

Part 1: Introduction

Good Morning!

You know, I really am so lucky to work with such a great team at The Gill Foundation. For weeks now, they've been kindly, and continuously, coaching me on this speech. Giving me two thumbs up, but also always reminding me of how critically important the next 10 to 15 minutes are:

"It's your first OutGiving, Courtney."

"You never get a second chance to make a first impression, Courtney."

"Who are you wearing, Courtney?"

"No, seriously, who are you wearing?"

The truth is, I agree. First impressions *are* important, and the way you can tell I agree is because I washed my hair this morning and wiped the baby puke off my blouse. Those of you who've had any experience with newborns or their equivalent, unyielding sleep deprivation, understand what I'm talking about. For the rest of you, just look at the circles under my eyes and take my word for it.

In all seriousness, though I may be a little sleepy, I, in all sincerity could not be happier than I am to be here with you today.

I doubt there are many, if any, of you that I haven't yet met face to face. But just in case, allow me to officially introduce myself. My name is XXX, I am the President and CEO of the Gill Foundation, and I'm wearing Ann Taylor Loft.

Part 2: Personal Anecdote

XX years ago, when I was a young girl growing up in XX, Georgia, the issues that confront us today as LGBT Americans, though pervasive, were never spoken of. Certainly not in my conservative home, or in my conservative town, or in my conservative church. Unfortunately, more often than not, the things we don't speak of become the things we are ashamed of. Shame, though it's invisible and weightless, is as solid and heavy as Georgia Live Oak. It pushes against your insides from the center, crowding out any room to breathe; and pretty soon you simply start to choke. Eventually, shame pushed me to the edges of my own life, and the lives of my family and friends, and, like so many of us, I was left with two choices: leave and live, or stay and suffocate.

So, I left. And the shame subsided and I started to breathe again, or, perhaps for the first time. Still, even after attending school at Wake-Forest and then studying at Stanford, there were times when that shame would return and I was left short of breath. At home, I was ashamed of being a lesbian; at school, I was ashamed of being from the South.

It's been a process: shedding the shame by giving voice to all those things we never spoke of around the dinner table or while getting my MBA. My wife XX and my brand new baby XX, are without a doubt, like breaths of fresh air. And, oddly, as my life gets more and more crowded, it also gets easier and easier to breathe.

Unfortunately, there are far too many LGBT Americans who cannot leave in order to live. And more importantly, they shouldn't *have* to. That's why we're here at OutGiving. Because we need to speak for those who can't push out the shame, let in some fresh air. LGBT Americans,

especially in the South, need some room to breathe right here at home. So that's what we're going to do.

Part 3: The Problem is Discrimination

The movement for LGBT equality exists on myriad levels – legislative, judicial, executive, and cultural, to name a few; and while we've made monumental strides on many of them we still have work to do. A recent Harris Poll revealed that 34% of non-LGBT Americans said they would be uncomfortable attending same-sex nuptials; a full third of non-LGBT Americans say that just *seeing a same-sex couple holding hands* makes them uncomfortable; and equally disappointing, a majority of Americans, 59% in fact, said that they would be uncomfortable if their child were in a relationship with a transgender person. These numbers mean different things to different people – to some, they are a sign of how far we've come, to others how far we've yet to go. Both are valid. But for the purposes of what we're gathered here this weekend to accomplish, I think these numbers are important because they reveal that despite, or as a result of, our recent victories there still exists a significant level of discomfort towards LGBT Americans, a degree of – let's call it what it is – fear of the things we're not supposed to speak of.

Luckily, there are people not afraid to speak. People like Michelle Tollotson.

Last May, in powerful testimony before the Houston City Council in support of the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance or HERO, Michelle Tollotson bravely spoke about the discrimination she experienced as a disabled, African-American, lesbian. Her words, though halting and difficult to discern, speak for themselves: "They hit me." She repeated over and over again. "They hit me."

Michelle went on to explain that she was bullied and physically assaulted, not by strangers on the street, but by her own neighbors.

