

Thank you for having us on this special day. I feel very honored and humbled by the Profiles in Courage award. Honored, because of what this award stands for and what President Kennedy believed – principled governance for our country and its citizens. Humbled because we join award recipients who did their jobs with principle and in the national interest. It is very moving to be part of this award, an award that honors political courage—courage to challenge political leaders and interests. Our court will carry on --- but only if we all step up with the courage to say “NO!” to those special and moneyed interests.

Our court followed the rule of law, strongly believing in our constitution which guarantees equality for all Iowa citizens. I am grateful for the role I played in this decision and for this award.

Thank you Caroline and the Foundation for this award. Thank you to everyone here today. Thank you for what you believe in. Thank you for this honor. Much of what this award stands for and what Caroline Kennedy and her family wished in establishing this award was suggested by Robert F. Kennedy when he spoke in Cape Town in 1966 – two years, to the day, before he won the California primary.

*Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation. ... It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance. ...*

*Few are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues, the wrath of their society. Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential, vital quality for those who seek to change a world that yields most painfully to change. ...*

*The future does not belong to those who are content with today, apathetic toward common problems and their fellow man alike, timid and fearful in the face of new ideas and bold projects. Rather it will belong to those who can blend vision, reason, and courage in a personal commitment to the ideals and great enterprises of American Society.*

It was almost 30 years before apartheid ended in South Africa.

Right after our court filed the marriage equality case – Five days later – the court received a hand-written letter. This letter really brought home to me – what we did in our decision was right. The author, after a few introductory remarks, too profane to read here, stated:

*I defended the likes of you – as an American soldier in WWII and Korea. I conclude I served the wrong side – Hitler treated Queers the way that they should be treated – in the gas chambers! You are bastards.*

The emotion revealed was breathtaking. We cannot change such raw and intense feeling with nuanced discussion. But this brought home to me what the gay community and the families with gay members struggle with every day. It also satisfied me that we were right to resist the political or expedient solution – to withstand the intimidation. People and forces that exploit this fear, prejudice, and paranoia. They pressured our court to follow the will of the people, no matter how manipulated or orchestrated – no matter how it violates the basic human rights of being treated as equally as all other citizens. Such forces must be challenged. My hope is that we have contributed a tiny ripple of hope and that this ripple builds a current that can sweep away such prejudice.

The Profiles in Courage Award is made here at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum (1964-79). The Library was designed by I. M. Pei – the same designer of part of the Des Moines Art Center (1966-68). Pei said

One has to Persist: You have to identify the important things, and press for them, not give up.

What our court did was to justly and honestly interpret the Iowa constitution that guarantees equality for

all. We did this as political forces, seen and unseen, swirled around us. We identified the important things – fair and impartial judging, equal protection for all – and pressed for them. Our accepting this award says that we will not give up. We will push forward. We will persist.

Thank you.

*Remarks delivered by Michael Streit on accepting the 2012 John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award, May 7, 2012. (As Prepared for Delivery)*