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House Equality Caucus Announces Creation of Transgender Equality Task Force

Washington, D.C. – The Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus announced today that it is forming a Transgender Equality Task Force. This task force is the first task force ever created by the LGBT Equality Caucus. The task force will analyze barriers to full legal and societal equality faced by the transgender community and will design legislative and other initiatives to make the American Dream more accessible to all transgender people.

The members of the Transgender Equality Task Force are: Rep. Mike Honda (Chair) (CA-17), Rep. Mike Quigley (IL-5), Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC-AL), Rep. Raul Grijalva (AZ-3), Rep. Chris Van Hollen (MD-8), Rep. Joe Kennedy (MA-4), Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (NJ-12) and Rep. Jackie Speier (CA-14).

“Transgender equality honors our most sacred ideals as Americans,” **Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi** said. “The Transgender Equality Taskforce represents the next step in House Democrats’ efforts to ensure that every person – no matter who they are or who they love – can enjoy ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. As we amplify the voices of transgender Americans in the Congress, let us also strive to ensure that every person has the freedom to be who they are at home, school, work, and in their communities.”

“This week, as we seek to raise awareness of the issues facing the trans community, it is important to renew our commitment to help trans individuals be free of the fear of violence or bullying just for being who they are,” said **Congressman Mike Honda (D-Silicon Valley), Chair of the Transgender Equality Task Force and Vice Chair of the LGBT Equality Caucus**. “It is my hope that by launching this workforce and holding a first-ever forum, we will reach some of my colleagues and encourage them to stand with the trans community. It is only through social change that we can truly elevate the conversation in this country and reach a place of true understanding and embrace all people for who they are.”

“For far too long, the transgender community has been the target of systemic violence, abuse and discrimination,” said **Congressman Mark Pocan (D-WI), Co-Chair of the LGBT Equality Caucus**. “More must be done to reduce these senseless acts of violence against transgender individuals, especially against women of color. The Transgender Equality taskforce will build on the tireless work of transgender advocates and find ways to address the rampant discrimination

faced by the transgender community. I'm proud to stand with my colleagues to ensure the transgender community receives the rights and protections they deserve."

"I'm pleased to see the formation of this important task force that seeks to educate Members of Congress and all of our communities on the values of acceptance, love and harmony for families who have transgender children, as Dexter and I have," said **Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-27)**. "We are proud of the valuable work that our son Rigo is doing to guide our nation on this sometimes difficult journey."

"We all celebrate the great strides we've made in recent years in the 'LGBT rights movement.' But too many times, the 'T' in 'LGBT' has been an afterthought," said **Congressman Jared Polis (CO-02), Co-Chair of the LGBT Equality Caucus**. "We need this task force because we need Congress to understand that trans people exist, and we need to take action on behalf of our trans constituents — so that they have equal treatment under the law and no longer have to fear for their personal safety."

"In the United States, no one should live in fear of being harassed, assaulted, or killed just because of who they are" said **Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney (NY-18), Co-Chair of the LGBT Equality Caucus**. "The Transgender Equality Task Force will shine a light on an issue that has gone unaddressed for far too long. I am committed to fighting for equality for all, and that must include members of the transgender community."

"This past year has been an amazing one for progress, but we can't stop now," said **Congressman Mike Quigley (IL-05), Vice-Chair of the LGBT Equality Caucus and Member of the Transgender Equality Task Force**. "Despite the recent gains in legal and social recognition at the federal and state levels, transgender Americans remain extremely vulnerable to harassment and violence. I'm hopeful that with this new voice in Washington, the Transgender Equality Task Force can start to move the needle on this issue. Because the status quo of violence and poverty in the transgender community is unacceptable."

"Every person deserves the opportunity to live their life without fear of harassment and discrimination," said **Congressman Chris Van Hollen (MD-8), Member of the Transgender Equality Task Force**. "Transgender Americans must overcome distinct hardships because, despite our pursuit of equality, our society isn't as inclusive as it can and should be. I look forward to working with the Transgender Equality Task Force task force to change that."

"We must fight to ensure equality becomes real for transgender Americans *everywhere* in the United States," said **Congresswoman Jackie Speier (CA-14), Member of the Transgender Equality Task Force**. "It is intolerable that in 2015 someone should be threatened with violence or lose their job because of who they are. For me, like so many other Americans, this battle is personal. My nephew is a young transgender man who will soon be searching for a job and a place to settle after college. He should not have to consider whether the state he moves to will allow employers, lenders, landlords, or even a court assembling a jury to discriminate against him legally. In the best tradition of Californians fighting for equality, I will continue to push for an end to so-called 'LGBT conversion therapy,' to end the ban on open service for transgender

soldiers, and to ensure that transgender Americans enjoy the full rights and privileges that every citizen deserves.”

