

The logo for "Blue Jersey" features the words "Blue Jersey" in a white, serif font against a dark blue rectangular background. The background has a slightly textured, hand-drawn appearance.

Rob Andrews Leads Historic Hearings on Transgender Discrimination

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Last Thursday I led a contingent of folks from Garden State Equality to attend the first ever Congressional hearings on transgender employment discrimination! The hearings were extremely insightful and for those that actually paid attention, the stories of blatant discrimination against loyal, patriotic and hard working quality professionals was simply mind boggling! For me it was especially satisfying since I played a small part in getting the parties together to enable this, and for the third time in my short political advocacy career, have a Congressman tell me he would take the lead on something and then do so - and do it very well! If for no other reason than holding these hearings, Sub Committee Chair, Congressman Rob Andrews would be deserving of great praise for saying he would and then for doing so!

But he did it so very well! What is impressive is that and he and his staff worked with terrific organizations, NCTE (National Center For Transgender Equality, **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**, ACLU, National Center for Lesbian Rights as well as state organizations such as Garden State Equality. The quality of our witnesses and the preparation given to the members of the Subcommittee reflected a high level of professionalism.

I hope you read Jason Springer's post which has the video in which Cong. Andrews slices and dices the Harvard educated lawyer for the religious radical right wing and exposes their argument as pure and simple ugly bias. Rob Andrews became a hero to many an equality loving person! I also very much appreciate that he made mention of me and Angie and Lily who were with GSE

I quote from [an LGBT blogger](#):

Rob Andrews pressed Lavy on his claims that forcing religious employers to hire transgender workers would be like "forcing an Orthodox Jew to eat pork." Andrews asks whether an Orthodox Jew with a law firm could refuse to hire a Catholic. Lavy is forced to respond in the negative. Andrews then presents a series of similar scenarios - should a pacifist be allowed to discriminate against a Vietnam vet? - and Lavy just looks at him blankly, speechlessly. Andrews is killing him right now and eloquently making the point that the "religious conscience" argument does not hold up to scrutiny. I wish I could type faster or had video! Because this is DELICIOUS. The overflow room is rapt.

But that was only part of the story, and I think the rest of the story needs to be told.

Indeed I was filled with pride to be from NJ with 3 New Jersey Congressmen playing an active positive role at the hearings, especially since only 2 were on the subcommittee. Say what?

The morning started off with a quick meeting with Congressman Rush Holt and some of his senior staff. Rush, from the first time I met him, he has "gotten it" and he never ceases to impress me as well as accord respect.

We then had a formal and productive meeting with Congressman Andrews NJ-1 and his staff prior to the hearings and followed his staff to the committee hearing room. Seeing the long line of people outside queued up for seats we followed his staffer where we waited in the witness room with the witnesses and folks from the national advocacy organizations. (VIP treatment) That was an education seeing the folks behind the scenes that prepped the witnesses and provided education for the Congressmen.... and to see what organizations actually did the work and which took the credit! **Special thanks to Becky Dansky the Task Force Federal Legislative Director for her great work with the committee and personal help in untwining my neck pendants so I could look good for the camera when it was focused on Colonel Shroer!**

Labor and Education Sub committee Chair Rob Andrews was amazing and he is now a Vice Chair of the newly formed House LGBT Equality Caucus. That caucus was formed as a result of the public outcry to the botched management of the ENDA legislation that was watered down and mutilated (aka SPLENDIA) against the will of all but one LGBT advocacy organization. One of the leaders against that SPLENDIA was committee member Rush Holt NJ-12 was and continues to be a champion for full LGBT rights and is a member of the LGBT Equality Caucus. Rush Holt made a very positive statement, but had to leave early for his own subcommittee hearing. Rush was my first Congressional Hero... "Rush rocks!"

The surprise was Cong. Donald Payne, who was a member of the overall committee, but not Andrews subcommittee, who was there for the proceedings. He asked to speak and was positive and productive and made a passing reference to our GSE meeting last fall in his Newark office as we "educated him Jersey Style". I think I glowed! That was impressive and if we can get his leadership on this as a member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), it would help insure success in the next Congress.

One of the problems was that the CBC was not behind transgender inclusion, especially some members in the South. I made sure I introduced Angie to him as she is a constituent, and said to him that when we are in Denver, I would introduce him to Marisa Richmond, an African American transwoman who is a Clinton delegate from Tennessee. (Yeah, and she is a Harvard educated college professor and grassroots activist)

Although the reporter didn't mention me, I introduced her to Lily who told her story that proved to be a nice counterbalance to distorted article and I think helped Andrews.

It was good day! The next afternoon Congressman Rush Holt called me, apologized for leaving early, and we did a post mortem, we agreed the hearings went as well as possible. YAYY!