In a win for the LGBTQ community on June 15, the United States Supreme Court ruled that an employer who fires a worker for being gay or transgender violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Until mid-June, legal equality for LGBTQ people did not extend to the workplace because 29 states still allowed employers to legally fire employees for being gay or transgender. The surprise ruling came during Pride Month, which occurs in the U.S. to commemorate the Stonewall riots that happened in NYC at the end of June 1969.

While the ruling itself is shocking enough, it’s the margin in the 6-3 decision and the author of the opinion that are far more astounding—and probably history-making. Justice Neil Gorsuch, a conservative Trump appointee, wrote that the ban on sex-based discrimination in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act protects employees from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. He was joined in his opinion by Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, and Stephen G. Breyer.

Gorsuch was President Trump’s first nominee to the Supreme Court, and has often been described as a “predictably socially conservative judge.” Up until now, he had established himself as one of the court’s most conservative justices and a reliable vote for Trump-administration initiatives that reached the highest court, such as the travel ban on anyone arriving from predominantly Muslim countries, placing a citizenship question on the census form, and banning transgender service members in the military.

The justice that “conservatives hoped for and liberals feared” made a decision in this case that has left many conservative supporters stymied. His reasoning, however, has changed how more than 7 million LGBTQ individuals will now be able to work and live in this country, having already been granted the legal right to marry in 2015.

Pride Month is largely credited as being started by bisexual activist Brenda Howard, known as “The Mother of Pride.” A year after the Stonewall Riots, Brenda organized Gay Pride Week and the Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade, which eventually morphed into what is now known as the New York City Pride March.

Although this year’s Pride Parade was canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic, 15,000 people crowded together in Brooklyn for the Black Trans Lives Matter Rally to commemorate Black trans people who have been killed in recent months.
In her own words: Vera Jordan on the Pride Committee

“I wanted to start the Pride Committee to provide a safe space for our members who identify as LGBTQ and also include the allies. I have always been a big union supporter and participated in many committees, but felt I didn’t have a space where I knew I could celebrate this part of myself,” Jordan said.

“Being able to resurrect the Local 1180 Pride Committee was the best thing ever. We had a strategic plan to lead our members right into Pride 2020. However, on March 18, COVID-19 changed the world. We were placed on PAUSE due to rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic that unfortunately placed the CWA Local 1180 Pride Committee on PAUSE, too. Then months later comes another nationwide problem; we lost another African-American male, George Floyd, at the hands of a disruptive cop.

A sad moment for the world. His death lead to the world coming together to voice again ‘BLACK LIVES MATTER.’ I also want to commemorate Tony McDade, a Black trans man who was killed by police.

“Being an African-American educated woman, single mother, grandmother of three, union member, and someone who identifies as a lesbian, I must say, our lives matter. During this time, I know the CWA 1180 Committee was to walk in the Pride parade. Instead, we will be virtual, what is now called the new norm. Looking out from the inside, we are all one and no matter what, we will conquer. LBGTQ LIVES MATTER. Happy 2020 PRIDE.”