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MARRIAGE EQUALITY USA CELEBRATES THE START OF 2010 BY APPLAUDING UNION'S ACTION TO EXTEND EQUAL BENEFITS TO SAME-SEX COUPLES; ADVOCATES FOR ALL UNIONS TO TAKE UP NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION TO PROVIDE EQUAL PROTECTION FOR ALL MEMBERS

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San Francisco: Marriage Equality USA (MEUSA) kicks off 2010 by celebrating the Trustees of the National Elevator Industry (NEI) Health Benefit Plan decision to extend health care benefits to domestic partners and same-sex married couples and highlighting the collaborative efforts of allies that helped influence this decision. Prior to this decision, the NEI Health Benefits Plan restricted coverage to opposite-sex couples and by changing this policy and living up to the union motto of "equal pay to equal work," this extension of benefits has had an immediate benefit to gay and lesbian union members covered under this plan.

"I am overjoyed that after years of trying to get health care coverage for my husband, today we can schedule Joe's long overdue hip surgery and end the chronic pain he has been suffering," said Frank Capley-Alfano, a dues paying member of the International Union of Elevator Constructors (IUEC). Frank and Joe have been together nine years, registered as domestic partners and married in San Francisco in 2008. Joe has suffered from a degenerative disc condition that has limited his ability to work. Unable to get coverage for his pre-existing condition, Joe lived with the fear of losing his ability to walk in the future without corrective surgery and Frank lived with the devastation of being able to care for his family like other union member could.

"Frank and Joe are not alone," said Molly McKay, MEUSA Media Director. "We learned of other IUEC members who were unable to provide equal protections for their families, families like Anitra and Kim and their newborn child. Anitra was formerly a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) and received health care benefits through that union. Anitra was shocked to learn that in joining the IUEC, she would lose health care coverage and would have to take on a second job to pay for private insurance."

Labor unions from the United Auto Workers to the Teamsters are walking the talk by ensuring their members, their gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, receive equal pay for equal work through updating benefits packages to be fully inclusive of all members. In particular, labor unions in California have been updating policies to comply with local anti-discrimination ordinances. "As one New Year's resolution, we hope all unions across the nation revisit their benefit plans and ensure they provide equal protection to all members," said McKay.

"Last but not least, we know this victory wouldn't have been possible without the support and active engagement of our allies," concludes McKay. "We would like to thank Pride at Work, Senator Mark Leno's office, Congressman George Miller's office, San Francisco Human Relations Commission, Harvey Milk and Alice B Toklas Democratic Clubs, San Francisco Labor Council and Trades Association, and the National Center for Lesbian Rights for helping us to encourage the Trustees of the NEI Health Benefit Plan to extend health care coverage to union member's same sex couples."

"This victory is truly a victory for everyone," said Frank Capley-Alfano. "This change will make the world of difference for our family and for others like us across the nation. And it illustrates what is possible when we come together to work as a team. Thanks to everyone who helped make this dream a reality."

Founded in 1998, Marriage Equality USA is a national grassroots organization whose mission is to secure legally recognized civil marriage equality for all, at the federal and state level, without regard to gender identity or sexual orientation. For more information, go to www.marriageequality.org.