

LGBTQ IOWA SPIRIT DAY SPEECH

Thank you for having me. It is a tremendous honor to join you in celebrating Iowa's LGBTQ students and educators—and the schools who are improving the lives of LGBTQ youth across the Hawkeye state.

On the heels of the 5th annual Spirit Day...and just a few months removed from the historic Supreme Court decision...

...I am proud to say that we are finally—and rightfully—having a real debate about how to ensure equality for *all* LGBTQ Americans, in every part of public life.

But as you know, we owe you more than words. We owe you action.

My name is Martin O'Malley. I am a Democrat, running for president.

I am running for one reason and one reason only, and that is to renew the truth of the American Dream that we share—for *all* Americans.

It is the very real and concrete promise, that—whatever your parents' zip code, whatever their income—through your own grit, your own talent, your own determination, and your own love of family...you should be able, with your hard work, to get ahead.

Call it an economy that works for all of us. Call it a country that works for all of us. We have an American formula that made us the “land of opportunity”.

And our formula is that, in every generation, together we have taken actions—not words, but actions—to *include* more and more people, more fully, in the life of our nation.

LGBT RECORD

Over the past decade, there is no group of people who have fought harder to be *included*—to be able to enjoy the same equal rights as any other American—than the LGBTQ community.

I am proud to have stood by your side in that fight from the start of my career.

As Mayor of Baltimore, I signed the state's first anti-transgender discrimination bill.

As Governor of Maryland, I expanded our state's longstanding protections against discrimination—so that no one could be fired, denied housing, or denied public or private services in our state because they are gay or transgender.

And throughout my career— including on my presidential campaign – I have been fortunate to work closely with advisors and senior staff members who reflect the diversity of the LGBTQ community: including young people, immigrants, and people of color.

But perhaps what I'm most proud of is standing up for *marriage equality as a human right*.

During the debate on marriage equality in our state, I joined supporters outside of the Maryland House chambers who were anxiously awaiting the vote on our marriage equality bill.

There, I met two moms and their 4-year-old son Will. After standing for hours, Will was tired and seemed a bit uninterested. I could only imagine how hard it would be to understand the complex discussions as a 4-year-old.

But the next day I saw a photo of Will and his family taken right after the vote. His little face was lit up with joy, and he was cheering as his moms hugged him with the love that only a mother can provide.

Will may not have understood the debates, but his smile after the vote proved one very important thing: even a 4-year-old knows the value of human dignity.

Even so, after I signed marriage equality into law, we faced stiff opposition. Thinking that the people were against us, they challenged this historic expansion of civil rights with a referendum.

So went to the people. We forged a new consensus and mobilized thousands of Marylanders to rally for the dignity and equality that 4 year-old Will easily recognized.

And almost exactly three years ago today, we won that fight—becoming the *first state* to successfully defend marriage equality at the ballot box.

BULLYING

Now, thanks to the brave Americans who earned a victory before the Supreme Court—and Jim Obergefell and his husband had traveled to Maryland to legally marry, so the ruling is especially meaningful for us—marriage equality is the law of the land in *every* state.

But our fight is not over. We must continue to improve our laws, to more fully protect the rights of every individual—and more fully realize the vision of the open, respectful, and *inclusive* nation that we aspire to be.

No where is this work more important than when it comes to preventing and addressing bullying. Today in America, no child should be *excluded* from getting a safe, quality education.

But as all of you know too well, bullying is a persistent problem—particularly when it comes to our LGBTQ youth. More than half of LGBTQ students say they feel unsafe at school... and 3 out of 4 have been harassed because of their sexual orientation.

And too often, the most frequent victims of bullying are transgender kids. This leads to far more than hurt feelings—it leads to lower performance in school, diminished career aspirations, and shocking disparities in healthcare.

In Maryland, my wife Katie and I took action to prevent and address bullying as a matter of principle.

As Governor, I signed legislation requiring the state to develop a model policy for prohibiting bullying, harassment, and intimidation in every single school.

After bullying over social media pushed a Howard County teenager to take her own life, we took dramatic steps to fight cyber-bullying. In addition to making cyber-bullying a criminal offense, we established Maryland's first-ever bullying awareness week.

We also required schools to report incidents of harassment or intimidation. Armed with that information for the first time, we worked with school boards to target hotspots of bullying—and protect our most vulnerable

students.

And – memo to Governor Branstad – this sort of reporting is actually possible, and it actually works.

I have a suggestion: if Governor Branstad really wanted better data on bullying – as is required under Iowa state law – he might try using a better system than Survey Monkey to get information from schools.

And, if he really cared about protecting Iowa’s children from harassment and violence—maybe he would stop your so-called representatives from targeting people who are doing the good and hard work to prevent bullying in your state!

