

Transcript of Remarks made by Vice President Joe Biden  
Human Rights Campaign Los Angeles Gala Dinner  
Saturday, March 23, 2014

Thank you very much, Jill. Thank you. Thank you all very much, thank you. Thank you.

Thank you please, please sit down. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you.  
Thank you so please, please sit down.

I know it shocks you to hear that I sometimes speak my mind, I uh, I um, as a matter of fact, uh, someone said not long ago, no one ever doubts what Biden says, the problem is sometimes he says all that he thinks.

And I assure you it was no surprise in the Biden household when I spoke out on Meet the Press. But folks, before I begin, I'd like you to introduce you to my best friend in the world, my sister Valerie and her son, who's an attorney out here in Los Angeles, and my granddaughter. Our granddaughter has come along with us and the reason she's with us is that I want her to understand, which she is only now beginning to understand, that what she thinks and all her generation thinks is starting to be thought by older folks, too. [LAUGH]

And so ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce you to my sister Valerie Biden, her son Cuff Bid, or, actually it's not Biden, she's married. Valerie Owens, her son Cuff and my granddaughter, oh there they are.

Folks, it's easy to think the way we do, when everyone who you know and respect thinks the same way.

[HRC President] Chad [Griffin], thank you for your generosity and your kind comments. And Attorney General Harris, you have always been there, it's never been a question for you. And Congressman Mark [Takano], is Mark here? I know he's out there somewhere, I believe he is. Congressman, thank you for your great support.

And Mr. Mayor, thank you for the passport to come back into the city. And Ambassador David Huebner, I want to thank you as well.

Chad I want to thank you as well for the kind words about Jill's advocacy. You know folks if you had known how Jill felt about standing before and speaking before large crowds seven years ago, you'd marvel that she stood up here. But she is taking it in stride. And Jill has always been had a true north, a moral compass that no one has ever questioned and she raised our three children and our five grandchildren. She hadn't

raised them, but she has impacted them so that they really feel it in their bones, that it's all about fairness and equity. And never to settle for anything less.

You know, it's overused, but Harvey Milk said, "Hope will never be silent." And you have never, never been silent nor have you ever lost hope, even in some very, very difficult times. It's been a long struggle and recently there's been some real progress, but there's so much left to do. All of you spoke out and stepped up and came forward, you came out and you marched, you demanded to be recognized, demanded your constitutional rights, demanded a basic American dream. You demanded respect.

And because of what all of you have done, my granddaughter is going to grow up in a better country, a more just country, and a more fair country.

And folks, I know, I know not like you, but I know it wasn't easy. Many of you paid a personal and a professional price, for stepping up and speaking out. But your tenacity, your integrity, and yes your physical courage, and your pride, bent the moral arch of this nation, and it's finally moving in the right direction.

My mother used to have an expression and I'm serious about this, she said, "Joey, bravery resides in every heart. And the time will come when it will be summoned."

Every one of you in this room stepped up, every one of you stepped up, I'm astonished by the bravery that resides in the heart of each and every one of you in this room. You know, I've been going around the country for a long time, and campaigns and doing my business as vice president, and I constantly am thanked and given a great deal more credit than I deserve.

My main purpose in being here tonight is to say thank you. Thank all of you, your actions not only liberated millions, millions, in the LGBT community, but here's the point you, I don't think you fully understand. You liberated tens of millions of straight guys and straight women. No-no. No-no, you have. You have.

Those of you who are old enough, those of you who are old enough, 20 years ago, if four guys were sitting in a restaurant and there was a gay waiter and as he left the table, one of them made fun of it, the other three would remain silent. Not today. You freed them. You freed them to speak up, because now they know. They know they're not the exception, they know they're the majority. They know, because of you.

And with regard to my being on *Meet the Press*, besides, I told the President, when he asked me to be Vice President, two things, I wasn't going to wear any funny hats, and I wasn't changing my brand. There's no way. I'm too old man. I'm too old, seriously, seriously. It's just, I, how could you remain silent anymore. You know, I have had, and I continue to have faith in the American people.

