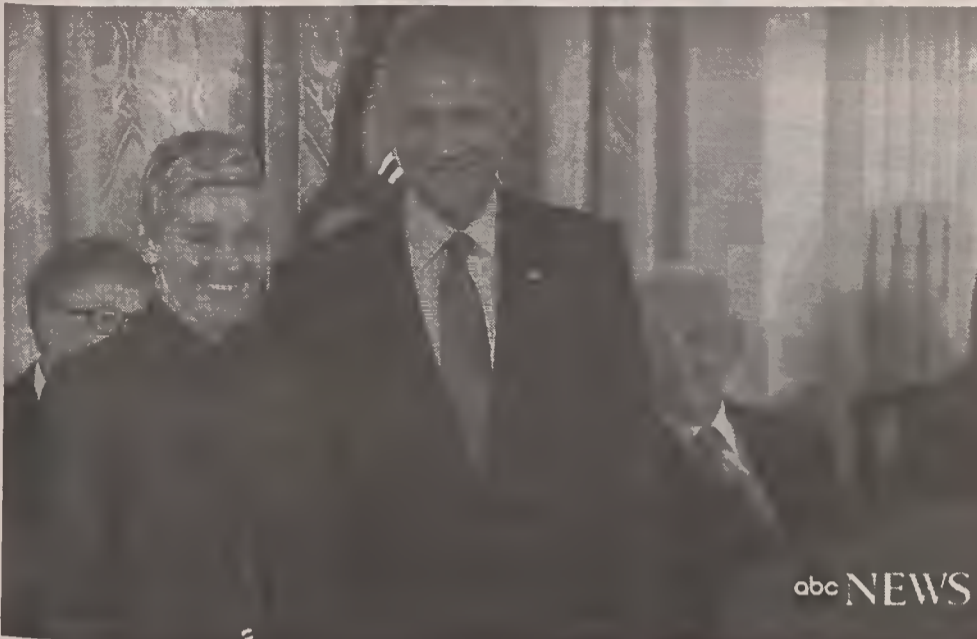


news notes: u.s./world

compiled by Dan Van Mourik :: **qnotes** contributor



President Barack Obama awarded Ellen DeGeneres in the White House.

Photo Credit: Screenshot via ABC News

Ellen honored

WASHINGTON, D.C. — As one of President Barack Obama's final acts in his presidency, he awarded 21 artists, athletes, scientists and philanthropists the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor. Among those honored was lesbian comedienne Ellen DeGeneres.

President Obama — who had to stop mid-address because he was “getting kind of choked up” — bestowed the award on the television host for her unwavering ability to make “you laugh about something, rather than at someone.” He praised DeGeneres' historic bravery for publicly coming out on national television nearly two decades ago, putting her career in jeopardy.

At the ceremony, DeGeneres held back tears as President Obama read a short speech celebrating her accomplishments: “In a career spanning three decades, Ellen DeGeneres has lifted our spirits and brought joy to our lives as a stand-up comic, actor, and television star. In every role she reminds us to be kind to one another and to treat people as each of us wants to be treated. At a pivotal moment, her courage and candor helped change the hearts and minds of millions of Americans, accelerating our nation's constant drive toward equality and acceptance for all. Again and again, Ellen DeGeneres has shown us that a single individual can make the world a more fun, more open, more loving place so long as we just keep swimming.”

DeGeneres played America's first prime-time TV character to come out as gay and was, almost simultaneously, America's first prime-time TV star to come out as gay. In April 1997, her sitcom *Ellen* featured an episode in which DeGeneres' character, Ellen Morgan, came out to her therapist, played by Oprah Winfrey. And then DeGeneres herself came out on Oprah's show.

Her brave decision created huge news. Behind the scenes, there was a great deal of anxious debate. Ellen's network ABC was owned by Disney, whose then CEO, Michael Eisner, was resistant. Although the character wore chinos and flannel shirts and steered well

clear of men, Eisner clearly felt that America's LGBT acceptance was not sufficiently developed to prepare it for the shocking revelation that Ellen was a lesbian. But DeGeneres was determined, history was made and pink America celebrated with “coming out” parties. At first, everything seemed OK. The world did not explode. But the televangelist Jerry Falwell called DeGeneres Ellen “DeGenerate,” and advertisers pulled their support from her show.

