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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

ECHO, the initial letters of the East Coast Homophile Organizations, is an ill-chosen name. At this point in the homophile movement we have nothing to do with echo. We are in our formative years. What we say and do is, for the most part, fresh and new, no matter how old the problems may be. What we are meeting for today is to make people aware that what we are seeking is the right to live our lives as decent, respectable human beings. We are seeking to remove the veils of superstition and ignorance that have clouded the issue of homosexuality since the days of David and Jonathan.

Now, just what exactly is ECHO? ECHO is the voice of the homophile movement. ECHO is the spokesman for some fifteen million American citizens. ECHO is the hope of this nation's second largest minority group. ECHO is young but dynamic. ECHO is struggling but succeeding. ECHO is small but growing, and ECHO is needed. Let me illustrate this need by citing an example. I am talking to you today not only as ECHO coordinator, but as a criminal and a liar. I am unconvicted of the felony I committed only because I was not caught. By way of explanation let me state that after I graduated from high school I wanted to join the service. I did so, served my time, and was discharged honorably. This was possible only because I perjured myself when I enlisted. Had my lie been found out I would have been discharged dishonorably; had I not perjured myself when I enlisted,

I would have been denied the right to serve my country.

My case is certainly not unique, but is repeated thousands of times a year. As a homosexual I am considered undesirable by my government and unfit to serve in its armed forces. The fact that I did serve, and was honorably discharged, does not alter the facts in their eyes. The fact that millions of homosexuals have honorably served their country does not help to change the government's position.

Am I bitter about my own experience? For a long time, for many years I wasn't. This was life; this was inevitable. This was one of the scourges of being a homosexual. I didn't think about it; I lived with it. Then I came across the homophile movement. This is what it did for me; it made me realize that I should not have to settle for a second-class citizenship. It focused my attention on the fact that the defeatist attitude of "what will be, will be" need not be.

So much for me. I mention this only to show one of the problems confronting the homophile movement, and to show how a homosexual coming into contact with the movement is made aware of the need for a change. This contact between the homosexual and the homophile movement is happening with increasing frequency, a fact that I will get back to later.

What is the homophile movement and who are its members? The homophile movement is a world-wide social phenomenon in which individuals and groups working through the media of mass communication and private endeavor are seeking to change the archaic public and private attitudes currently held on the subject of homosexuality--in short, working to improve the status of the homosexual in his society. ECHO is one of the leaders in this movement.

How does ECHO function to achieve these ends? This conference is one of the ways. One of the primary purposes of this conference is to make people aware of some of the problems. ECHO works in many other ways. Also, each of the affiliated groups operates slightly differently; they put a different emphasis on the means, to achieve the common ends in view, by stressing those means which they consider most important. Thus one group may stress the importance of educating and informing the public and put most of its efforts into sponsoring public lectures and publishing informative articles. Another may stress self-improvement and self-understanding and work with the homosexual as an individual with individual problems. Some stress research and seek to institute and cooperate in research in the area of homosexuality. Another group will stress civil action and work directly toward changing laws and official attitudes as they relate to the homosexual. This is not to say that all these approaches are not used in some degree by all the groups. But it is a hard road strewn with many obstacles. I mentioned the

attitude of the Armed Services. The Mattachine Society of Washington is working to change these charges of undesirability and unfitness of the homosexual. However, the response has not been gratifying although we have met with officials at the Pentagon and have sat in on conferences with Selective Service heads. We have found out that no one is greater for "passing the buck" than our government. Our requests for information have been transferred from office to office with the excuse that, and I quote, "This matter does not come under our jurisdiction." When we do get any further response it is usually to the effect that section such and such, paragraph so and so of the Army code or the Defense code states that homosexuals are undesirable and subject to dishonorable discharge. When we ask for the authorities on this subject and the reasons for this statement, our correspondence is suddenly cut off.

We resent this treatment and we resent the unsubstantiated accusations made, and we will continue to work to change this situation.

Homosexuals are not unfit. Homosexuals are not undesirable. Homosexuals are not strange creatures who evolved through the ages in some manner entirely different from the rest of the human race. Homosexuals are people -- real, live, human people. They have abilities and capabilities to work and serve well -- just like real people. They also have the ability to feel emotions and resent unjustness -- just like real people. They can be hurt like real people, and if they are cut it is blood that flows from their veins, not some vicious venom. They are tired of having muck thrown continually in their faces.

Civil liberties. What do these words mean to the homosexual? You read in the newspapers that other minority groups are fighting for their civil liberties; for instance, for the right to be served food in a restaurant without discrimination. Does the homosexual have anything in common with this fight? You bet your bottom dollar he does.

Case in point. The banquet halls of the International Inn, the Gramercy Inn, and the Manger Hamilton Hotel refused to serve us because there might be some homosexuals present. The Washington Daily News, the Evening Star, even the liberal Post refused to advertise this conference because it pertained to homosexuality. If this is not discrimination, then what is?

