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Dromm Applauds President's Order to End DOMA
Obama Orders End to Defense of Federal Gay Marriage Law

Jackson Heights, NY, February 23, 2011 -- In a major victory for civil rights for the LGBT community, President Barack Obama has ordered the Justice Department to drop its defense of a central part of the 1996 law that bars the federal government from recognizing same-sex unions, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder say they've concluded the law is unconstitutional.

At a press conference on Wednesday, New York City Council Member Daniel Dromm, a leader in the LGBT movement, spoke about the importance of this new development.

"This is truly a historic moment in the history of our country. It's the first time the President of the United States has recognized the rights of lesbian and gay people to marry," said Council Member Daniel Dromm (D-Queens). "I am particularly pleased that President Obama and Attorney General Holder have equated sexual orientation with other protected classes like race, religion, color and creed."

Brendan Fay, founder of the Civil Marriage Trail Project, crossed the border to Canada on July 27, 2003 to get married. An Irish immigrant and marriage equality activist, Fay was among the first couples to cross the border. Since then, he has helped numerous couples do the same, including Edie Windsor, who sued the federal government in 2010 for failing to recognize her marriage to her partner of 44 years and whose case is referenced in Attorney General Holder's letter.

"Today marks a leap forward on the road to equality," Fay stated. "We have a ways to go, but this is a step in the right direction. DOMA has deprived same sex couples of various rights, including tax, medical and housing benefits. Just this past week, my spouse was informed by his employer that he couldn't extend his health coverage to me. But today, I have hope that this will eventually change and I look forward to the day when no couple will have to cross a border for the simple right to marry."

"This decision around DOMA is a clear sign that times are changing. New York has been lagging behind other states in this regard," said Ron Zacchi, Executive Director of Marriage Equality New York. "New Yorkers still need to travel out of state to get married. Let this be a sign to the New York State legislature to pass marriage equality in New York."

"This is a historic moment in U.S. history," said Kathleen Walsh D'Arcy, co-chair, St. Pat's for All Parade. "I applaud the president and the attorney general's statement today regarding the new direction that the Justice Department is taking to ensure the civil rights of all people in the United States of America. LGBT couples who are committed to each other should have the same legal and civil rights under the law."

"Today is a day of celebration," said Michael Mallon, corresponding secretary of Stonewall Democratic Club of New York City. "I am elated by the Obama administration's stance that the Defense of Marriage Act should be struck down as a violation of same-sex couples' rights to equal protection under the law. Today, the president demonstrated that he is a true advocate of human rights for all people, including members of the LGBT community. I implore all federal and state legislators in this country to follow President Obama's outstanding example."

Gary Paul Gilbert, a volunteer for the Empire State Pride Agenda has been together with his husband Murdoch Matthew for 28 years. They were married in Montreal five years ago. Currently, New York State recognizes their marriage from Canada which entitles them to over 1300 state rights and obligations, but the third part of the Federal Defense of Marriage Act prohibits the federal government from recognizing their marriage, depriving them of over 1100 federal rights.

"Today, Eric Holder's letter to Congress would potentially entitle us to over 1100 federal rights enjoyed by every other couple," said Gilbert. "It would help us to honor our obligation to each other as a couple."

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