

## Remarks by GLIFAA President Bob Gilchrist at Thank-You Toast, August 5, 2009

Under Secretary Kennedy, friends, colleagues – thank you all for coming today.

I am Bob Gilchrist, president of GLIFAA, and before moving on to remarks, I'd also like to introduce other GLIFAA board members here – Policy Director Ajit Joshi; Civil Rights Director/spokesperson and former GLIFAA President Michelle Schohn; Secretary/Treasurer John Wiecking; and Social Committee Chair David Tessler, who so superbly organized this event today. I also extend best wishes from those on the board who could not be here – Vice President Kerri Hannan; Communications Director Ashton Giese; and Post Representative Coordinator Selim Ariturk, who remains active in our organization from distant Baku.

This event is not about the board though. This is an event hosted by all the members of GLIFAA – in Washington and elsewhere -- to thank YOU, our friends and colleagues who helped us achieve so much towards greater equality for the families of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) personnel in foreign affairs agencies.

This year has been historic. And for GLIFAA members who have worked for years for equality, it has been nothing less than amazing in terms of the changes we have seen. But this year's events did not happen by magic and were not achieved by GLIFAA members alone. They happened as a result of both public and behind-the-scenes efforts by everyone here, and by the many others we invited who were not able to attend, in many cases because they are serving in our embassies and missions overseas.

In the process, I might add, we are proud that GLIFAA has also received national level attention, including a nomination as Employee Resource Group of the Year by the national organization Out & Equal. The awards ceremony for this will be held October 8 during a national workplace summit.

**I'd like to turn our attention now, however, to recognize our allies who have been key in making this year historic. I should add that this isn't close to a complete list, but is limited by time and fear that a giant hook will pull me away if I go on for too long.**

In particular, I'd like to thank Under Secretary Kennedy, who will provide some remarks shortly. His commitment and leadership ensured that Secretary Clinton's vision of greater equality for LGBT families could be achieved in the State Department in near record time. He spoke to GLIFAA candidly and openly, making clear that we were not pushing against a brick wall in our approaches to senior management, but rather against an open door. Thanks also to Danny Stoian, on M staff, for his responsiveness and commitment.

I'd like to thank our friends in the Office of the Legal Advisor. Harold Koh is longtime friend of GLIFAA's. We are fully cognizant of the quiet leadership of Principal Deputy

Legal Advisor Joan Donoghue, Jim Thessin and a core team of other lawyers who looked not at what the so-called Defense of Marriage Act prevents, but rather at the many things that can be done despite this legislation that our members hope will one-day be repealed. And their sleeves remain rolled up, as the L team works to amend bilateral work treaties to include same-sex partners and encourage other governments to fully accredit LGBT family members.

I'd like to thank Assistant Secretary Janice Jacobs and her team in CA, for – among other steps -- working quickly to extend diplomatic passports to our American partners, and working creatively with DHS on remedies that will hopefully allow non-American partners to more easily accompany personnel on assignment in the U.S.

I'd like to thank the Bureau of Human Resources, including former DG Thomas, PDAS Taylor, and Karen Krueger who kept us apprised on developments and ensured the HR machine was ready to move full steam ahead when President Obama and the Secretary made their announcements. We congratulate Director General and longstanding GLIFAA friend Nancy Powell on her appointment and look forward to working with her as well.

Thank you to Office of Civil Rights Director Robinson and his staff, particularly David King, Somer Bessire-Briers, Verena Sander and Shireen Dodson, for all their support, and to Leslie Teixeira and others in the Family Liaison Office who never lost track of the fact that same-sex partner families should be no less or more equal than those of opposite sex partners.

Thank you to the current and former chairs of USAID's Executive Diversity Council: Counselor Lisa Chiles and her predecessor Mosina Jordan. Thank you to Foreign Agricultural Service Administrator Mike Michener and his staff who are trying to implement the new policies on their end.

Thank you to successive boards of AFSA, who've stuck with us since before the enactment of the Member of Household policy and remain our allies today.

And finally, thank you to our 2200 friends and colleagues in Washington and around the world who signed the letter we provided Secretary Clinton in January seeking an extension of key benefits to same-sex partners. A number of you are here today. We were awestruck by the robust support for equality we received from our colleagues and our friends. And the letter came at a historic juncture. We had a new Secretary already committed to equality, and a fully supportive President. We had a lineup of colleagues at senior, mid, and even entry level allies ready to develop and implement new inclusive policies. And we had strong supporters – in this building, in Washington, and beyond – who helped us move this mountain forward, including through the letter.

That said, there is still much to be achieved towards full equality. Because of legal restrictions, same-sex partners of federal employees still do not have access to federally

subsidized health insurance, nor may they inherit pensions. Dual national couples struggle to plan their futures, as non-American partners do not have access to expedited citizenship or the legal means for permanent immigration. Gay and lesbian Marines serve their country alongside us in our Embassies worldwide but cannot be open about who they are without fear of intimidation and discharge. There are more transgender employees in our workplace, and we need to think about how to support them, including through access to health insurance for transitioning and inclusion of gender identity/expression in our non discrimination policy. We hope in the not too distant future for an executive order to ensure they cannot be fired simply for who they are.

In addition, there are challenges in other agencies -- FCS, FAS, Peace Corps, MCC, DOJ, CDC and others have not yet adopted the new measures implemented at State -- and at USAID just yesterday. It may also take time, and a lot of elbow grease, to ensure that other governments in some parts of the world catch up with the changes happening here.

I'd now like to turn briefly to a slightly different issue.

Over the years, our friends have approached us to ask how they can help GLIFAA more, both as colleagues and as citizens. And I am proud to say today that we have an answer. We have started a new initiative called "GLIFAA Friends". It's a gay-straight alliance for everyone who believes in equality. I ask you to pick up a "GLIFAA Friends" postcard on your way out to post it where others will see it and ask about it. I ask you to visit our new GLIFAA Friends website: [www.glifaa.org/friends](http://www.glifaa.org/friends), where you can sign up for email alerts that will keep you up-to-date on ways you can help. Please -- take a postcard, visit our website, consider registering, stay with us, take action. Our progress will only continue if our GLIFAA Friends stay by our side.

And on that note, let me raise a glass to all of you. Thank you for supporting us. Thank you for bringing the U.S. one more step down that historical path to equality.

And now I'd like to thank again and introduce one of our best GLIFAA friends, Under Secretary for Management Patrick Kennedy.