Do you say that because we are somewhat controversial that this puts us in a slightly different category? What do you read in the papers today that is not controversial? Civil strife is controversial. The Presidential campaign is controversial, and, I might add, a lot dirtier than our poor efforts. Papers would cease to exist if they did not print and report on controversial matters.

Civil liberties -- what a mockery to the Civil Service employee who is discharged after years of faithful service because of allegations of homosexuality, and who cannot even confront his accusers. Security risks, they say, subject to blackmail. To whom would they be blackmailed? Their employer, who is the government which set up this ridiculous set of circumstances. This is a vicious circle; it must be broken, and it will be broken.

Security risks -- security risks indeed. In the year 1963, eightyseven defectors crossed over to Iron Curtain countries. Fifty-four of these crossed over because of involvements with women. The rest crossed over for a variety of other reasons. Not one was in any way involved with homosexuality. A few years ago twenty-nine defectors crossed over into Red China. All were married men or subsequently married while in China. They say that the homosexual is the security risk. I say: "Beware of the heterosexual."

We are grossly maligned, and unjustly so. We want reasonably and sanely to confer with the powers that be to set right these wrongs. We will bend over backward to meet them on their ground. But, if we are not heard, we will fight.

Our demands are not unreasonable. We are not asking for favors or special treatment, just the rights, and all the rights, afforded the heterosexual. We are still in the asking stage. We will soon reach the **demanding** stage.

And how about social rights? The average homosexual is running scared in his own society. His social rights are nil. The total exclusion of the homosexual from government employment carries over into private enterprise, since in this society, as in most, the government sets the standards. So part of the fear of the homosexual is purely an economic one. The fear of loss of job, the loss of a means of livelihood. This fear is such an inbred thing that it is sometimes carried to extremes. For instance, the heterosexuals who are attending this meeting have, almost without exception, paid their registration fees with personal checks. The homosexuals are afraid to take this chance; afraid even of the word ECHO appearing on their cancelled checks. So, most of the homosexuals who have registered have done so by bank draft. No tell-tale checks lying around. No bank teller seeing the word ECHO on their checks. How careful can you be? And yet, you have to be. What a sad state of affairs. But, if you were a homosexual, would you take this chance?

That question was purely rhetorical since it is impossible for a heterosexual to put himself in the place of a homosexual. To know the constant fear, so constant that it almost becomes subconscious, of being found out by an employer, family, friends.

I could not dare to talk to you today under any other name but Robert King, because this is not my real name. Were I to use my real name, tomorrow I would probably not have a job. Who would keep a "queer" on their payroll? And I have to eat. I stand here, even so, in the fear that someone I know from the world of the heterosexual may walk in that door and I will be discovered. You say that as a spokesman for the homosexual, as a member of the homophile movement, I should not hide behind a pseudonym. I say that when the day comes that I don't have to hide behind a pseudonym our job will be done.

Social rights? To the homosexual this means the right to have a job, work well at it, and not be in constant fear of losing it. It means the right to socialize with the friends one chooses at the places one chooses to go, and there are such places, bars and lounges, where the homosexual may go to be with others of his kind, but even here one goes with the fear of harassment and police surveillance.

Again, this constant fear. And how about one's family? How tired one can get of making up reasons and excuses for being thirty-five and still a bachelor. What can you say to an uncle who is constantly asking: "How's your love life?" To an aunt who asks: "Who's your latest girlfriend?" To a mother who asks: "When are you going to get married so that I can have some grandchildren?" You sort of laugh, lie and sheepishly shrug it off, but you get tired of this game. So you join the homophile movement, where the one chance of changing public opinion exists. We are working to change public opinion. We want to live in a world where this constant fear of discovery does not exist because it does not matter, and this world will come. Not tomorrow, or next year, or perhaps even in our lifetime. But it will come, and we are here to see that it does.

We are asking again, but only for the right to live a happy, decent community life, to be accepted by our neighbors as equal members of society. Not unreasonable demands, but they are still going unheard.

So what do we do? We try to strengthen ourselves so that our cries and pleas will be a little louder. As individuals, we join groups. The groups try to enlarge their membership and to increase the circulation of their publications. They try to collect funds to finance their work. Then the groups themselves get together and form affiliations such as ECHO and sponsor conferences such as this. But we have only scratched the surface. Our work has just begun. I mentioned earlier that more and more homosexuals and heterosexuals who believe in civil rights and liberties are coming into contact with the homophile movement. We are small, but we are expanding rapidly. What right, what persuasive power if all the homosexuals joined the movement?

Why, we could even put into office those people whom we felt would be sympathetic to our cause. Fifteen million deciding votes-- which is a plurality larger than any president has ever received! The homophile movement right now is small--excluding people who only subscribe to our publications, there are perhaps 500 really active members--but that leaves a dormant army of 14,999,500 homosexuals out there just waiting to be awakened. And this dormant army is beginning to stir; and so to Life Magazine and the New York Medical Bureau, who say, "Good Lord, they are coming out into the open!", and to the New York Times, Harpers Magazine and the Wall Street Journal, who say, "My God, they are organizing!"-- we say: "Brothers, you ain't seen nothin' yet!"