She was beaten by her neighbors because she was a lesbian.

When Michelle reached out to her building's management company she was told that *she* was the problem, that it was *her* fault she was assaulted, and that *she* needed to move. Without the protections provided by the Equal Rights Ordinance, it was well within the rights of the Management Company to do what they did, or rather, to do nothing at all. As a result of the abuse Michelle experienced coupled with the extraordinary obstacles she faces everyday as a person with disabilities, she was unable to pay her rent. Facing imminent eviction, Michelle explained to the City Council that with no legal recourse she was left unprotected and vulnerable, adjectives that, for Americans like Michelle, represent real peril. Michelle's testimony was a study in contrasts, both heroic and heartbreaking. Here is a woman so brave that even the threat of physical violence doesn't deter her from speaking and so determined that even the seemingly insurmountable physical challenges that complicate just getting from her house to the City Council's chambers don't stop her from showing up. And yet, here is a brave woman, a hero if ever there was one, begging – yes, literally begging – the City Council to pass the Equal Rights Ordinance; to put protections in place so that she would have legal options to prevent being put out on the street.

In Roseville, Michigan, Krista and Jami Contreras were blessed with the birth of a brand-new baby. At six days old, Krista and Jami brought baby Bay into Eastlake Pediatrics for a wellness check-up. To their surprise, the pediatrician who had agreed to care for their child wasn't there.

In fact, Dr. Vesna Roi was absent because she didn't want to be there when the practice informed the new parents that "after praying on it" she was no longer willing to care for Baby Bay. The Dr.'s excuse? An inability to develop a personal patient-doctor relationship with the baby because of her faith. You heard correctly: because the parents were lesbians, the doctor wouldn't be able to develop a relationship *with the baby*. Shocked and angry, Krista and Jami have explained that though very much aware of anti-LGBT discrimination in the world they were dumbfounded to find it thrust so harshly into the insulated world of their newborn.

I have a lot of feelings about this story for obvious reasons; as a new mother, a lesbian, a woman, and a human being, this kind of cowardly bigotry – weakly disguised as it is behind a cloak of faith – well, it just PISSES. ME. OFF.

It's far too easy, and terrifying, to extrapolate from this case, using Dr. Roi's twisted logic, any number of horrifying scenarios in which a medical professional could jeopardize the life of a patient because they are LGBT. It's like we went from zero to sixty in the blink of an eye; from gay wedding cakes and Chik-Fil-A to the health of a newborn child and Michelle Tollotson beaten and homeless. Let's imagine two hypothetical points on the discrimination spectrum: at one end we have "holding hands in public causes discomfort" and on the other "refusing to treat a patient because they are LGBT or part of an LGBT family." Just think of how much space exists between those two points, cracks through which countless Americans – like you, me, Michelle, and Baby Bay – can, and will, fall.

Unless, that is, we do something about it.

Part 4: What's Next? KICK DISCRIMINATION IN THE ASS!

My team and I went back and forth at length about what to call this next section of my speech, which essentially details the plan we've come up with to end the problem of discrimination. We decided to keep it classy and use:

What's Next? KICK DISCRIMINATION IN THE ASS.

You really *don't* want to piss off a mama bear from Georgia.

This morning I am eager to invite you into a discussion we at Gill have been having for many months now. An unprecedented, soul-searching discussion with peers, allies, movement leaders, and some OutGivers to identify and solve the biggest obstacle to unfettered LGBT equality: discrimination. I believe we've done it. And by the conclusion of OutGiving, I think you'll believe it too.

By drawing a realistic geographical map of where we need to win next; by analyzing the opportunities we have to not only defeat but engage our adversaries; and by rigorously scrutinizing our victories and those of other movements, especially those that have passed through and survived what we're calling a SCOTUS moment; we have crafted a unique, provocative, and strategic plan to achieve a *federal solution to end discrimination*.

For the next few minutes, I'm going to throw back the curtain and share with you some of the details of how we've come to this solution and how we plan to accomplish it.

