

Skadden Celebrates Pride Month

Why is it more important than ever to “say gay” and to have gender expression freedom?



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I believe that LGBTQ+ allies and people visibly supporting LGBTQ+ values are critically important so that the next generation feels accepted. It's essential that in the workplace, at home and in every aspect of their lives, people are able to identify as who they really are. This is good for society as a whole. It's vital that we stand up for the values we believe in to build a diverse and inclusive society.

Acknowledging the LGBTQ+ community is a sign of love, affirmation and validation. At this point in time we need to focus on the positive — on love and support and not hate and exclusion, especially as we head into an election cycle where, unfortunately, at least one of the potential presidential candidates wants to prevent people from expressing these kinds of positive statements. Family has always been a central part of our society. As a kid, I remember thinking how proud I was of my parents and being able to share this pride with others. Denying children the ability to do this in school is a tragedy. More than ever, we need to counterbalance the message of hate.



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While we have made great leaps in the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights over the past few decades, in recent years we have witnessed a targeted pushback of those rights in various states. An example we are all likely familiar with is Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill, which was recently expanded to limit classroom instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity through the 12th grade. Beyond making LGBTQ+ students feel shame and isolation at school, these policies have the larger effect of creating environments of intolerance, further stigmatizing the LGBTQ+ community. Given this recent development, it's all the more important to counter the hateful rhetoric, encourage people to live freely and uninhibited, and convey that everyone has a meaningful place in society.

Every day I wake up to headlines about efforts to ban transgender-affirming care and anti-LGBTQ+ legislation like the "Don't Say Gay" bill in Florida. It's deeply disheartening. I came out only in the past few years. I am fortunate to live in a liberal state with supportive friends and to be at a place in my life where I am comfortable with who I am; yet the experience has still been very difficult. But it is also extremely freeing. Coming out is transformative in a really beautiful way. It's incumbent upon people like me — an attorney at a powerful law firm — to do what they can politically to help others, even when feeling defeated. It's also important, for me, to help others feel comfortable and to provide a safe space for them to be who they are, even if that's just by saying I'm gay without hesitation.



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The policies and rhetoric that we are seeing around the country and around the world are causing real harm to LGBTQ+ people, especially LGBTQ+ youth, so it's more important than ever to “say gay” and have gender expression freedom. We must work to create a society where everyone is welcome and has the opportunity to be happy and productive.

It's important to create environments that acknowledge, respect and celebrate our differences, gender identities and sexual orientations. This is essential now, given the historic wave of bills targeting the rights of LGBTQ+ teens, children and their families and causing psychological damage to an already vulnerable population. Legislation like Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill, for example, can negatively affect the mental and physical health of young people because when one's identity becomes politicized, it's dehumanizing and causes stress and trauma. Creating an inclusive culture helps prevent and combat the distress and discrimination brought about by the debate around sexual orientation or gender identity. Members of the LGBTQ+ community need to know that they're seen, heard and valued, and that there's a community of people that will defend their right to be exactly who they are.



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