

RELEASE IN FULL

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By MATTHEW LEE

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton will soon announce that gay American diplomats will be given benefits similar to those that their heterosexual counterparts enjoy, U.S. officials said Saturday.

In a notice to be sent soon to State Department employees, Clinton says regulations that denied same-sex couples and their families the same rights and privileges that straight diplomats enjoyed are "unfair and must end," as they harm U.S. diplomacy.

"Providing training, medical care and other benefits to domestic partners promote the cohesiveness, safety and effectiveness of our posts abroad," she says in the message, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press.

"It will also help the department attract and retain personnel in a competitive environment where domestic partner benefits and allowances are increasingly the norm for world-class employers," she says:

"At bottom, the department will provide these benefits for both opposite-sex and same-sex domestic partners because it is the right thing to do," Clinton says.

Among the benefits that will now be granted gay diplomats: the right of domestic partners to hold diplomatic passports, government-paid travel for their partners and families to and from foreign posts, and the use of U.S. medical facilities abroad.

In addition, gay diplomats' families will now be eligible for U.S. government emergency evacuations and training courses at the Foreign Service Institute, the message says.

The announcement, expected this week, was provided to the AP by a State Department official who is a member of the Gays and Lesbians in Foreign Affairs Agencies organization. Two department officials not affiliated with the organization confirmed its accuracy.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publically about the changes.