First, the problem. We all know the numbers – though after hearing about Michelle and Baby Bay, they feel more like a gut punch than a statistical map: in 29 states it is perfectly legal to

discriminate against someone for being lesbian, gay, or bisexual and in 32 states it is perfectly legal to do the same for being transgender.

A federal *solution* is optimal because its achievement is based on rigorous effort and meaningful success on the state level; and, as marriage equality has shown us, on the state-level we know how to do the work to get the win. Unlike marriage however, nondiscrimination requires a *political* victory, not a judicial one. Thusly, in order for Congress to act, we must convince them, one by one if need be, that they've staked a claim on the wrong side of this issue, namely, the side opposite their constituents. State-level successes for non-discrimination will set a winning example for other states to follow, change public perception, and prep the landscape for sweeping legislative action. We can change the whole map, by focusing on *some* of the map.

Next, the plan. We're going to win the South. Specifically, Florida, Georgia, and right here in Texas. Why? Because we are uniquely positioned in these states to move the dial on discrimination in our direction: we can win in these states, we can win soon, and we can win big. In doing so, we send a palpable message to allies and adversaries alike, across the region and across the country, that the last stronghold of discrimination is crumbling, that the three biggest states in the South are moving towards inclusion, and that anchor cities – like Atlanta and Houston – are *not* harbors for bigotry. In Florida, Equality Florida is poised to achieve state-wide wins. The same is true for Georgia – just ask former Attorney General and brand-new LGBT ally Mike Bowers, about the likelihood that Georgia will pass their so-called religious freedom bills. Right here in the great state of Texas, the Texas Wins Campaign is a multimillion dollar business-led effort to put the stories of LGBT Texans who have faced discrimination – like

Michelle Tollotson – front and center on the television, in the legislature, and on the steps of the State House.

Our presence in the South is strategic, diverse, and growing. The Gill Foundation invests in vetted, innovative, on-the-ground organizations – many of which you will have the opportunity to meet this weekend – that understand the culture of the region, have built lasting relationships, and have laid a solid foundation of networks upon which to build and move the fight for equality forward. These are organizations that understand that for every LGBT victory, especially around marriage, a persistent misunderstanding grows that victories are top-down decisions that don't take into account the feelings of the citizenry and worse, that victories mean the fight has been won and it's time to stop investing time and money. Their presence at the community-level, their diverse range of membership, and their eagerness to cross "issue and party barriers" and to collaborate with other movements puts them in the best possible position to combat backlash and to change public perception.

We have business on our side. Corporate influence in stemming the tide of religious freedom restoration acts cannot be understated. From Atlanta to Phoenix, business allies have persuaded lawmakers to see these bills for the transparent, terrified, desperate last-ditch efforts that they are: bigotry that's bad for business. We must, and will, continue to persuade CEOs and Presidents of big and small businesses from Wall Street to Main Street to leverage their influence across the South.

Next, we're not just going to beat back the bad guys, we're going to win the argument. That means engaging new allies – many of them in the faith community – to work with us to defeat and repeal religious exemptions to equality.

The South is the place to make this stand, not only because a majority of the 19 States that have adopted some version of the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act – more than a dozen of which are considering versions that go far beyond the federal limits – are located in the region, but because this is where religion and legislation meet, usually on Sunday, and usually at the pulpit of every Southern Baptist church across the South. We will not defeat religious exemptions until we make meaningful and lasting inroads in the Southern Baptist community. Right now they are the opposition. Transforming this contingent from adversary to ally must be a priority.

But that doesn't mean letting them off the hook. In fact, just the opposite. Calling out the most egregious perpetrators of this kind of fear-mongering identifies and stops hypocrisy in its tracks. It will reveal intolerance and create an opportunity to align with progressive allies within the faith community, to tell *our* stories, and to ask face-to-face questions that are impossible to answer, like: "Exactly how does my equality burden your religious expression? No, really. I'd like to know."

