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Washington, DC, May 19, 2009 – Earlier today, the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the U.S. House of Representatives approved for full House consideration the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 2010-11. Importantly, the Act includes key provisions that would strengthen the Department’s attention to human rights abuses, specifically including those based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. A separate provision that would have remedied Department of State policies that discriminate against the same-sex partners of lesbian and gay Foreign Service Officers was removed from the bill based on expectations conveyed to the Chair that the Department of State soon will issue regulations to provide those benefits.

The Council for Global Equality (www.GlobalEquality.org), an alliance of prominent U.S. human rights and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) advocacy organizations, commends Chairman Berman for his leadership on both of these sets of provisions. It urges that the full House take up and approve the bill without delay, and that the parallel Domestic Partner Benefits and Obligations Act, also introduced May 19 in both houses of Congress, be adopted to provide full federal benefits to federal lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) workers and their families.

The Council also commends Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen for her personal support, both of domestic partner benefits and protections, and of the LGBT human rights provisions in the bill. It further commends the strong and vocal support for the latter provisions expressed at the markup by Reps. Gerald Connolly (D-VA), Diane Watson (D-CA), Bill Delahunt (D-MA), and Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX).

The Council, which seeks a stronger U.S. voice on behalf of fair treatment and equal citizen rights for LGBT individuals at home and abroad, has sent a letter to Chairman Berman on these provisions. In that letter, Council Chair Mark Bromley noted that “LGBT-inclusive workplace policies at the Department of State are essential” to the above goal; “so is greater vigilance in how the Department reports on and responds to growing evidence of a genuine crisis in human rights abuse directed at LGBT individuals in many countries around the globe.”

Former U.S. Ambassador Michael Guest, who advises the Council, also submitted a letter to Chairman Berman this week, explaining in compelling detail the discrimination against LGBT employees that caused him to end his 26-year State Department career in November 2007. Noting that for him today’s “legislation is intensely personal,” his letter explains that while both he and his partner had accepted the sacrifices attached to a diplomatic career, neither could accept that “the same government and country we served would in turn honor that service by treating (his partner) as a second-class citizen.” The letter concludes that “Men and women who work side-by-side, under identical conditions of service, should be accorded equal workplace treatment, for us and for our families. This is a matter of principle, and indeed of national integrity. Anything short of full and equal treatment dishonors the service of LGBT Americans, fails our families, and tarnishes our country’s integrity.”

Copies of both letters are available on the Council’s website at www.GlobalEquality.org