A year later Ellen was canceled, and her career seemed dead in the water. But three years later, it was water that saved her. She landed the voice role of Dory the forgetful fish in *Finding Nemo*. Dory's motto was “just keep swimming,” and that's what DeGeneres did. Her career was back on track and she is now the host of one of the most popular talk shows on daytime television.

Gay social network expands

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. — Hornet, the world's second-largest gay social network, announced that it has raised its first round of institutional funding led by Ventech China to support rapid business growth and user adoption across the globe. Hornet is committed to strengthening the gay community by providing quality social interactions with more ways to meet and engage in local gay communities. With over 15 million total and 3 million monthly active users, Hornet recently integrated Vespa — the largest, most comprehensive gay city guide — into its functionality.

Said Christof Wittig, CEO, Hornet, “Hornet brings interaction and an experience that builds relationships and helps form meaningful connections to local communities. We will invest heavily into making our vision for a fully connected gay community a reality.”

“Gay apps have evolved over the past few years to more fully engage users, who demand a richer, mobile experience,” says Hornet President Sean Howell. “Hornet users expect to interact with other members and to be informed about the issues important to gay culture. Hornet is designed to reach and fulfill the needs of our diverse user base.”

Hornet is now the number one gay social

network in markets including France, Russia, Brazil and Taiwan and is showing rapid organic growth in other key markets.

Playwrighting competition winners

NEW YORK, N.Y. — The board of the Arch and Bruce Brown Foundation has announced the winners of the foundation's 2016 LGBT playwrighting competition: First Prize: Donja R. Love, of Jersey City, N.J., for *Sugar in Our Wounds*; Second Prize: Sevan K. Greene, of New York, N.Y., for *The House of In Between*; Honorable Mentions: Daniel Loftman Hurewitz, of Brooklyn, N.Y., for *Reclamation*, T. Berto, of Guelph, Ontario, Canada, for *ROW*, Will Snider, of Del Mar, Calif., for *Strange Men*, and Lachlan Philpott, of Stanmore, NSW, Australia, for *The Trouble with Harry*.

This year's competition, the 16th in the foundation's history, drew a record-setting 267 submissions.

The Arch and Bruce Brown Foundation, established in 1994, funds LGBTQ-themed performing arts projects that are based on or inspired by history. In addition to its playwrighting competition, it operates a production-grant program that in 2016 provided financial support to more than 35 theater companies and other not-for-profit producing organizations.

Attorney General nominee condemned

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund is condemning the nomination of ultra-conservative Senator Jeff Sessions (pictured) as the nation's next Attorney General. “Senator Jeff Sessions' long track record reveals a politician who is transparently and vehemently against LGBTQ people, immigrants (both documented and undocumented) and people of color. This is the person who said the KKK is ‘OK.’ Well having someone like that as Attorney General isn't ‘OK.’ President-Elect Trump's notorious comments about Mexicans, Muslims, and people of color during the election campaign emerge from a mindset that Mr. Sessions represents. He was rejected by the Senate for a federal judgeship in the past because of his bigoted views. He hasn't changed — and he shouldn't be nominated nor be



confirmed,” said Rea Carey, Executive Director, National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund.

“The choice of Senator Sessions to lead the Department of Justice is more than deeply unsatisfactory; it is a blatantly inflammatory act in a time of heightened focus on violence and injustice against communities of color. The Attorney General is the ultimate defender of the rights and liberties of all people in the United States. Sessions' history of racist rhetoric, insults and persecution is well-known, and put a swift end to his nomination for a federal judgeship years ago. As U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama, he became infamous for his prosecutions of African Americans for vote fraud, all of which ended in acquittals. The proposed nomination of this person as a candidate for this position is a shocking gesture of hostility toward millions of Americans, and should be immediately rejected,” said Alliance for Justice President Nan Aron.

Have news or other information? Send your press releases and updates for inclusion in our News Notes: editor@goqnotes.com.

Happy Holidays!

From staff of qnotes and all of our contributors to you and your beautiful array of family, friends and loved ones, we wish you the brightest, merriest, most peaceful holiday season and a Happy New Year!

Thank you for being a reader!