

While I disagree with President Obama on the trade promotion authority fast track and on the Trans-Pacific partnership agreement, I give him credit for being more aggressive than President Bush or President Clinton on enforcing trade rules and trade laws. It makes a difference in helping to create jobs.

Trade agreements must include provisions protecting our workers and our companies from foreign governments that artificially manipulate their currency. For example, Japan has a history of shutting out American auto companies and manipulating their currency to benefit their own manufacturers. That policy has worked for Japan, but it has not worked for us. In 2013, for every 1 car the United States sold to Japan, we imported 99 cars from Japan. That doesn't sound like a level playing field, where cars that were made by American workers get an opportunity to sell in Japan. It is not much different with Korea. Too much is at stake. Our capacity to outcompete and outinnovate our competitors depends on our capacity to outmanufacture them. That means we need trade policies that will create opportunities for workers and small businesses so they can earn a living wage and join the middle class.

I urge my colleagues to demand increased transparency in this process. I urge everyone to say no to a deal that shortchanges our workers and companies and does not ensure a level playing field.

We cannot allow another trade deal—we had NAFTA, PNTR with China, CAFTA, South Korea, and Colombia, one after another—that sells out our workers and ships jobs overseas. It is time for a very different trade policy.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BOOKER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE JIM OBERGEFELL STORY

Mr. BOOKER. Madam President, I rise with some excitement as I get to tell a story that is an American story. This story is, in fact, a love story.

The first time Jim Obergefell met the love of his life, John Arthur, neither of them were swept off their feet. As is the case with a lot of couples, they met at a bar through mutual friends. They met then a second time, but the sparks didn't really fly then either. It wasn't until a few months later that they met for the third time at a New Year's Eve party. This time, they fell in love. Jim and John like to joke that theirs was a story of love at third sight.

Following the New Year's Eve party, John and Jim began building their

lives together in Cincinnati, OH. The next 20 years they spent doing so many of the things that connected couples do. They said "I love you" for the first time. They had their first fight. Their bond grew and grew, and this incredible couple moved in together, buying their first home, selling that home, buying another home, and working together, building lives together. They moved from job to job, but they stayed together. Traveling, making friends, becoming involved with their community, they built a life of love together.

Jim and John's love story is a familiar one. They crossed familiar relationship milestones and faced so many of the same probing questions many couples often get: Why aren't you married? Have you thought about getting married? Hey, what about marriage?

Well, of course, they had thought about marriage. Their bond was that strong; they were so deeply in love and committed. But their response, unfortunately, was that they had thought of it, but they wanted it to actually mean something legally. They wanted it to be right and just. They wanted their marriage to be affirmed before all, and for it to have meaning under the law. They wanted it to be recognized just as it was for other American citizens. They wanted that ideal that exists deep in our country's heritage, flowing through all of our roots, that they together as a couple could have a life, could have liberty, and could pursue their happiness.

However, for them at that time, equality and freedom for all in our country was an ideal that was seemingly far off. But I will tell my colleagues this: What I love about America is that we cannot slow down the dream of freedom and equality. It marches forward. Look at history and we see all of the attempts to stop these fundamental ideals of freedom and equality under the law. People and tyrants, with brutality, try to chain our freedom, try to beat it back. They try to assassinate its advocates, but just as the Statue of Freedom sits on the Capitol dome, freedom rises, and it will come.

Jim and John watched the progress march in our country as so many of us did with encouragement. Painfully slowly but steadily it marched forward. As they watched and waited, they went on living their lives of love together. For almost 20 years, their union, their bond as committed people with unconditional love continued.

Unfortunately, though, John began having problems walking. After months of tests, doctors' appointments, prodding and probing, John was diagnosed with ALS. The typical prognosis for a patient with ALS is 2½ to 5 years. Jim became John's primary caregiver. He leapt up. He had unconditional love. There were trying times, but he said he considered it a privilege to care for his life's love.

Two years after John's diagnosis in 2013, when he was receiving hospice

care and was confined to a hospital bed in their Cincinnati home, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Edith Windsor, declaring that the Defense of Marriage Act was unconstitutional. That decision set the stage for an even greater national movement toward marriage equality. It set the stage—after years of struggle and fights and sacrifice for equal rights—for equality under the law, for love to be affirmed in marriage between two Americans, to be affirmed and equally recognized, not condemned, not banned, not made illegal. So on a warm day in June, after 20 years of love, commitment, and building a life together, it was at this moment that Jim leaned over to John, sitting there in his hospital bed, kissed him, and proposed: "Let's get married."