I believed five years ago, I believe today, that they're so far ahead of the political leadership. And when I spoke out, the great surprise, all of a sudden the polling data started rolling in. And a majority, an absolute majority of the American people agreed with what I said.

But it wasn't because of what I said, it's because all of the sacrifices all of you made. It's been an honor of my lifetime to work alongside of so many of you. And particularly to see what we've achieved in the last five years.

Together, as this has been mentioned already, we passed the Matthew Shepard Hate Crime Prevention Act. Repealed Don't Ask, Don't Tell. Reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act for services for the LGBT community. Passed the Affordable Care Act. So no one can be denied health care because of their sexual orientation or their gender identity.

We argued the case for Edie Windsor, in the high court of the land, because we knew it was unconstitutional -- simply wrong for the federal government to discriminate. We filed a brief on Prop 8 because we believed the loving relationships we see in this room, and California -- my home state of Delaware -- all around the nation -- cannot, should not be denied the freedom to marry. It's basic, and we rejoiced, we rejoiced as we saw that iconic picture of Kris and Sandra and Paul and Jeff, joining hands in victory on the steps of the Supreme Court.

But folks, it's a lot of progress in a relatively short time, after this fights been going on, but guess what, there's so much more to be done.

My grandkids, my children, and their kids are going to be shocked, it shocks the conscious that this very moment in American history, in some states, an employer can fire you just because of who you are, or who you love. It's close to barbaric. I mean think about this, a man, no I really mean this. Imagine, imagine, 20 years from now, as America look back and say how in the hell could that have ever been allowed?

The country's moved on. The American people have moved on, it's time for the Congress to move on, and pass ENDA. Pass ENDA now. Not tomorrow, now!

If you think about it, it's outrageous we're even debating this subject. I really mean it. I mean it's almost beyond belief that today, in 2014, I could say to you, as your employee in so many states, you're fired, because of who you love. I mean think about that. It is bizarre, no-no-no, it really is. It really is, I didn't even think most Americans even know that employers can do that.

And so folks, look, I was raised by a truly gracious and decent man. He taught me and my sister, my two brothers, that uh, a simple truth that every single person in the world is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. And he taught us by his example. Not by his lectures.

I can remember I was a junior in high school and he was driving me into the city, I lived in the suburbs. The city in Wilmington, to uh, apply for a job as a lifeguard in the city swimming pools. I was a pretty good lifeguard. Matter of fact, when I ran for the United States Senate, they said all Biden has ever been is a lifeguard. I was 29. But at any rate, it was close to true, but I'll never forget it. He pulled up in front of the city courthouse, we went and made the application and he didn't want to park, he was dropping me off. And we stopped at a red light and I looked over to my left and there were two men kissing goodbye. And I looked and it was the first time I'd seen that. And my father looked at me and said, "They love each other." That's the end. That's the end.

But my point is, because of you, so many Americans have been freed. Dignity and respect has to remain our North Star. But as far as we still need to go, the rest of the world has so much further to go.

As you probably know, I spent an awful lot of time traveling in foreign countries, I've had the privilege of literally meeting every major head of state in the last 40 years because of the nature of my job in the Senate. And I've traveled to most countries in the world. And I can tell you, they're looking to us as an example, as a champion of LGBT rights everywhere.

In almost 80 countries, today, it's a crime, more than half countries, almost more than half the countries in the UN, it's a crime to be gay. It's a crime. In seven countries, it's punishable by death. And in many more places LGBT people face violence, harassment, unequal treatment in the courts, mistreatment by the police, denial of health care, social isolation, always in the name of culture.

Well ladies and gentleman, the world -- God willing -- is beginning to change. To paraphrase Pope Francis of all things, but think about this, think about what he said. One sentence he uttered. To paraphrase him, "who are we to judge," -- who are they to judge you or me?

In Nigeria, even supporting LGBT organizations can land you in prison for a decade. Closer to home, in Jamaica, we hear about corrective rape for lesbian women. The world was outraged when we found out about genital mutilation that takes place in some African countries.

