

Today, Congressman Mike Quigley (D-IL) saluted veterans from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities at "With Liberty and Justice For All" - the nation's only municipally-sponsored, military salute to LGBT veterans. The event was presented by the City of Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR) in Daley Plaza (12:00pm).

As one of his first acts in Congress, Quigley issued a statement calling for the repeal of the U.S. military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. An emerging national advocate for the LGBT community, Quigley has cosponsored over a dozen bills that work toward equality during his first 100 days in office.

During his remarks and presentation, Congressman Quigley recalled his recent trip to Iraq and saluted the veterans for their admirable "commitment to a country that doesn't yet honor [their] commitment to one another."

The full text of the Congressman's speech is as follows:

*Thank you for having me here today.*

*It's a pleasure to spend some time at home in Chicago and see so many familiar faces.*

*It's a true honor to serve in the United States Congress, and I'll never forget that I wouldn't be there without you.*

*I'd like to thank Mayor Daley, Commissioner Starks, Luke Visconti, Bill Greaves, Jim Darby and the many others who helped make this historic salute possible.*

*As many of you know, Mayor Daley stood up for this community and human rights before hardly anyone else did, and has continued his commitment to doing what's right for decades.*

*Thank you, Mr. Mayor.*

*I was sworn into Congress in April of this year, and after 100 days in office now, have been proud to sponsor over a dozen bills that work toward real equality for the LGBT community.*

*I wrote President Obama to encourage him to include same-sex marriages in the 2010 census;*

*I joined Representatives Barney Frank, Tammy Baldwin, and Jared Polis at the podium to introduce a new Employer Non-Discrimination Act;*

*I am a member of the Congressional Equality Caucus;*

*And I have called upon my colleagues and President Obama to repeal "Don't Ask Don't Tell."*

*We see so many pictures, read so many stories, and hear so many newscasts about wartime,*

*about how many soldiers have been killed by a roadside bomb here, or unfriendly fire there, and so it's easy to become numb to what this looks and feels like on the frontlines.*

*I recently had the humbling opportunity to travel to Iraq and the Middle East.□*

*I met soldiers there from Illinois and listened to their stories.*

*I looked at these brave men and women, willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country, many of them as young as my own children, and I'll tell you what:*

*I didn't see soldiers who were black or white, men or women, straight or gay, Democrats or Republicans.*

*I saw Americans.*

*It sounds corny, but you leave an experience like that, and see the American flag, and it suddenly means something more.*

*You see the American flag after that, and you suddenly realize what it is to really pledge allegiance to it.*

*"With Liberty and Justice for All" is a very compelling title for today's event.*

*These powerful words remind us of saying the Pledge at the start of our schooldays.*

*They remind us of President Lincoln, who said that as a country, we were on an evolutionary path to doing what's right, what's fair, and what's just – toward achieving equality for ALL Americans.*

*And they remind us to honor those who protect our flag, even when some will not honor them.*

*One of my first acts in Congress was to co-sponsor the Hate Crimes Bill.*

*One of my next acts was to speak out and co-sponsor a bill that would repeal Don't Ask Don't Tell, a policy that essentially says, 'be all you can be'...□ just not that.*

*A policy so fundamentally hypocritical that it encourages citizens to put their lives on the line, to serve a country built upon freedom and democracy, as long as they lie about who they are.*

*A policy that is not only morally repugnant, but one that is making us less safe as well.*

*As you may know, my colleague Congressman Patrick Murphy of Pennsylvania has introduced a bill which would repeal this policy, and allow gay and lesbian Americans to serve in the military openly.□*

*Congress, with leadership from the President, must do its duty for our country's brave service*

*men and women and end once and for all this terrible Don't Ask Don't Tell policy.□*

*We must do this not only for all our LGBT soldiers but also for the security and defense of our country.*

*Our work isn't done, and seeing you all here today and honoring members of the LGBT community who serve our country inspires me to keep fighting until we achieve real, true, and full equality.*

*At this time, I'd ask Jim Darby to come forward and for all the other AVER members on the stage to stand up, so that I can present you with a proclamation.*

*I recently entered this statement into the United States Congressional Record – the same record that contains the words of Daniel Webster and Abraham Lincoln.*

*Fitting company of remarkable men, I think.*

*As you know, AVER fights not only for LGBT veterans but also for gay and lesbian soldiers currently serving in our armed forces.*

*AVER members travel to Washington every year to lobby members of Congress for an end to "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."*

*And for fifteen years, AVER has fought against this detrimental policy.*

*I want to recognize Jim Darby, the founder of the Chicago Chapter of AVER and a Korean War veteran.□*

*Jim served in the Navy as a Russian-language specialist, and along with others, has fought tirelessly to educate the general public and Congress on these issues.□*

*Jim, it is my honor to present you with this.*

*Thank you for everything you have done, are doing, and I know will continue to do.*

*I salute you all for a commitment to a country that doesn't yet honor your commitment to one another.*

*And I promise you that I will never stop fighting and standing up on your behalf.*

*Thank you.*