

The Council for Global Equality



Advancing an American Foreign Policy
Inclusive of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

CONTACT INFORMATION

Contact: Henry Pacheco
202-719-0511
Henry@GlobalEquality.org

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 17, 2009
www.GlobalEquality.org

Washington, DC, June 17, 2009 – During a White House ceremony in the Oval Office today, President Obama signed a Presidential Memorandum granting limited domestic partnership benefits to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) employees of the federal government, including U.S. diplomats serving in the country’s many embassies and missions around the world. In a written statement, President Obama recognized that it was the lack of such benefits in the State Department that forced Michael Guest, the country’s first Senate-confirmed, openly gay U.S. Ambassador and now a Senior Advisor to the Council for Global Equality, to leave his diplomatic career, “because he believed that the country he served was failing to implement the principles of equality it espoused abroad.”

President Obama went on to note that “[i]t is too late to prevent Ambassador Guest from having to make the choice he made, but today I am proud to issue a Presidential Memorandum that will go a long way toward achieving equality for many of the hard-working, dedicated, and patriotic LGBT Americans serving in our Federal Government – Americans like Ambassador Guest.” (Read full White House statement http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Statement-by-the-President-on-the-Presidential-Memorandum-on-Federal-Benefits-and-Non-Discrimination-and-Support-of-the-Lieberman-Baldwin-Benefits-Legislation/)

From his position at the Council, Guest welcomed today’s announcement, saying he is “personally grateful that President Obama and Secretary Clinton have moved to provide fair protections and benefits for gay and lesbian Foreign Service Officers and their families.” He also noted that the White House announcement provided “needed closure” to his diplomatic career, and that he trusts the move “will be but the first in a series of energetic steps to provide full and equal civil rights for all LGBT Americans, in keeping with our country’s founding principles.”

Julie Dorf, another Senior Advisor to the Council, explained that “the President seemed to be trying to go as far as he could to extend benefits, but the White House is limited by discriminatory provisions that are still entrenched in existing federal legislation.” Dorf cautioned that “the President himself recognized that we have a long way to go to extend full benefits to all LGBT employees in the federal workforce – and to provide for the millions of LGBT Americans who are trying to care for their families in these difficult economic times.”

The Council for Global Equality is an alliance of fourteen prominent U.S. human rights and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) advocacy organizations. Working in Coalition, the Council seeks a stronger U.S. voice on behalf of fair treatment and equal rights for LGBT individuals at home and abroad. Since joining the Council, Guest has led the organization’s efforts to secure domestic partnership benefits within the State Department.

“Having won many of the employment benefits that are unique to those who are proudly serving our country in diplomatic missions overseas,” Mark Bromley, the Council’s Chair, noted that “the Council is now eager to join President Obama in his call to guarantee full domestic partnership benefits across the entire federal workforce, which is the nation’s largest employer, by enacting the Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act in Congress, and by repealing the Defense of Marriage Act.” (Read the White House Presidential Memorandum <http://whitehouse.gov/asset.aspx?AssetId=1994>)