of the Stonewall protests, which took place 40 years ago this week, when a group of citizens, with few options and fewer supporters, decided they'd had enough and refused to accept a policy of wanton discrimination. And two men who were at those protests are here today. Imagine the journey that they've traveled.

It's the story of an epidemic that decimated a community and the gay men and women who came to support one another and save one another, and who continue to fight this scourge, and who've demonstrated before the world that different kinds of families can show the same compassion and support in a time of need; that we all share the capacity to love.

So this story, this struggle, continues today, for even as we face extraordinary challenges as a nation, we cannot and will not put aside issues of basic equality. We seek an America in which no one feels the pain of discrimination based on who you are or who you love.

And I know that many in this room don't believe that progress has come fast enough, and I understand that. It's not for me to tell you to be patient, any more than it was for others to counsel patience to African Americans who were petitioning for equal rights a half century ago.

But I say this: We have made progress, and we will make more. And I want you to know that I expect and hope to be judged not by words, not by promises I've made, but by the promises that my administration keeps. And by the time you receive—[*applause*]. We've been in office 6 months now. I suspect that by the time this administration is over, I think you

guys will have pretty good feelings about the Obama administration—[*inaudible*].

Now, while there is much more work to do, we can point to important changes we've already put in place since coming into office. I've signed a memorandum requiring all agencies to extend as many Federal benefits as possible to LGBT families as current law allows. And these are benefits that will make a real difference for Federal employees and Foreign Service officers who are so often treated as if their families don't exist. And I'd like to note that one of the key voices in helping us develop this policy is John Berry, our Director of the Office of Personnel Management, who is here today. And I want to thank John Berry.

I've called on Congress to repeal the so-called Defense of Marriage Act to help end discrimination against same-sex couples in this country. Now, I want to add, we have a duty to uphold existing law, but I believe we must do so in a way that does not exacerbate old divides. And fulfilling this duty in upholding the law in no way lessens my commitment to reversing this law. I've made that clear.

I'm also urging Congress to pass the domestic partners benefits and obligations act, which will guarantee the full range of benefits, including health care, to LGBT couples and their children. My administration's also working hard to pass an employee nondiscrimination bill and hate crimes bill, and we're making progress on both fronts. Judy and Dennis Shepard, as well as their son Logan, are here today. I met with Judy in the Oval Office in May, and I assured her, and I assure all of you, that we are going to pass an inclusive hate crimes bill into law, a bill named for their son Matthew.

In addition, my administration is committed to rescinding the discriminatory ban on entry to the United States based on HIV status. The Office of Management and Budget just concluded a review of a proposal to repeal this entry ban, which is a first and very big step towards ending this policy. And we all know that HIV/AIDS continues to be a public health threat in many communities, including right here in the District of Columbia. And that's why this past Saturday, on National HIV Testing Day, I was proud once again to encourage all Americans to know their status and get tested the way Michelle and I know our status and got tested.

And finally, I want to say a word about "don't ask, don't tell." As I said before, I'll say it again, I believe "don't ask, don't tell" doesn't contribute to our national security. In fact, I believe preventing patriotic Americans from serving their country weakens our national security. My administration is already working with the Pentagon and Members of the House and the Senate on how we'll go about ending this policy, which will require an act of Congress.

Someday, I'm confident we'll look back at this transition and ask why it generated such angst, but as Commander in Chief in a time of war, I do have a responsibility to see that this change is administered in a practical way and a way that takes over the long term. That's why I've asked the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop a plan for how to thoroughly implement a repeal.

I know that every day that passes without a resolution is a deep disappointment to those men and women who continue to be discharged under this policy—patriots who often possess critical language skills and years of training and who've served this country well. But what I hope is that these cases underscore the urgency of reversing this policy not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it is essential for our national security.

Now, even as we take these steps, we must recognize that real progress depends not only on the laws we change but, as I said before, on the hearts we open. For if we're honest with ourselves, we'll acknowledge that there are good and decent people in this country who don't yet fully embrace their gay brothers and sisters, not yet.

That's why I've spoken about these issues not just in front of you, but in front of unlikely audiences: in front of African American church members, in front of other audiences that have traditionally resisted these changes. And that's what I'll continue to do so. That's how we'll shift attitudes. That's how we'll honor the legacy of leaders like Frank and many others who have refused to accept anything less than full and equal citizenship.

Now, 40 years ago, in the heart of New York City at a place called the Stonewall Inn, a group of citizens, including a few who are here today, as I said, defied an unjust policy and awakened a nascent movement. It was the middle of the night. The police stormed the bar, which was known for being one of the few spots where it was safe to be gay in New York. Now, raids like this were entirely ordinary, because it was considered obscene and illegal to be gay; no establishments for gays and lesbians could get licenses to operate. The nature of these businesses, combined with the vulnerability of the gay community itself, meant places like Stonewall, and the patrons inside, were often the victims of corruption and blackmail.

Now, ordinarily, the raid would come and the customers would disperse. But on this night, something was different. There are many accounts of what happened, and much has been lost to history, but what we do know is this: People didn't leave. They stood their ground. And over the course of several nights, they declared that they had seen enough injustice in their time. This was an outpouring against not just what they experienced that night, but what they had experienced their whole lives. And as with so many movements, it was also something more. It was at this defining moment that folks who had been marginalized rose up to challenge not just how the world saw them, but also how they saw themselves.

As we've seen so many times in history, once that spirit takes hold, there is little that can stand in its way. And the riots at Stonewall gave way to protests, and protests gave way to a movement, and the movement gave way to a transformation that continues to this day. It continues when a partner fights for her right to sit at the hospital bedside of a woman she loves. It continues when a teenager is called a name for being different, and says, "So what if I am?" It continues in your work and in your activism, in your fight to freely live your lives to the fullest.

In one year after the protests, a few hundred gays and lesbians and their supporters gathered at the Stonewall Inn to lead a historic march for equality. But when they reached Central Park, the few hundred that began the march had swelled to 5,000. Something had changed, and it would never change back.

The truth is, when these folks protested at Stonewall 40 years ago, no one could have imagined that you or, for that matter, I would be standing here today. So we are all witnesses to monumental changes in this country. That should give us hope, but we cannot rest. We must continue to do our part to make progress, step by step, law by law, mind by changing mind. And I want you to know that in this task, I will not only be your friend, I will continue to be an ally and a champion and a President who fights with you and for you.

Thanks very much, everybody. God bless you. We are—thank you. It's a little stuffed in here. We're going to open—we opened up that door. We're going to walk this way, and then we're going to come around, and we'll see some of you over there, all right?

The First Lady. Out there? [*Laughter*]

The President. But out there. [*Laughter*]

But thank you very much, all, for being here. Enjoy the White House. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:35 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Steve Hildebrand, deputy campaign manager, Obama 2008; Fred P. Hochberg, Chairman of the Board of Directors and President, Export-Import Bank of the United States; Bishop V. Gene Robinson, Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire; former U.S. Ambassador to Romania Michael E. Guest; former U.S. Ambassador to Luxembourg James C. Hormel; Jerry Hoose and Tommy Lanigan-Schmidt, participants of the Stonewall Inn riots; and Judy and Dennis Shepard, parents of Matthew Shepard, who was attacked and killed in October 1998. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month proclamation of June 1 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.