

**Human Resources Lunch
Out and Equal Conference
Orlando, Florida
October 14, 2009**

Thank you. I appreciate being invited to join in offering thoughts on how you, as HR and diversity professionals, can strengthen your companies' commitment to diversity and equality abroad.

I see some familiar faces from last year's "Out and Equal" summit in Austin, where I spoke about my decision to end my Foreign Service career because of workplace discrimination at the State Department. To bring closure to those remarks, I should tell you that I subsequently had the opportunity to raise that issue while serving on President Obama's Transition Team. As you may have heard, the President amended those policies in June, giving the families of gay and lesbian employees the same State Department-specific protections, training and benefits that those of straight employees long have enjoyed. For that I'm deeply grateful.

The President chose to stand on principle. That's what I want us to talk about today – standing on principle.

You know, shortly before I ended my career, I gave a leadership talk at the State Department's Foreign Service Institute, to a group of newly minted Senior Foreign Service Officers.

I remember being immensely sad at that time – sad because I was leaving an institution that I loved, sad because I felt, in a certain way, that I had failed. In that talk, I confided that I was having a hard time accepting the reality that, because I'd been so visible in pushing for LGBT rights in our personnel policies, I'd always be remembered as "the gay ambassador." I'd spent 26 years building a career, building a reputation for professionalism, and for total commitment to that profession. For that career to be reduced to those three words, "the gay ambassador" – something that said nothing of my reasons for service or, in fact, of my achievements – well, that was hard for me to face, hard for me to bear.

And then someone in the audience raised his hand and offered a comment that I still cherish. He and his wife had served many years earlier in Romania and had continued to follow events in that country, including during my term as

Ambassador. He said that many people associated my name with the principled stance I had taken against corruption in that country, and with my call for higher standards of government accountability and attention to the rule of law. And if some chose to remember me for my efforts on workplace equality – well, being remembered for having stood on principle in Washington was not, in the end, such a bad thing.

That story came to mind when I was thinking of what to say to you today. You see, I have no doubt that all of you are talented professionals. And I applaud you for that. But we can all do our jobs with great professionalism. We can put in 80 hours a week; we can be the ones that volunteer to fill in as needed for our colleagues. We can up the number of employees trained per month, or streamline employee relocation procedures, with reduced costs. We can be known as the engine that keeps the office going.

All of these are good things. But the question is whether they're enough. Are they the obituary we want? Well, not for me – and I hope you feel the same. I hope you want to make a difference in life that goes beyond the so-called corporate bottom line – to know that you looked beyond the in-box and had a real impact on the wider world. Because those of you who work for global companies have enormous power to make a real difference in this world – power that you may not fully realize.

For more than a quarter century, I had the privilege of representing our country at America's embassies and consulates abroad. But your companies are also the face of America. And the principles embedded in your logos are seen, by your foreign employees and the broader public alike, as representing our country.

Now, American policy decisions are not always liked. But America is still respected for the principles we've espoused, and for our weight in world affairs. We're admired for our can-do attitude, the practical way we approach problems. And when U.S. companies bring jobs to countries that need them, that, too, is very welcome.

All of this gives you and your corporations enormous influence in so many countries that strive to partner with us, or to find for themselves the path we've charted to prosperity. What you do with that influence is, of course, a matter of choice.

Across my career, I've seen fabulous examples of companies that are using that influence to do good things. Some involve themselves in what's commonly called "corporate social responsibility" – giving back in tangible ways to the communities in which they're located.

Other companies go further, using their influence to compel economic change in some pretty difficult operating environments. In some countries, the need may be tax or regulatory reform. In others, it's to reduce red tape, not only for your own good but to improve the local business climate. Or maybe the goal is stronger protections of intellectual property rights.

But I've also seen companies that see a broader picture – one where immediate business interests are barely a fragment of a bigger societal need. A great example comes from my tenure in Romania, where endemic corruption was and remains a serious societal problem. That became my signature issue as Ambassador. And the American Chamber of Commerce was right there beside me, every step of the way, pushing to stem the influence of corruption in all aspects of public life.

You see, the companies there understood that this was an issue of ethics and values – relating, in some very fundamental way, not only to the business climate, but to Romania's future, and indeed to what we stand for in this country. I can assure you that the Romanian people saw the U.S. embassy and American corporations as standing on their side. And even some of those who were part of Romania's back-room decision-making process admitted admiration for how our policies aligned with our values.

Today I ask quite simply that your companies align your workplace practices abroad with the values that your HRC Corporate Equality Index scores are meant to reflect at home. I ask you to support and implement full workplace equality for all of your LGBT employees, American or not, wherever you operate abroad.

I ask this knowing full well that not every society has thought this issue through. Certainly we, in this country, haven't done so, at least not to an acceptable conclusion. And I know, too, that there are many countries that don't share American ideals. But you don't owe your loyalty to them. That loyalty is owed to the LGBT men and women who support your company's needs – and indeed to our country, and to the principles that guided its

foundation. And if your corporations' support for equality really is based on principle, it cannot stop at water's edge.