Lastly, we must invest time and energy into changing public perception, especially now poised as we are on the precipice of winning marriage equality across the country. We're not the first ones to cross this threshold, not by a longshot. Part of the discussion that created the foundation for this plan was to discuss lessons learned with other social movement leaders who

have had their SCOTUS moment. Their eagerness to share with us the lessons they've learned was a strong reminder of how closely connected we all are in the universal struggle for civil rights, but also of how critical it is to surround yourself with smart people and to then, just listen.

We met with leaders from across the civil rights movement and almost without exception each one advised us to prepare for backlash, namely from those most impacted by the decision; like bakeries that refuse to make cakes for same-sex weddings. But, we were reminded, backlash can also be far more subtle, or, as Gloria Feldt, the former president of Planned Parenthood put it, like a "water on stone strategy," or the subtle erosion of laws at the federal and state level. We see this happening today in Arkansas, West Virginia, and right here in Texas. Perhaps more familiar to us right now is the opposition's strategy of seizing the victim narrative, shifting the conversation from LGBT equality to Religious Equality. Lastly, we must get out in front of and refute the idea that we've won, that we're done, and that it's time to walk away.

Each ally encouraged us to change these perceptions before they take root or transform them soon. Well, they're right. And we will. By telling our stories, like Michelle Tollotson, we must be brave ourselves and celebrate and make possible the bravery of others. We must remind people of that dangerous gap on the discrimination spectrum, through which so many of us can still fall. Or as Rinku Sen of Race Forward says, we "have to reestablish the humanity of the people who still need change." We must be people again, not professional movement leaders, not Democrats or Republicans, but people who deserve full equality.

Part 5: Reflection on Past Victories

Our goal is ambitious and our strategy sound, but what gives me the most confidence that we will realize a federal solution to end discrimination is quite honestly, you. As intelligent and deeply committed philanthropists, activists, and leaders, you, more than most, know how to put plans into action, because you've done it before, time and time again. The results bear this out:

- Since OutGiving 2013, the number of states on our side of the marriage equality column has more than quadrupled, with nearly 71% of all Americans enjoying marriage equality.
- The landmark decision in *Macy vs. Holder* was a meaningful step in the ongoing effort to end anti-trans bias and move the dial on achieving federal-level protections for all LGBT Americans.
- President Obama amended Executive Order 11246, adding sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of protected categories covering federal contractors.
- Trans-inclusive healthcare is now a reality in nine states and the District of Columbia.

These are but a few of the dramatic wins achieved in the past 24 months – each one a link in a chain of victorious moments, and each one made possible, in no small part, because of you.

When President Obama signed the newly amended executive order he noted the “passionate advocacy” responsible for making the government “of the people, by the people, and for the people, just a little bit fairer.” He was talking about you. You are OutGivers – your commitment – writing a check, organizing on the ground, or lobbying in State Houses across the country (often, all three) – is the practical, purposeful realization of the “passionate advocacy” to which the President referred.

Part 6: Conclusion

If I sound confident, it's because I am. Who wouldn't be? You, here in this room, represent the most committed LGBT-focused philanthropists in the world and you are joined this year at OutGiving by the brightest, sharpest, and most strategic minds in the development and execution of unique and achievable plans like the one I just highlighted, and about which you will learn much more over the next two days. Together, we will capitalize on the momentum earned from marriage equality victories; and together will take the ball and run it down the rest of the field, transforming a series of winning moments into a movement that we've won.

I started this speech talking at length about how silence can beget shame and how shame can be suffocating; but, after 17 and-a-half minutes of non-stop talking about all the things I was encouraged never to speak of as a gay girl growing up in Georgia, I can honestly say I've never felt more proud.

I've come back home to the South, and this time, I'm not afraid to speak.

My name is XX, I'm the president and CEO of the Gill Foundation. I'm a lesbian, a wife, and a brand-new mother from the great state of Georgia. It's very nice to meet you.

As far as first impressions, go, I feel pretty good about this one.

Thank you for your time and have a fantastic OutGiving!