“Every member of our society is entitled to full respect and equal protection under our laws,” said **Congressman Raul Grijalva (AZ-3), Member of the Transgender Equality Task Force**. “The Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus’s groundbreaking Transgender Equality Taskforce will help ensure our friends and loved ones who are gender non-conforming do not endure discrimination, unequal treatment, or even violence simply because of their gender identity. This taskforce will fight for the transgender community’s constitutionally protected pursuit of happiness, and enable them to safely be open about who they are. I hope this taskforce brings solace to transgender youths in our nation, and ignites for them the deep care that their representatives have for their livelihood. One more transgender youth taking their life due to lack of acceptance and bullying is too many. It’s past time we act.”

“From violence in their communities to discrimination in their workplaces, transgender Americans across this country too often find their day-to-day experiences clouded by the threat of prejudice and fear,” said **Congressman Joe Kennedy III (MA-04), Member of the Transgender Equality Task Force**. “As we seek to deliver on our promise of equal protection under the law, this country simply must do better for the transgender community. The Transgender Equality Task Force will help bring this issue to the forefront of federal policy and ensure our civil rights protections extend to those who need them most.”

“Today, for the first time, many Americans are learning about transgender issues in ways little known to many before,” said **Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC-AL), Member of the Transgender Equality Task Force**. “However, judging by the rapid acceptance of marriage equality and of gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans in the armed forces—each in fewer than 20 years—Americans are putting behind their prejudice based on the unknown. As an African American woman, I am heartened by the increasing willingness of the American people to discard old myths and prejudices. I cannot help but believe that the nation’s long experience with racial prejudice has left a deeper appreciation about the unacceptability of all forms of discrimination than most had realized. We will not rest until we see the same increasing acceptance that we have seen with people of color and gay and lesbian Americans. Prejudice in whatever form retreats when the group itself and their allies step forward.”

"As a Latino transman with loving support of family, friends, and colleagues, I struggle knowing that many trans people, particularly trans people of color, lack yet long for that same support, as well as for support from their communities,” said **Diego Miguel Sanchez, the Director of Policy for PFLAG National and first openly transgender senior Hill staffer**. “Trans and gender-expansive youth in particular should be able to live their lives—and hope for their futures—proudly, safely, and authentically, with the same promise their non-trans peers enjoy. It is time for us to be affirmed in our humanity, and recognized as a part of ‘We, the people...,’ inclusive of our beautiful diversity, and these Members of Congress creating the Transgender Equality Task Force is an exciting, promising step towards getting us closer to that goal sooner.”

"Transgender people - especially transgender women of color - face stigma, discrimination, family and community rejection, and a lack of access to health care and support services - challenges that marginalize them and leave them vulnerable to bias-motivated violence," said **Human Rights Campaign (HRC) President Chad Griffin**. "We look forward to working with the Equality Caucus and this new task force to find meaningful and substantive steps in advancing equality for transgender people."

"The formation of the Transgender Equality Task Force within the House Equality Caucus sends an important and powerful signal to transgender people throughout this country that they have allies not only walking the halls of Congress, but serving in Congress," said **Winnie Stachelberg, Executive Vice President of the Center for American Progress**. "We look forward to working with the members of the task force to raise awareness, educate the public, and push for the change that transgender people still so desperately need."

"At a time when transgender people are making historic progress but also facing unprecedented levels of both political backlash and deadly violence, we need allies to show leadership on fairness and equality more than ever," said **Harper Jean Tobin, Esp., Director of Policy for the National Transgender Law Center**. "NCTE thanks Congressman Honda and the Transgender Equality Task Force for stepping up to provide some of that leadership."

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The mission of the Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus is to promote lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) equality. The bi-partisan LGBT Equality Caucus is strongly committed to achieving the full enjoyment of human rights for LGBT people in the U.S. and around the world. By serving as a resource for Members of Congress, their staff, and the public on LGBT issues, the Caucus works toward the extension of equal rights, the repeal of discriminatory laws, the elimination of hate-motivated violence, and the improved health and wellbeing for all regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

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