You know, when I was dealing with LGBT workplace issues at the State Department, I gave our human resources bureau chief a list of Fortune 500 companies that provide relocation and other benefits for the families of gay and lesbian employees. I tried to convince him that the Department needed to do the same to compete for and keep the best talent. And I remember saying that I found it sad that the federal government had ceded to corporate America its leadership role in civil rights – a role I remembered Washington having during my growing-up years in the 60's.

But now that I've left government, I've come full-circle. It's great that corporate America has taken that lead. That's what we should want – citizens taking action to strengthen our communities, and to make our country a fairer place, not because the government requires it, but because it's the right thing to do.

And I've also come to realize that corporate America has far more freedom to act than political America does. Certainly I see this every day, living as I do in Washington, DC. And those of you who've watched a Congressional debate on C-Span have seen it too. Washington has become yet another arena for America's culture wars – with debates and floor statements more often about votes and constituent relations than it really is about a search for the common good. And so progress too often is incremental, based on compromise rather than on principle.

That same relative freedom applies overseas. Every word an Ambassador utters, every action an embassy takes, is parsed and whittled and debated. But companies fly below that radar. The same hysterics aren't attached to your every move. And because of the jobs you bring to the economy, local and national officials find ways of accommodating you.

In other words, you have leverage. You don't have to take my word for this. Just ask IBM, which took a principled stand on the hiring of African-Americans in my near-native state of North Carolina many years ago. That took courage, but it helped change our country for the better. Each of you has the same power to make a difference overseas.

Now, I don't mean to imply that establishing global workplace policies is universally easy. Some of you know first-hand that it is not. But when your standard is one of workplace equality, and you hold to that standard, you're not psychoanalyzed so much. Those policies will be noticed, and that's good – but they'll be seen just as part of your corporate package, part of who you are. And you'll have credibility that the U.S. government can't claim. After all, you're ahead in this race. You're already sprinting down the track, and Washington – well, Washington is just lacing up. And now's the time for you to break the tape.

The Council for Global Equality, of which I'm a part, has just issued a report on how to do this. We have copies somewhere in this room. Out and Equal, the Human Rights Campaign, and Immigration Equality also contributed to the report. It outlines positive benefits that flow from actions you can take to anchor equality abroad. I hope you'll take a copy back with you and share it within your company, and then talk about what you can do to promote equality in your overseas operations.

You see, I'm sure that your overseas offices rely, as American embassies do, on local hires to steer many management functions. They may be among the best talent of the countries in which you're located. But as talented as they may be, they're largely products of their culture and local environment.

Maybe they live in countries where homosexual relations are criminalized, or where it's just taboo. Maybe the closet is so deep that they don't even know there are gay or lesbian or transgender employees on the staff.

And so unless you have global human resource policies that affirm equality for LGBT employees system-wide, the men and women who guide your local operations may never have thought about what they could do to modernize your policies.

You may be following the letter of the law, not what a careful reading of the law actually allows. There may have been no thoughtful consideration of what can be done if the heart is willing – no brainstorming or strategic thinking and planning for how your company can stand on the principle of a safe and fair workplace for your LGBT employees.

My friends, you have the power to change that. In some countries, local law won't impede you from instituting equal workplace policies for all employees,

gay or straight. And even at the other end of the spectrum, where homosexuality remains criminalized, you may find creative ways to support your LGBT employees, short of contravening law. And you may decide that you owe it to those employees to use your quiet influence, your trusted contacts, to urge that laws be changed in the interest of fairness and of human rights. But any way you look at this, it likely will take your engagement, and your principled determination, to make it happen.

I'm mindful that I'm issuing you a problem to deal with, not a set of solutions. But there are circles of support to help you figure this out. Organizations like Out and Equal and Immigration Equality can provide resources here in the U.S., of course. But the most important resources are in the field.

Earlier I mentioned the local American Chamber of Commerce, which was such a great partner in fighting corruption in Romania. There are Chambers in most major capitals – and I would bet that a range of company members in most of them are grappling with the same workplace issues that you are. Forging a common approach isn't just a matter of safety in numbers – it's a sound strategy for thinking through all the issues and angles, and for collectively using contacts and influence to ensure success.

You may also find useful contacts at local embassies. Many European countries are ahead of us in dealing successively with LGBT issues, and so they may provide good advice and partnership. But even in times when an unsympathetic Administration is in power – you know, like the last one – there always are Foreign Service Officers who were inspired to government service by the power of American ideals: people who want the world to be a better and fairer place, and who I bet will run interference gladly, when your company is struggling to do the right thing. And that can make a difference.

I speak in that regard very much from personal experience. And I know that the change we seek, the change this conference really is all about, never will come unless it's willful – unless men and women like you are committed from the head and from the heart to make it happen.

Because that's what turns principle into reality. And if you're prepared to live your ideals, what a different place this world can become.

Thank you.