Because Ohio has yet to recognize marriage equality, and with John confined to his bed, this was going to be challenging. Their options were limited. Transporting John to a State that would recognize their marriage would require a special medically equipped airplane, and it would require a lot of money they did not have. Jim asked for ideas on Facebook, and people came forward. Unprompted, Jim and John's friends raised \$13,000 to cover the entire cost of a specially chartered medical plane.

A few weeks later, Jim, John, and John's Aunt Paulette, who became ordained to perform the service, boarded a plane in Ohio that took off and landed nearby in Maryland. In this State, they recognize marriage equality. In this State, they recognized the love of two American citizens. And for 7½ minutes, on the tarmac at Baltimore-Washington International Airport, John and Jim, two Americans, had their wedding.

Sitting on the tarmac, Jim, holding the hands of his partner of 20 years—whose hands lacked dexterity and strength—said this to John:

We met for the first time, my life didn't change, your life didn't change. We met a second time, still nothing changed. Then we met a third time, and everything changed. As you recently said, it was love at third sight, and for the past twenty years, six months and eleven days, it's been love at every sight.

In a cramped medical airplane, John's aunt began the formal vows. She started to say, "Take each other's hands," but then realized they had never let go of each other's hands.

They exchanged their rings, Jim helping John place the ring on his own finger, and after the ceremony they left that Maryland tarmac to fly back. Jim and John arrived home to the realities of a disease like ALS. John was dying. And while they had taken their eternal vows together, while their marriage was affirmed by love, affirmed by this unbreakable commitment, affirmed by loving family and by friends, affirmed to be legal by the State of Maryland, their marriage was disavowed by their home State—the State John would eventually die in.

These men at this time decided to work with a civil rights attorney because they feared that even after their actions on their part, John's death certificate would list him as unmarried—an assault on the dignity of two great men. His life with his partner—their 20 years of love and commitment and ultimate affirmation of those years—their marriage would mean nothing according to the government. They feared that on this document—the last documentation of his life—that their life of love and commitment would be denied by their government. On this paper their marriage would be denied—negated, disallowed.

John, who married to the love of his life, died in his home State and was listed on that final government document as single. With their attorney, the men filed a lawsuit to have John and Jim's marriage legally recognized in Ohio. A week and a half after their marriage, a district judge in Ohio ruled to recognize their wedding, but that was just the start of a long legal fight.

In the last few months of John's life, Jim worked with the attorney to continue to fight for recognition of their citizenship rights as Americans. People would ask Jim: Why, when your husband is dying, would you use your last days together to fight this? Jim's response was simple: Why not?

Jim could not think of any better way to honor his husband, to live up to his vows, and to demonstrate the power of his love, the power of their commitment, the power of love in our world, other than to fight this injustice.

A little over 3 months after their marriage, the inevitable eventually arrived. John passed away at the young age of 48. Amidst his overwhelming grief, Jim found a small but substantive source of consolation. On his death certificate he was listed as married with Jim's name listed as his surviving spouse.

The State of Ohio appealed the decision to list John as married. Their government went to court to strip him and his beloved of this recognition and won. State officials made it their mission to change John Arthur's death certificate.

Jim Obergefell now stands as a named plaintiff in an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, the highest Court in the land, to have he and his husband's fundamental rights recognized—that their vows and commitment be worthy of recognition as American citizens. They have joined with cases from three other States also seeking that affirmation of citizenship, of equality under the law. Together, all these cases have come to represent the cause of paving the way for marriage equality to become a reality in our Nation.

Jim and John's story is moving. It is being heard in a building across the street with these words emblazoned over its doors, "Equal Justice Under Law." Their story is heartbreaking. It is inspiring, but unfortunately in our Nation right now it is all too common.

This story of theirs about the persistent, unyielding, and indefatigable love conquering indifference about our ideals of equality conquering inequality in our country. This call is in their hearts for each other reflects the larger call for our country for itself, for us to live our truth. It calls that question forward, what kind of country will we be? Will we be the Nation of love and freedom and equality? Will we be the Nation that every single generation has had people standing up for these ideals, people pushing to March forward for our country these ideals. This is not a question about sexual orientation or race or gender, it is a question about whether our country will live up to the ideals we say every time we pledge allegiance to our flag: "... liberty and justice for all."

Will we have equality under the law or will we tolerate a government that denies some citizens fundamental rights while granting them to others? This is the question that is being called.

It is a question that echoes throughout our history—Sojourner Truth, standing in Akron, OH, at the Women's Convention, calling the question, "Ain't I a woman?"

It is a question by my family members that I heard, standing strong, saying defiantly: I am a man. I, too, am an American citizen.

Proclaiming those words, generation after generation have strained at chains, have fought Jim Crowe. It is what Susan B. Anthony said when she said, "It is we the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union. . . ."