Corrective rape? What in God's name are we talking about?

How can a country that speaks in those terms be remotely considered to be a civil society?

In June, the Russian government banned the dissemination of so-called propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations to young people. And by the way, as the great Soviet dissident, Andrei Sakharov said, quote, "A country that does not respect the rights of its citizens will not respect the rights of its neighbors." And we're seeing that today. We're seeing that today in Ukraine.

Find me a country in the world that singles out a set of citizens, and I'll guarantee you that country is where justice does not live.

Ladies and gentlemen, this week I met with a remarkable group of activists, in the so-called Roosevelt Room in the West Wing. From all around the world, about eight of them, they had one thing in common: courage -- many of them were taking incredible physical and personal risks in order to fight for the basic human rights, the rights of others. One activist from India, a woman named Geeta [PH] spoke of the importance of quote, "Street to street" connections between local LGBT organizations in different countries.

Another young woman, working in Uganda. Uganda a nation where you can go to prison for life for so call aggravated homosexuality, whatever the hell that is. Aggravated homosexuality? Whoa. There's some sick people in the world.

But here's what she said, she said the LGBT community has been chosen in her country as pawns in the question of where do we look, west or do we look east and she went on to say, it shouldn't be either east or west, it's a basic human right.

Well ladies and gentlemen, let's think about it in basic terms and I know you know it, but sometimes even you forget it. The single most basic of all human rights is the right to decide who you love. It's the single basic building block...it is. It is the single most important human right that exist... and hate, hate can never, never be defended because it's a so called cultural norm.

I've had it up here with cultural norms. I really mean it. A cultural norm is sick, is sick, it's simple.

There's never a justification for a government or individual politician to play off the bigotry and hatred.

A friend of mine who I've gotten to know years ago, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, spoke out against what he called, "a wave of hate sweeping across his beloved continent

against LGBT people.” He said, “politicians who profit from exploiting this hate are fanning it, they must not be tempted by the easy way to profit from fear and misunderstanding.” And we have a simple obligation, when it occurs, where it occurs, as individuals and government we must speak up, speak out and do everything we can to confront it.

America’s strength and I know you’re tired of hearing me say this the last six years, but America’s strength, I really mean this, does not lie in the exercise of its power. It does not lie there. It lies in the exercise of its values.

In every aspect, in every aspect of American foreign policy, we should have as the focus in our foreign policy that we lead not merely by the example of our power, but by the power of our example. That’s what makes us different. That’s what makes us strong. I really mean that.

Look, I don’t want this to just be a rah-rah speech here, I mean what I say. It’s clear we have a long road to travel, to change hearts and minds and laws all around the world, but we’re beginning to do it. We’re beginning to do it.

I want to talk to you about what the President and I are doing to help us get there.

Barack and I believe that the rights of LGBT people is an inseparable part of America’s promotion of human rights around the world. It is not -- no-no-no really -- it is not, it cannot, is not distinguishable it’s a false distinction made in the past.

The first and most important thing, this administration is done is used the bully pulpit of the most powerful nation on earth to stand up in defense of LGBT rights around the world.

It means speaking up against the criminalization of LGBT status or conduct, as President Obama has ordered all agencies working overseas to do. It means our annual State Department report on human rights now speaks out by name, naming countries that mistreat LGBT people. It is consequential. It means providing training and tools to our diplomats around the world so that they can integrate LGBT rights into how we do American foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and by the way, five of these missions are now run by openly gay ambassadors.

The second thing we’re doing and going continue to do is use foreign assistance to protect LGBT rights. We’ve set up and contributed to the Global Equality Fund, which is working in over 50 countries to support unbelievably brave LGBT activists working on the ground, around the world, often in unimaginably difficult and dangerous circumstances.

Thirdly, we offer emergency support to LGBT people in danger including refugee status and asylum seekers fleeing persecution.

And fourth we're building a broad coalition. As broad as we can. We're working with partners like Albania, which just added protections against hate crimes for sexual orientation and gender identity. Albania. Nepal. Nepal, which is taking steps to recognize transgender citizens. Mongolia, which has held its first pride week last September. And Russia calls these countries backward?

