

Has Obama Ushered in a New Era for LGBT Rights?

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President Obama's speech this past weekend made it "abundantly clear" that America is looking at "a new era for civil rights for LGBT people," said one gay rights advocate.

The address on Saturday at an event hosted by the nation's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organization "drew a clear line in the sand for the world to see: this administration believes in and will work with the LGBT community and our allies to achieve full equality under the law for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans," said Mitchell Gold, founder of nonreligious organization Faith in America.

"President Obama's presence and words represented his recognition that LGBT people are a normal part of our diverse society."

It was an evening of standing ovations and loud applause as thousands of gay rights supporters heard Obama say he is on their side. He called LGBT people his friends and assured them that despite some of the pressing issues, including the economy, on his desk he remains "unwavering" in his commitment to them.

"We cannot and we will not put aside issues of basic equality," Obama said at the [Human Rights Campaign's](#) 13th Annual National Dinner. "This fight continues now. And I'm here with a simple message: I'm here with you in that fight."

Many are hailing Obama as the first U.S. president to express such strong commitment to the LGBT people.

HRC president Joe Solmonese stated, "This was a historic night when we felt the full embrace and commitment of the President of the United States. It's simply unprecedented."

During his speech Saturday, Obama said his administration is "moving ahead" on the "don't ask, don't tell" policy, which bans gays and lesbians from serving openly in the armed forces. He promised to sign into law an inclusive hate crimes bill, which would expand federal protection to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people; push the Employment Non-Discrimination Act; and repeal the federal Defense of Marriage Act.

The issue of marriage drew out the most emotion and applause from the crowd. Obama noted that when they look back over the years of his administration, they will "see a time in which we as a nation finally recognized relationships between two men or two women as just as real and admirable as relationships between a man and a woman."

Obama also made it no secret that he wants to go beyond policy changes and change hearts.

"There are still fellow citizens...good and decent people who hold fast to outworn arguments and old attitudes who fail to see your families like their families," he said. "Are we a nation that can transcend old attitudes and worn divides?"

While it was no surprise that Obama would address HRC members, conservatives were shocked to hear Obama promise what they consider "radical cultural changes."

Prominent evangelical and Southern Baptist theologian R. Albert Mohler Jr. said Obama's words "represent a moral revolution that goes far beyond what any other President has ever promised or articulated."

"It is virtually impossible to imagine a promise more breathtaking in its revolutionary character than this – to normalize same-sex relationships to the extent that they are recognized as being as admirable as heterosexual marriage," the seminary president commented.

Following Obama's remarks, Tony Perkins, president of the conservative Family Research Council, similarly said it was clear from the speech that Obama's goal is not simply equal legal rights but rather "to overturn millennia of moral teaching that has acknowledged the harms of homosexual conduct and the unique benefits of marriage between a man and a woman."

He further called the president out for neglecting to mention that "all of this will be forced on the American people who in the last election gave the President a mandate to fix the economy – not enact radical social policy changes such as allowing homosexuals to serve in the military."

"President Obama tried to hide his pro-homosexual agenda during the presidential campaign. With the election behind him and a liberal Congress beside him, he is now positioned to move forward an agenda with the ultimate goal of redefining marriage at the expense of religious liberty," he said.

In a statement Sunday, Perkins' organization vowed to work to defeat Obama administration's legislative strategy and to continue to promote policies that strengthen traditional marriage and religious liberty for generations to come.

Last week, the Pew Research Center revealed in a study that the majority of Americans (53 percent) oppose gay marriage while 39 percent favor it. The statistics have remained almost unchanged when compared to 2003. Moreover, 49 percent consider homosexual behavior morally wrong. At the same time, 64 percent believe gays and lesbians face more discrimination than any other group.

The study, however, demonstrated that attitudes may be changing as younger generations show more support than older Americans for LGBT people. More than half of 18- to 29-year-olds (58 percent) support gay marriage, compared to 38 percent of 30- to 49-year-olds and 35 percent of Americans aged 50-64. Additionally, the younger generation is less likely to say homosexual behavior is morally wrong compared to older adults.

Results for the survey were based on telephone interviews conducted among a nationwide sample of 4,013 adults, 18 years of age or older.

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