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Biden celebrates Pride Month, highlighting LGBTQ rights

By JOSH BOAK and DARLENE SUPERVILLE

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WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden celebrated [Pride Month](#) at the White House on Friday, a reflection of the growing stature of the LGBTQ community at the highest level of government.

“Pride Month represents so much,” Biden said. “It stands for courage. The courage of all those in previous generations and today who proudly live their truth. Stands for justice. Both the steps we’ve taken and the steps we need to take. And above all, Pride Month stands for love.”

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, the first openly gay person confirmed to a Cabinet post, joined the president and first lady in the White House’s East Room and also gave remarks.

“Us even being here proves how much change is possible in America,” Buttigieg said. “So many lives have been changed, saved by the sustained advocacy, the moral resolve, the political courage of countless LGBTQ-plus leaders and allies, some elected, some invisible, some long gone, some in this room right now.”

A White House hallway was lit in the colors of the rainbow flag, a symbol of the LGBTQ movement, and Biden said he takes the

hallway each day as he goes between the residence and the Oval Office. Also on display was a candle carried during the AIDS vigil and a pair of sandals owned by Matthew Shepard, a gay college student who was fatally beaten in 1998 and whose death inspired new hate crime laws.

Also on Friday, Biden named Jessica Stern as a special diplomatic envoy at the State Department for LGBTQ rights. Her responsibilities will involve ensuring that U.S. diplomacy and foreign assistance promote and protect LGBTQ rights around the world. Stern is currently executive director of OutRight Action International, which defends human rights and works to prevent abuses of LGBTQ people.

In her new role, Stern will help put in place a presidential memorandum to advance the rights of LGBTQ people as well as bring together like-minded governments, nonprofits and corporations to uphold equality and dignity, according to the White House.

The focus also carries personal resonance for many in the Biden administration. [Karine Jean-Pierre](#), the White House's principal deputy press secretary, tweeted out her own story Friday about coming out to her mother at the age of 16 and the revolted look in response that left her sexuality a family secret for many years.

"I'm proud to be an out Black Queer woman and I have been for quite some time," she wrote. "I'm happy to say, my Mother is now proud of ALL of who I am; she loves my partner and she loves being a doting grandmother to the daughter we are raising."

Jean-Pierre added that her journey toward acceptance was not easy, but it was worthwhile.

Biden also signed into law Friday [a measure that designates the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida, as a national memorial](#). A mass shooting at the gay nightclub in June 2016 left 49 people

dead and 53 wounded in what was the deadliest attack on the LGBTQ community in U.S. history.