This is the ideal—the love of our country, the sacrifice for our principles, this ideal that has been fought for generation after generation. The question was called by abolitionists, by suffragettes: Will we be a nation with liberty and justice for all?

Throughout our history the question would call: Will we have freedom for all? Will truth march on—as it did in Selma, as it gathered in church basements and protested at Stonewall and came together at Seneca Falls. Will we live our truth, despite the assassinations of its advocates such as Milk and King, Matthew Shepard or Emmitt Till? Will our march come to fruition to fight for recognition of full citizenship beyond race, beyond creed, beyond color, beyond orientation? It is this dream that must be secured for all of our citizens as Langston Hughes said so clearly: "There is a dream in this land with its back against the wall, to save the dream for one, we must save the dream for all."

We fight for this dream here. The time is now. The anguish has gone on long enough. And I will tell you I found out just preparing my remarks that we still face these weary years and too many silent tears.

I sat with staff members and learned of some of their struggles right here as

Capitol Hill employees. One of my young staffers shared that he entered his adult life unsure if his full citizenship rights would be an option in his lifetime. Could he have equality under the law? Could he be married? Similar to many gay men and lesbians decades before him, he was afraid his country would cast his love as less meaningful at best or at worst vile and immoral. Yet today, in this case before the Supreme Court, it makes him hopeful that we can live in a country that one day recognizes his love, his value, his dignity, as being equal under the law.

Another staff Member told me he feared that his coming out as gay would mean his own family would never accept him. He shared what he described as a defining moment in his own valuation of his self-worth when he came out as gay to his deeply religious grandmother. She held his hands tightly in her own and looked him in the eyes and proclaimed, "I will always love you, and I will love anyone who loves you."

All across America right now there are weary years, silent tears, unspoken pain in the country that does not value the dignity, worth, and citizenship rights of too many.

What message does it send? How many stand in uncertainty and fear and despair that threatens to consume the potential of young people? I see the data of suicide rates rising for our gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender teens. We cannot give any implicit support for any idea that they are worth less or are lesser citizens, and we all should come together and condemn so-called therapies that purport to change who people are at their core, as if it is not enough, as if they are not worthy. All across the country this struggle is going on, from intimate, personal struggles to public fights—stories of love meeting fear, stories of hope meeting despair, our families and communities coming together to stand and say that I am an American. I am a citizen. I deserve equality under the law.

As Jackie Robinson said then, and it is true now: "The right of every American to first-class citizenship is the most important issue of our time."

Jim and John and all Americans have a right not to second-class citizenship but first-class citizenship, to honor their first-class love.

I am a prisoner of hope today. I am not going to let disappointment after disappointment undermine my infinite sense of hope for our country. The history of our Nation is a screaming testimony of a perpetual achievement of freedom and light and truth overcoming inequality and hatred. Just 3 years ago, only six States and Washington, DC, had marriage equality, with 34 million Americans living in marriage equality States. Now 37 States and DC have marriage equality, meaning 224 million Americans now live in States that honor equal rights to marry. This movement has been a strong validation of our country's history. It is a shining example of

progress. However, just because the arc of history always bends toward justice does not mean it will not meet resistance. As King said, "Change never rode in on the wheels of inevitability."

We are the architects of our Nation. We are the truth tellers, life workers, and lovers that must exult our principles. We cannot fail now. Love is on the line. Citizenship is on the line. We are interdependent. We need each other. We cannot deny the worth of one American without denying the worth, dignity, and strength of our Nation as a whole.

The story of Jim Obergefell and John Arthur is a story not just of unconditional love and unconditional hope, it is not just about the two of them, but it is about our country. This is the story of all of us—of America. It is a story of what our truth will be. One member of this incredible partnership has passed away, but I know their love marches on.

I believe in this country our truth will march on, and equality and justice will have its way.

Madam President, I yield to my colleague, the Senator from Ohio.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, Senator SESSIONS wants to speak in a moment, and I will be brief.

I would like to thank Senator BOOKER for his always stirring words and for his sense of justice and fair play and leadership in so many ways.

I met Jim about 1 year ago and had a brief meeting, not too long after the court decision by Judge Black in the Cincinnati Southern District Court in Ohio. I just spent a half an hour with him in my office. He never wanted and never expected to be famous. He never expected to come to Washington to meet with Senators. He never expected to travel the country giving speeches. He was once a high school teacher. He joked that more people have been with him as he traveled across the country, joked that when he spoke to crowds of hundreds or even 1,000 about his experience with his beloved John and what has happened, he wished that his students had listened to him so closely. You could hear a pin drop when he spoke to hundreds, which is not always the case when speaking as a high school teacher. But he wanted to live his life in a normal way as most Americans do. He never expected to have his story or his marriage litigated before the U.S. Supreme Court.