Yet just this week, we learned that the Iowa state legislature is launching a witch hunt against our hosts here tonight—Iowa Safe Schools—for holding an anti-bullying conference.

The leaders of Iowa Safe Schools came together to educate students and teachers. They joined hands to promote diversity, equality, and social justice. And now, they’re being attacked for trying to make Iowa a more welcoming and inclusive place!

In a nation where all of us are entitled to equal rights and protections, this cannot be tolerated.

And when it comes to the fight against bigotry and hatred, I will always have your back.

That’s why, as President, I would embrace a comprehensive agenda to tackle bullying in every school:

Requiring that all schools and districts implement anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies—policies that are crafted specifically to prevent and prohibit bullying of LGBTQ students...

Mandating that public colleges and universities do the same...

Prohibiting discrimination in public schools on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation...

Launching new federal grant programs to help schools and colleges put anti-bullying policies in place that actually work...

And creating real and meaningful penalties when schools fail to create safe environments for all of their students. Because schools that allow for unlawful discrimination should risk losing federal funding—and students who experience harassment, bullying, intimidation, and violence should have a legal cause of action under the law.

FEDERAL LGBT PROTECTIONS

Yet, we know that bullying is not the only challenge our children face.

Even though we’ve made progress, our LGBTQ youth still face a lifetime of uncertainty.

Too many of our young people are still asking: Will I be able to get my dream job? Will I be discriminated against—or attacked—for the way I look? Will I be able to live in the open, free of fear, with the person I love?

I believe we must answer these questions with compassion – and action.

Because while President Obama and Vice-President Biden have been powerful advocates for the LGBTQ community, too many Americans are still waiting for life *to get better*.

Because too many of our children still face, day in and day out, the worst forms of discrimination—as well as hateful homophobia and racism.

People are evicted from their homes, or fired from their jobs—just for being gay.

LGBTQ immigrants are abused and assaulted when they are detained behind chain link fences and razor wire.

Trans women of color are attacked and murdered.

Runaway gay and trans youth don't know where to turn for help without experiencing hatred and violence.

To truly achieve LGBTQ equality, we must win *all* of these fights—and as president, I will stand with you, leading with actions, not just words.

So, first and foremost, we must fight to pass the EQUALITY Act.

I was proud to be the first presidential candidate to endorse this critical legislation—because I saw how important our comprehensive non-discrimination legislation had been in Maryland.

It is time to end discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations and education, credit, and more as a nation—once and for all!

We must come together, to ensure that all of our children—especially our most vulnerable children—are able to live in a loving, caring, and stable home that is equally protected under the law.

That means ending discrimination in adoption and foster care ...

And reauthorizing and strengthening the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act—so we can locate, treat, and support homeless LGBTQ youth and their families.

We must fight to strengthen access to accessible, affordable, and quality care for all of the LGBTQ community.

One, by making it very clear to health providers, that when they receive federal assistance—including through Medicare and Medicaid, or under the Affordable Care Act—they have an obligation not to discriminate against people based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Two, by repealing ineffective abstinence-only education programs and providing comprehensive sex-ed for young people—including for LGBTQ youth.

And three, by continuing and fully funding the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program—which provides vital medical care and support services to young people.

And we must stop doing things that *hurt* our young people...

Banning deceptive and harmful “conversion therapies”;

Ending the practice of immigrant detention, especially for LGBTQ people;

And pushing states to repeal laws that criminalize people with HIV—because these laws are inconsistent with science, and they are harmful to public safety and public health.

These actions are not just common-sense solutions—they are an extension of the principles and of who we are as Americans.

CONCLUSION

This is my forward looking and specific vision of what we must do in the future to become a more inclusive, a more compassionate, and a more vibrant nation.

The other candidates might talk about who supported DOMA when – but I’m talking about what we must do, together, tomorrow.

And unlike the other candidates, I have actually gone to the mat for LGBTQ rights.

I didn’t just believe in marriage equality, I achieved marriage equality.

And when I tell you today that we need to provide better and more equitable healthcare to our transgender neighbors, that we must fight for the EQUALITY Act – it’s because I’ve done it, as an executive, and I know that it is necessary and that it is possible.

We need new leadership. We need actions, not words.

To be fearless about our progressive values... our ability to solve this problem...and our ability to make our economy work again for all of us.

We should be guided by a belief in the dignity of every person. A belief in our own responsibility to advance the common good. And an understanding that we're all in this together.

Now, there are a lot of people who would look you in the eye and tell you that you've got a tough fight.

Well you know what? -- I kind of like the tough fights. I’ve always been drawn to the tough fights.

Perhaps the toughness of the fight is the way the hidden God has of telling us we are fighting for something worth saving!

The American Dream is worth saving.

Our children's future is worth saving.

Our country is worth saving

It’s time to join the fight.

Together, you and I can and will rebuild the American Dream.

Thank you.

