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United States Senate
Hearing on the
Employment Non-Discrimination Act
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On behalf of 24,000 U.S. employees of Shell, I thank the committee for the opportunity to share our company's perspective on the issue of diversity and discrimination in the workplace and to voice our strong support for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

Shell's commitment to diversity has been strong and very active. Shell's plan for how we will conduct our business is outlined in our Blueprint for Success which not only defines how we will deliver on our performance commitments, but also how we will ensure every employee can contribute to his or her full potential. Our goal is to become a model of diversity for corporate America - a lofty aspiration, but one that we take seriously and work every day to achieve.

In order to reach that goal, Shell has adopted policies that it believes create an environment where all of our employees feel that they have a chance to exercise their creativity, knowledge and experience without fear of ostracism or reprisal. People spend a good portion of their lives in the workplace; why deprive them of achieving the satisfaction of being able to give of themselves in the fullest measure and our company of the benefit of their productivity?

As an essential element of those policies, our non-discrimination policy expressly states that the company will not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. This has been the policy of Shell Oil Co. since April 1996. This policy is not only in place because it is the right thing to do. It is the right business decision as well.

Our non-discrimination policy has worked well. In the years since we included sexual orientation, its implementation has been accepted broadly and we believe it has affected our bottom line for the better. Having this policy significantly improves employees' morale, loyalty and productivity. Simply put, our business would be greatly diminished if our gay and lesbian employees lived every day in fear of discrimination. The same is true for all businesses.

Our gay and lesbian employees have worked closely with our leadership to help advance employee awareness and understanding of issues that are important to Shell and its employees. Most importantly, they have helped Shell model desired policies and practices to the external environment.

Since its formation, our gay and lesbian employee network, called SEA Shell, participated in volunteer activities in the local community such as the AIDS walk, the Pride Parade and the Greater Houston Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce's Empower events.

All of these activities are driven by the realization that we must take action to effect change. Our way of life – our freedom, open-mindedness, and understanding of what it means to be tolerant – are being challenged like never before, especially in the aftermath of the events of September 11.

Society today is demanding greater accountability from businesses, governments and individuals. Shell's commitment is to America - and to what it represents. And, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act goes to the core of what this nation is all about. Giving all our citizens the fundamental right to be judged on one's own merits.

In fact, the fairness and simplicity of this bill is one of its most compelling features. Affirmative action is not mandated by this bill. It contains no reporting requirements. It does not compel employers to grant domestic partner benefits, although Shell has done so for many years. A

federal law would create a level playing field for corporate America with the right policy against discrimination. Currently our business has to comply with 12 differing state laws against sexual orientation discrimination, while our employees in other states are afforded no legal protection under state law. One uniform federal policy would ease our administrative burden.

This bill embodies the principle of non-discrimination that already enjoys the wide support of the American people. Nearly two-thirds of America's Fortune 500 companies already include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies. A recent poll found that more than 80 percent of Americans believe that gays and lesbian should be given equal opportunity in the workplace.

Unfortunately, in many places, just the opposite occurs. It remains legal in 38 states to fire an individual based solely on his or her real or perceived sexual orientation. And while many large employers have recognized the value of diversity others have not.

It is Shell's belief that ENDA is good for American business, large and small. The principles it fosters are consistent with our corporate principles of treating all employees with fairness and respect. We encourage the Congress to move expeditiously to pass this common-sense legislation.