But that is really the mark of character, that Jim has taken his grief and his pain and hoped to change the world, and that is what he is doing. His marriage is still not equal in my State of Ohio. I am embarrassed by that. I was, frankly, embarrassed when Ohio, 10 years ago, passed a constitutional amendment outlawing same-sex marriage. I thought it was a terrible public policy mistake. I think it left too many people behind and too many people heartbroken.

Jim and his late husband John Arthur's story is one of love and sacrifice. It could happen to anyone. It could happen to any of us. Frankly, it happens to too many families. So as Senator BOOKER pointed out, they flew to Maryland where John's aunt, Paulette Roberts, officiated their marriage on the tarmac in a medical plane.

Paulette remarked, "If marriage vows mean anything, then those two were more married than anyone I have ever known." That speaks to their commitment, it speaks to their love, to the seriousness with which they took their wedding vows, and the seriousness of the relationship for 20 years prior to that.

Just 3 months and 11 days later John passed away. Jim has been fighting for his marriage ever since. The question is, why should he have to do that? No one ever voted to allow my wife Connie and me to stand before our families and acknowledge our love and commitment. When we were married, we were benefitting from a right not—get this—a right not extended to the minister who officiated our wedding.

The woman who officiated our wedding, Kate Huey, had had a marriage—she had had a commitment ceremony 18 years earlier. It was not until late last year that she traveled to New York with the woman she loved and was officially married, legally married in New York. You still cannot do that in Ohio. It is outrageous that she cannot do that in Ohio. I am hopeful after Jim's case is argued a couple of weeks from now and the Court hands down that decision, it will stop that bigotry and inequality that has hidden under the banner of tradition for far too long.

Keep in mind—and Senator BOOKER, I thought, laid out a lot of this history very well—Ohio once passed laws to keep Black people and White people from marrying. Ohioans came together, as we always do, we rallied, we repealed that unjust and hateful antimiscegenation law. We have a long history of fighting for justice and equality. We will not rest until we achieve that justice for Jim and for John.

I look at the pages who sit before us who are mostly 16 and 17-years-old. This is something that makes no sense to most of them. When I was talking to Jim earlier in my office, he had made a speech in Athens, OH, to Ohio University students. He told me most of them could not understand why State laws would prohibit somebody from marrying the person whom they love. They could not understand why the State government, the Ohio State government, would spend my tax dollars and Jim's tax dollars, the tax dollars of Hazel's parents—mother of the page from Ohio—the tax dollars of all of us to fight this court battle so that Jim's marriage would be denied.

If the Supreme Court rules in Jim's favor, and I think it will, Jim's name will go down in the history books, along with Roe, from Roe v. Wade; and

Brown, in Brown v. Board of Education. It is not what Jim was after. It would be fitting for a love that spanned decades and was strong enough to carry Jim here to Washington. The moment has come for our Supreme Court to stand on the right side of history and join Americans who support marriage equality.

As Senator BOOKER said, 37 States and the District of Columbia now allow marriage equality. I do not like it that we have to rely on the Supreme Court to get my State to change its laws. We have politicians who look backward rather than forward. That is too bad. We have politicians who are willing to deny human beings basic rights, basic civil rights, basic rights of decency and fairness.

I am hopeful that Jim's courage and Jim's outspokenness and Jim's willingness to join on behalf of John in his fight and make this fight will help change my State and help change our Nation. I know I cannot look to the gallery and thank somebody so I will not look to the gallery, but I will still thank Jim from here.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

SGR LEGISLATION

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I would like to share a few thoughts as we head into this week, because we will be confronting the question of how to fix the payment to our physicians who treat Medicare and Medicaid patients. If we do not take action, there will be a 21-percent reduction in the amount of money they are paid to do the work for the Federal Government.

This is an unacceptable alternative, but it is what current law says. Congress needs to fix it. In fact, we have been dealing with this for 17 years. For 17 years, Congress has, in some way or another, fixed the doctor payment plan and raised their pay so that they do not take a cut. As years have gone by, the size of the cut that needs to be fixed has increased too, as I said, 21 percent today if we do not act. I think there is a uniform, universal belief that we should do that, and do it on a permanent basis so we do not have to have doctors calling Congress every year, saying: Are you going to change the law so I can continue to do Medicare work? If you do not change it and my services are cut 21 percent, I am out of here. I can hardly make a living now on what you pay me, and taking a big cut will not allow me to continue to offer Medicare services for people in need.

It is a big issue and a real issue. I have favored a permanent fix for a number of years. I would offer, though, to my colleagues that many of us who have been concerned about the financial condition of our country have successfully insisted each one of those 17 times that the new money that is needed to pay the additional funding be