

Remarks at Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce Annual Business and Leadership Conference

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Commerce Secretary Gary Locke

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Thank you for those kind words.

It's wonderful to be here today, and I want to thank the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce for inviting me to speak.

The partnership between the Chamber and the Obama administration has been strong from the outset. In fact, the chamber was the first LGBT organization invited to the White House – one week to the day after President Obama took office.

Since then, the administration has continued to seek progress on a variety of issues important to the LGBT community, from the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” to combating anti-gay bullying through the “It Gets Better” campaign.

I'm proud of the progress we're making on these issues, and I'm proud to have taken similar steps when I was governor of Washington state. Back in 2002, I signed a bill requiring schools to write anti-bullying policies that protected kids from taunting, including bullying that arose because of sexual orientation. Standing with me that day was a mother named Gabi Clayton, whose bisexual son Bill had taken his life after facing unbearable bullying. That's a tragedy no mother, no father should ever have to endure, and the Obama administration will continue to fight against this discrimination and harassment wherever we find it.

For all the progress we've made combating discrimination of LGBT Americans, we know that in communities across the country, there are LGBT people young and old who still feel alone....who feel as if they don't belong.

That's why organizations like the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce are so important. You help create a sense of community. A sense of solidarity. Your members are positive role models that young people can look to – to see real-world evidence that it really can get better.

But your importance extends well beyond the LGBT community. The chamber represents 1.4 million LGBT-owned businesses and partners with 125 corporations. That represents a lot of economic firepower that we're going to need to help rebuild the American economy.

Of course, it is also the primary mission of the Commerce Department to help spur economic growth that can create good jobs in America. And I'm delighted to see our shared interest formalized in the Memorandum of Understanding between the Chamber and the Department of Commerce I will sign.

Through this partnership, we will:

- Increase the pool of LGBT businesses that can successfully compete for contract and program opportunities;
- Improve the quality and effectiveness of information concerning Department technical and financial assistance programs; and
- Encourage Department prime contractors to enlist diverse suppliers for second-tier contracting opportunities and support procurement.

I also eagerly await advice the Chamber will provide to the Commerce Department on small business activities, including identifying potential barriers to participation in Commerce Department contracting opportunities.

I should also mention that it was great to hear all the success stories from the first-ever LGBT trade mission over the summer. The trip to Argentina sounds like it went phenomenally well, and I understand plans are underway for a 2011 trip to Brazil and possibly Colombia.

This is the sort of major work I hope will be expanded under our new partnership.

Today I just wanted to take a few moments to talk about how the Obama administration is trying to build a sustainable economic recovery. And before answering your questions, I'd like to leave you with some thoughts on how you might be able to help the cause.

As you all know, we have taken a variety of steps over the last few years to jumpstart the American economy.

It began with the passage of a Recovery Act that took us back from the brink of a second depression, and would ultimately save or create between 3 and 3.5 million jobs over the next 18 months.

The Recovery Act had three main components, funded in almost equal thirds.

- It had \$288 billion in tax cuts for working families, which included a making work pay tax credit, that gave families as much as \$800 in annual relief on their tax bill;

- The second third went for emergency aid to cash-strapped states as well as assistance to the most vulnerable Americans in the form of things like extended unemployment insurance and Medicaid funding ;
- And the final batch of funds went for important investments in infrastructure to spur not just immediate job creation but also long-term economic growth.

As many of you are aware, this did not do wonders for us at the polls.

But the fact is that right now, we've got hundreds of thousands of cops on the beat, teachers in the classroom and workers building new highways and bridges and sewer systems, because of this bill. Even John McCain's adviser conceded that without the Recovery Act, unemployment would likely be 11.5 percent -- two full points higher than it is now.

Now, the Recovery Act was a response to immediate crisis. But this crisis was really just the culmination of a lost decade where America wasn't innovating or creating at anywhere near the rate we needed to build sustainable economic growth.

For a decade, we largely sat by as our manufacturing base was hollowed out, and as we lost ground to other countries on emerging industries like clean energy.

America may still be a world leader in key metrics of economic success like levels of entrepreneurship, R&D investment and IT infrastructure -- but a much-cited report released last year concluded that no advanced economy in the world has done LESS than the United States to improve its competitive position over the last decade.

And the upshot of all this was a middle-class that was absolutely decimated. After adjusting for inflation, the average family income was actually less at the end of this decade than it was at the beginning. That had never happened in any post World War II economic recovery.

That's why the Recovery Act featured critical investments in infrastructure and in emerging industries like clean energy to help lay a foundation for sustainable long-term growth.

