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Remarks To Empire State Pride Agenda

New York, New York

October 5, 2000

I feel like I'm back in the parade. I am very happy to be here, and I want to thank Jack for his leadership and very kind introduction. I want to send my best wishes to Kate Gallavin for a speedy recovery. I want to thank Matt Foreman and Tim Sweeney. I'm delighted (inaudible).

We're all pleased to have with us Andrew Cuomo, our Secretary of State with us this evening. And I'm delighted to be here with someone who I look forward to working with who has done such a fabulous job for New York, Senator Chuck Schumer.

See, I know that I have some pretty big shoes to fill tonight. Two years ago Al Gore became the first Vice President to address this Empire State Pride Agenda... (inaudible).

And then last year you had the first sitting president ever to attend. And I know that my husband was delighted to be here and review some of the work that has been done in the last eight years.

And really I want to thank you for the support and the enthusiastic commitment that you have shown to the President's work as he's attempted to move the agenda that is the agenda of the Empire State Pride Agenda forward. Now we can (inaudible) America. Thank you.

I am also grateful that many of you have been wonderful friends and supporters to me over the past 15 months. And I thank every single one of you. I was proud to march in the parade with you. I was proud to be with Tom Duane, and Chris Quinn, and Phil Reed and all the rest of the people who were there that day.

And there seemed to be extraordinary pride and joy and excitement that people felt because they had come out and marched and walked and celebrated. And yet in many ways, it struck me that this was becoming a regular New York City parade.

Now bear with me. Sure the costumes may have been more colorful. The number of marchers in spiked heels and feather boas may have been higher than some marches. But like so many parades in this city, the marchers proudly walked down Fifth Avenue. There were corporate sponsors and New York elected officials and candidates - save for one notable exception from Long Island.

But that parade was the latest evidence that the civil rights and human rights movement launched in this very city more than a generation ago has taken root, and literally changed the lives and attitudes not only of people in this room, but people across this city, state and country for the better, and we're stronger and better because of what you have done.

More than 30 years ago, the men and women at Stonewall lacked the power and the right to gather freely, simply because of who they were. And tonight more than 1600 men and women and their families, friend and supporters gather freely in the heart of New York City to celebrate not only who they are, but where they're going - to a freer, more just and inclusive New York and America. And all of us benefit from what some of you have been willing to do.

Now I believe that the Empire State Pride Agenda has a lot to be proud of this evening. You've grown from a small civil rights group to a leading voice for equality and justice. This is an organization, that through tireless effort, and sheer force of will, has done its best to make sure that New York honors the progressive tradition that has always been a part of this state's proud history.

And just this last year, in viewing the accomplishments, I'm impressed. As Jeff said, I was honored to stand with you at the state capital to call upon the legislature once and for all to pass a strong New York Hate Crimes Law, after eleven years of debate and delay. And it passed, thanks to your effort.

You've also fought for and won greater support for lesbian and gay health and human services. You've helped pass non-discrimination measures in Westchester and Buffalo Schools. And your voices have certainly been heard in Washington.

I'm proud to be part of an administration that has sought out and benefited from the talent, expertise, and energy of

hundreds of openly gay men and lesbian women. I know that there are current and former members of the administration here tonight and I thank all of them for their service.

You know, today the federal government is the largest employer in the world to live by a non-discrimination policy. I am proud of my husband, because he, as you know, was the President who signed the executive order that made that possible. I'm also proud to be part of an administration that is the first to support research into lesbian health, that has more than doubled our commitment to breast cancer research, prevention and treatment, and that has led the global fight against AIDS.

But we all can look back at the last eight years, then we can see a country that is not only stronger, but, I believe, more just and more inclusive than it was eight years ago. But we all know - we all know - that the fight for equality and against discrimination is far from over. That fight has to be carried on not only in the halls of legislatures, but also in our hearts. We have much further to go.

Our country was founded on one of the simplest, yet most powerful ideals in the history of humanity. We are all created equal. We believe in the American Dream: how if you take responsibility and you do your part, you can build a better life for yourself. What counts most is energy and honesty, integrity and talent. That's our ideal and that's our dream. But we know that that dream has yet to come alive for too many of our citizens.

We know that dream is not fully alive when in workplaces across the country, a boss can still come up to the best worker in the company and say, "I'm firing you because you're gay." We know that dream is not fully alive when a landlord can say to tenant who pays the rent on time every month, "You're a good tenant, but you'll have to go because you're gay."

