

Acceptance Speech by Sterling A. Washington

Distinguished Service Award Recipient
GLAA 45th Anniversary Reception
Policy Restaurant and Lounge
April 21, 2016

Thank you for that wonderful introduction, Rick. Some of you may not know this, but I've been friends with Rick Rosendall for over 15 years. When I was a college student (the second time around) at Howard University, I worked with Rick at the U.S. Dept. of Labor, where we would speak often about the University's challenges creating a welcoming and supportive campus climate for LGBTQ students. And we've remained friends and have collaborated on other issues through the years.

It is such an honor being recognized by GLAA, alongside my friends and colleagues June Crenshaw and Monica Palacio. June has been a friend for years and I congratulate her on her new role as Interim Executive Director of the Wanda Alston Foundation. Monica Palacio is both a friend and former colleague and is one of the unsung heroes in this city. She continues to do tremendous work as Director of the DC Office of Human Rights.

I am so grateful for this award since it comes from an organization whose work I've admired for a long time. I am constantly amazed by GLAA's capacity to do such detailed work with such a relatively small membership. But, what it lacks in numbers, GLAA more than compensates for in substance. GLAA's "Building on Victory" policy brief is an excellent example of that. If history is any indication, the policy brief and the candidate questionnaire were probably met with consternation from some candidates, underestimation by others, and eagerness from a few who have significant work to spotlight. As someone who has assisted four candidates in the past with the questionnaire, I appreciate its thoroughness and how influential it can be in moving candidate's positions or at least in expediting timelines on important issues. GLAA really understands the role that government can play in redressing the community's most pressing issues. And, as the policy memo's title suggests, the community is winning in so many ways and can definitely rely on collaboration and communication as effective tools in creating change, as GLAA has done and continues to do.

This spirit of cooperation reminds me of my most fulfilling as Director of the Mayor's Office of LGBT Affairs for Mayor Gray. It was the February 27, 2014, press conference in which the District government clarified that health insurance companies could be discriminate against the transgender community. Moreover, the insurance companies had to cover medically necessary procedures for anyone with gender dysphoria, including gender affirmation surgeries. (Now, the phrase "diagnosed with gender diaspora" probably sounds pretty clinical and it arguably stigmatizes people who are transgender. However, it is an example of using what you have to your advantage since gender dysphoria was defined in the newly released DSM-V). My larger point though is that behind the press conference was a year's worth of work that entailed numerous meetings between my office and community activists (who raised the concern about the discrimination shortly after I became Director) as well as conference calls and meetings

educating government officials on the issue. My team and I (and I have to give a shout out to my Deputy Director Amy Loudermilk, who was exceptional) worked closely with the National Center for Transgender Equality, the Center for American Progress, and DC Trans Coalition to make this happen. And it happened because there was that spirit of cooperation and open communication.

I see the current Director of the Mayor's Office of LGBT Affairs, Sheila Alexander-Reid, and her Deputy Director, Terrance Laney, here. And they are both extremely competent and in a position to help advance the LGBTQ community's issues. I hope that the community continues to work with them in the spirit of cooperation to find governmental solutions for our concerns. Certainly, there isn't always a government solution, but there is most of the time. I urge the community to email them with those concerns. Sending an angry tweet is simply not good strategy because, if it is even seen, it is not as effective as a well-constructed email detailing the issue. That detailed email gives them something tangible to take to up the chain of command and find a solution that much faster. I'm speaking from experience here because that's how we were able to get so much accomplished in the Gary administration. So, I encourage you to help the community by taking a step back and considering strategy and cooperation over histrionics and despair.

That is what has made GLAA such an integral player in advancing LGBTQ equality over the last 45 years. Once again, this award is so appreciated, especially since I've taken a step back from activism in order to focus more attention on my first love - music - and my current work as a Consultant for Dynamic Meditation (and Claudia Cauterucci, the founder of Dynamic Meditation, is here tonight), and Uproar Lounge & Restaurant. Moreover, I'm enjoying my new J. Hilburn business and serving as Tenor Soloist and Section Leader at National City Christian Church. This award is a fitting coda to my years in the trenches and something that I will always treasure. Thank you, GLAA, and happy anniversary!

[Note: These are Mr. Washington's full prepared remarks. He delivered a shorter version at the reception for the sake of brevity.]