Many of the investments and the grants that we've been awarding have been in the form of seed money that will either encourage or even require matching private-sector investments. We've actually heard some people say the Recovery Act has effectively converted the Department of Energy into the world's largest clean energy venture capital fund.

Our desire to spur innovation is why we reformed the financial sector to reward the expansion of credit to growing businesses instead of pure speculation.

It's why we have cut taxes for small businesses eight different times, including eliminating capital gains on key investments, accelerated depreciation on new equipment and tax incentives to hire new workers.

We've also established a new \$30 billion Small Business Lending Fund which will provide capital to small banks with incentives to increase small business lending. This could support several multiples of the original \$30 billion in new credit.

I'm confident these measures and others are going to empower American businesses to innovate, to grow and to hire. This administration understands full well that the private sector can and must lead the way to recovery.

And if you are the engines of innovation and growth, then I believe the job of U.S. policymakers is to straighten and smoothen out the road ahead of you.

One of the most important areas where we're trying to smooth the road for you is in helping U.S. businesses gain more access to the 95 percent of the world's consumers who live outside the borders of the United States.

Right now only one percent of U.S. companies export – and of those that export, 58 percent export to only one country, typically to Mexico or Canada.

If we can just help that 58 percent export to one or two additional countries, our exports would grow substantially.

Earlier this year the President announced his National Export Initiative, which seeks to double U.S. exports in five years while supporting two million U.S. jobs.

It's an unprecedented effort, and it was designed with two overriding goals in mind: To put Americans back to work and ensure long-term economic growth.

Consider that today more than one in three manufacturing jobs and almost one in five agricultural jobs are tied directly to exports. And these are good jobs that provide good wages, paying 15% more than the typical wage in America.

The simple fact is this: The more American companies export, the more they produce. The more they produce the more people they hire. And that means more jobs.

The National Export Initiative is going to help spur exports by expanding access to credit for companies who want to export; increasing government trade promotion activities; and putting a sharper focus on knocking down trade barriers and ensuring that U.S. companies are competing on a level playing field in the global economy.

And we're already making a difference.

Consider the fact that:

- Exports have contributed as much to GDP growth as domestic consumption in each of the last four quarters of recovery;
- Through August of this year, exports were up 18 percent over the same period in 2009; and
- U.S. exports of manufactured goods so far in 2010 have risen by 22 percent over last year.

This is a good start, but with millions of Americans still searching for a job, and with countries around the world competing just as hard as we are, we can't let up for a second. And we won't.

So, these are some of the things we're doing to improve the business environment that all of you are operating in. But before I open things up to your questions, I just want to suggest one way that you can help improve the climate for innovation and job creation.

I think one of the challenges we face in reinvigorating the private sector is the fact that "the business community" and its leaders are not held in the highest esteem.

Millions of people around the world are still suffering from the aftermath of a financial crisis that resulted in large part from a toxic combination of greed, incompetence and shortsightedness from some of our business leaders.

And this came just a few years after accounting scandals at companies like Enron and a dot-com bust shook the global economy.

People have lost their homes, their jobs, their retirement savings and their future because of all this. They are mad. And they have a right to be.

It isn't fair that upstanding, responsible members of the business community are sometimes painted with this brush of mistrust from policymakers and the public. But that is the reality in 2010.

And if this continues, it will be increasingly difficult for business leaders to convince people that policies that are good for the business community are in fact good for everyone.

If business leaders aren't seen as responsible forces for progress, then increasingly they won't be at the table where decisions are made. They will be on the menu.

That's why I believe it's so important for you to get involved in communicating to politicians and your stakeholders what you do, how you contribute to your community and what policies you need to succeed.

I know that when you're busy meeting payroll, and competing in an absolutely unforgiving environment, that can seem like a luxury you don't have the time for.

But I believe our current economic challenges actually make it even more important for organizations like the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber and its members to be involved in shaping policy and public opinion.

Your companies are doing great things every single day that make people's lives immeasurably better. Get out there and tell your story. Show how you're making a difference. And help make the connection for people that when you succeed you:

- Provide good jobs so employees can provide for their families;
- You support community infrastructure through paying taxes and fees;
- You purchases goods and services from local suppliers and service providers, thus reinforcing local economic growth; and
- When you compete intensely, but also fairly, with all comers – then that competition sets off a virtuous cycle of innovation.

All of you have a tremendous opportunity to help ensure America continues down the path of growth and innovation and opportunity. I hope you will use it.