We know that dream is not fully alive when thousands of brave men and women cannot wear their country's uniform simply because they are gay. We know that dream is still not fully alive when a gunman can go into a bar and indiscriminately murder and maim people. Where a young man can be harassed, beaten to death, and left to die on a lonely country road - we have a long way to go.

America's struggle to honor our ideals is an ongoing one. And it is the duty of every generation to expand the circle of human dignity. I want to keep fighting side by side with the Empire State Pride Agenda to build a New York and an America where every man and woman is treated with respect and dignity; where all Americans can live closer to our most cherished ideals of equality and justice.

That's why tonight, I've heard news that is very disappointing. The Hate Crimes legislation that people in this room and far beyond have been fighting for, was stripped in a Senate conference committee of consideration in this session of Congress. Republicans and Democrats both supported this bill. It has widespread support across the country. But once again, the Republicans congressional leadership stands in the way of important progress.

Here's a major difference between Democrats and Republicans, between Al Gore and George Bush, and between me and Rick Lazio. I want to go to the Senate to fight with you for this legislation. Not only would my opponent not co-sponsor the bill, he missed the vote.

No New Yorker, no American should feel unsafe walking the street or the subway, or supermarket, or going about their daily lives because of who they are or what they believe in.

I have been a consistent supporter of stronger hate crimes legislation from the beginning. We must recognize violent acts against our citizens are based on race, religion, sexual orientation, gender and disability cannot be tolerated.

In the Senate I will be a proud co-sponsor of this Bill and I am convinced that Chuck Schumer and I will get it done...(inaudible). I also want to fight to make the Employment Non Discrimination Act (ENDA) the law of the land because this law is not about creating special rights its about defending opportunity for all. Its about extending American rights to American citizens. All of America loses when any person is barred from contributing to our workplaces and our country because of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

We know that last time the Bill made it to the floor of the United States Senate it was just one vote shy of passing. If

you send me to the Senate I won't just be a vote, I'll be a co-sponsor and round up the support we need...(inaudible).

But we can't stop just with employment because ENDA cannot be the end. We must protect the rights of all Americans when it comes to housing and public accommodation. I support your efforts to pass SONDA (Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act) here in New York and I'll work to pass similar legislation in the United State Senate.

I will also work to make sure that all men and women willing to risk their lives to defend America can serve proudly in the United State Military regardless of sexual orientation.

And I'll work with you to dismantle the barriers that keep long-time domestic partners from the legal recognition, health insurance and benefits afforded to other couples. And that keep committed couples from being reunified across national borders. That is the right thing to do.

But we know the progress we're working and hoping to achieve must go beyond laws. It has to go our hearts. I will never hesitate to do my part to stand up and speak up against hatred and intolerance wherever I see it. I will proudly march and walk with you. As we continue to make progress.

I will never follow the dictates of a Congressional leadership that would want to pass mean-spirited laws that flout our ideals of equality and justice for all.

This is where I stand. This is the kind of New York and America I want to be part of building. You will never have to wonder how I'll vote or what I'll do on the issues that matter to you and all New Yorkers.

Now my opponent as you know cannot say the same thing. But to me this election has never been merely as contest where I ask you to vote for me and against him so much as I ask you to vote for yourselves. To vote for your own future, for your own beliefs... (inaudible) So I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your endorsement and your support. In the next 33 days I am going to need your help, your energy and your enthusiasm.

Chuck Schumer has said so many times how the votes and

support of this community made the crucial difference in his race two years ago. I need you to make the difference again.

The polls may say that I'm ahead. But I'm not taking a single vote for granted. I really hope you will talk to your friends and neighbors, your co-workers about what's at stake in this election. So that when people go into that voting booth on November 7th I want them to know about the differences between me and my opponent.

I want them to know exactly where we both stand on the issues that matter most, from health care to education, to guns, to choice, to the economy, to every issue one can imagine, because they will be at stake in this election. And then I want people to vote - for the kind of city, state country and world we want to live in.

Now I said to a small group of people a week or two ago that based on my experience at the parade, I think we need to make voting more fun in this country. (inaudible) that we talk about it in these rather weary terms about it being our obligation - well we have done a terrific job the last eight years under the President's leadership closing the budget deficit, lets close the fun deficit ... (inaudible). I have a minor suggestion - I suggest that perhaps we go to the polls dressed in a way that conveys our concerns ... (inaudible).

But whatever it is that will move people to go vote - Al Gore needs your vote, I need your vote, New York needs your vote and America needs your vote.

Thank you all.