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REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Good evening everyone.

Elliott, Andrew, Senator Feingold, Alan, colleagues, friends - - thank you to the Pride Agenda for having me here tonight, and thank you - Anne - for those kind words.....

It is an honor to be here this evening, in the company of so many people who have done so much for our community.

You know it occurred to me coming here tonight that some people in this audience probably have no idea what the City Council is much less what the Speaker does. That's ok. Before I started working for the Council it was a mystery to me too.

I'll simply tell you that among other activities, we're the ones who propose and pass the City's laws and hold those exciting 3 hour hearings at City Hall. Now, for those of you who can't get down to City Hall in person, be sure to turn to Channel 74 where you can watch them gavel to gavel. You'll see for yourself that democracy in action is almost as thrilling as Grey's Anatomy.

In all seriousness...since becoming Speaker of the City Council, I've gone to many events and delivered remarks on numerous topics of concern to New Yorkers.

For some reason, though, tonight's invitation to speak before all of you made me apprehensive. And it wasn't just because along with every gay man in the room, I'm a big fan of Anne Hathaway's.

Anne, Loved the movie, loved the outfits.

So, given this apprehension, I did what any New Yorker would do in my situation.

I talked to a therapist.

No - - - not my therapist, New York Post if you're out there - - but to a friend who happens to be a therapist. She was, of course, amused by my predicament.

“Why would you be nervous,” she said. “Relax, Chris. You’re going to be talking to a bunch of gay people...these are your people!”

She was right. But the truth is - - that was exactly why I was so anxious about this evening. The bottom line is I feel enormous responsibility to our LGBT community.

And it’s also because of the deep gratitude I feel to so many of you. Thank you for working tirelessly on behalf of our community and for your support.

You have literally brought me to this place. And in doing so, you have lifted up our whole community -- and our struggle for equal rights.

Every day I walk into City Hall, I recognize the tremendous responsibility of my position. Deciding with my colleagues how to spend \$50 billion of your taxpayer dollars, and working on initiatives and laws that improve our city, are certainly key reasons for this.

But another reason is that I never forget where I’ve come from.

While much of the work I do is obviously not specifically related to LGBT issues, my experience and the experience we all share as LGBT people is a part of the prism of my daily consciousness.

And I often hear from people throughout the country who make my responsibility to LGBT people abundantly clear.

A month after I was sworn in as Speaker, I received a letter from Joe, a young man in California.

He wrote: “I am a junior at a secondary school in Los Angeles. I came out to my parents at age 14. My parents were amazing with my coming out experience. I then came out to all my family and friends, brought back my school’s Gay-Straight Alliance, and organized a pro-gay marriage rally to show teen support for marriage equality.

I tell you my story, he said, not because it’s unique or unusual but because if it were not for officials like you, I would not be treated as an equal by friends, family, or in school. Thank you for your courageous and unwaivering leadership!”

When I called Joe to tell him how grateful I was for his letter, I told him that courageous people like him make it possible for there to be people like me. And in that spirit, I want to acknowledge each of you this evening for your courage and your leadership. Without you behind me, and alongside me, there’s very little I could accomplish.

Coming here tonight has made me think about some of the milestones we have through together. And we have come through a lot.

25 years ago, Karen Thompson was forced into a legal battle for the right to visit her partner Sharon Kowalski in the hospital, after Sharon was severely disabled by a car accident. As we know, they won that fight in 1991.

20 years ago, we didn’t have a gay rights law in New York City.

15 years ago, we didn’t have a Domestic Partnership Law.

5 years ago, we didn’t have a Transgender Civil rights law.

And a month ago, we didn't have a soon to be Governor who has said he not only supports gay marriage but will introduce legislation to make it a reality.

Elliott, I will be with you in this effort every step of the way.

Yes, we have all come quite a distance together and we are going to go even further.

The arch of history always bends towards justice and equality. ...And as Martin Luther King said, "Justice delayed is justice denied."

Despite the - - convoluted - - confused - - , confounding - - callous - - and crazy - - decision by the New York State Court of Appeals, we will see the day when same sex couples are seen as true equals in the eyes of the law.

Make no mistake about it we are ready to fight for this right.

Ladies and ladies; gentlemen and gentlemen, the simple fact is: we will marry. As some of you know, my activism began on the steps of City Hall protesting for tenants rights and LGBT rights.

Like many of you in this room, I did whatever outrageous thing it took to get the attention our issues deserved.

I threatened to go topless - - died my hair purple - - yes, there are even photos - -

That is, there are photos of me with purple hair, not topless since I didn't actually go topless - - - - And now I as I stand on the steps of City Hall - - yes, like all of us a bit more grown up, a lot wiser, red hair instead of purple - -my desire to fight for justice and equality for LGBT people is more resolute than ever. And I know that each you feels the same.

This summer, I gave the commencement speech for the graduation class at Harvey Milk High School. I talked to students about their fears and the stigma they feel. My advice to them was to push through their fear by doing something every day that they are afraid of.

I try to take my own advice.

Tonight, I stand before you to tell you that I fully embrace the responsibility you have all placed in me. With this responsibility comes opportunity. With fear, comes resolve. And with injustice, the commitment to fight for what's right.

As the saying goes, "To whom much is given, much is expected." I try to live by this every day and I know I can count on you to never let me forget it.

Again, my deep thanks to each and every one of you for all that you do for our community. I look forward to our hard work ahead and to making much more progress together.

Thank you and good night.