We're working with countries like Argentina, Brazil, France, Norway, Sweden. Mexico as well. On U.N. Human Rights Council, the World Bank, regional bodies like the Organization of American States and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

We're working with businesses who can vote with their capital for those economies that respect the rights of LGBT employees. We're supporting organizations such as the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center which is working with grassroots advocates. You're all working with grassroots advocates all across China to help them start their own community organizations.

And we're excited to work with you, the Human Rights Campaign through your new global engagement program to which you take the same passion and remarkable courage you brought to fighting for LGBT rights in this country to help people around the world.

And folks, we're in the early days of a long, long fight, but you should never underestimate the epiphanies that follow a culture that makes a breakthrough of conscious. And that's what you helped start here.

As we used to say in the Senate, I'd like to make, in closing, a point of personal privilege.

I want to thank Chad for being the person he is. Now let me explain what I mean by that.

You all know him, he's a good man, but let me explain what I mean. It was in April of 2012. I was campaigning for Democratic candidates around the country and I was here in Los Angeles with leaders of the LGBT community of Southern California, at the home of Michael Lombardo and Sonny Ward. And a young man who was standing against the wall in the living room as I was answering questions, that young man was Chad. And Chad asked me one of the most sincere and plaintive questions I've ever been asked in my political career, particularly on this issue.

He looked at me and just asked a simple question. He said Mr. Vice President “what do you think of me?” A simple, straightforward question. “What do you think...” I had never met him before.

What he was saying was what do you think of me? “I am a homosexual... What do you think of me?”

No one ever asked me that question before. And it made me sad to think that anyone, any of you in this audience, any of my acquaintances, my friends, my employees who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender have to go through any part of your life looking at people that don't know you and wondering what do they think of me.

What do you think of me? What a profound question. And all I could think of was, if all Americans understood that there are people of different sexual orientations in every walk of life, every sector of America, every nook and cranny of this country, and that you are no different, you are us, we are one. And all I could think to say to Chad, it was spontaneous was I wish every American could have been in the kitchen. They always take me in through kitchens. You think I'm kidding, I'm not.

I walked into Michael and Sonny's home through the kitchen and they were standing there and their two beautiful young children, five and seven were standing between their parents. And the first thing I did, the little girl put her arms out. Actually, the little boy did first. So I bent down, crouched and gave them a big hug, and we talked a little bit before I even said hi to Sonny who was standing to my right. And after a few minutes, the little girl turned to her father and said daddy, is it okay if the Vice President comes out in the back yard and plays with me and you speak? I swear to God. By the way I like kids better than people, but...

And all I could think of was, I mean this sincerely folks, if every American could have just been there and seen the love these kids had for their parents, just seen how normal it all was in the perverted notion some people have. They wouldn't have any doubt about what the right policy is, what the right thing to do. And it reinforced in me the certitude that the only way to prevail is to continue to step up and speak out, because we're all one. People fear that which they do not know. And you all continue to do that. That's why things are changing. Not because of Barack Obama or Joe Biden, but because of you. It's powerful. It's powerful.

So I mean what I said at the front end. Thank you for not only liberating people who have been persecuted and pummeled, but thank you for getting us in the way of liberating all of America. It's a fight we will win.

I don't have a single solitary doubt in my mind. I am absolutely confident my grandchildren's generation has already moved and will continue to move far beyond the



prejudice of the past and of today. That's why I'm so confident that the future's only going get better.

Just as some of you heard me say through the campaign, I will fight to ensure that my four granddaughters have every single solitary opportunity, I mean without exception, that my grandsons have. And as long as I have a breath in me, I will not be satisfied 'till everyone in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender community is afforded the dignity, the freedom and the equality that my father spoke so clearly of. Because that's the only way. Only when you do that, will we be a whole nation. Only when you do that will we be a whole nation. God bless you all. God bless your families, and may God protect our troops.

Thank you for what you do. Thank you. Thank you very much.

[27 Minutes, 51 Seconds]