

Dem. Nat'l Convention: No words: 'Gays' and 'lesbians' not on platform

by Lisa Keen, Keen News Service
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Heading into the Democratic National Convention next week (Aug. 25-28) , the LGBT is confronted with two stark ironies:

One: Under the presidential nominee who has uttered the words "gays and lesbians" in a supportive way more than any other candidate on the campaign trail, the Democratic Party has completely eliminated those words from its platform.

Two: A long line of LGBT leaders has only praise for the platform that dares not speak their name.

That's right. The 54-page Democratic platform for 2008 does not mention the words "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual" or "transgender" even once.

And yet, U.S. Rep. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., a lesbian and a champion of inclusion, calls it "by far the most pro-equality platform in Democratic history" and one that "makes very clear our party rejects discrimination, including, very explicitly, discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity."

True, the text three times mentions "sexual orientation", twice regarding the military and once denouncing all forms of discrimination. It mentions "gender identity" once, in this latter context.

But the 2008 platform is the first time since 1992, when the party first included the word "gay," that it has omitted explicit mention of the words or any identifiable acronym for the LGBT community.

But Baldwin was not alone in her assessment. **Her sentiments were echoed by Rea Carey, head of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**; Aubrey Sarvis, head of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network; Mara Keisling, head of the National Center for Transgender Equality; Alabama lesbian State Rep. Patricia Todd; and Jon Hoadley, head of the National Stonewall Democrats, among others.

Baldwin, who was one of only 15 members of the final platform drafting committee, said that the document is "shoulders above where we were four years ago."

The key, she explained, was that while the 2004 platform mentioned gays explicitly, the 2008 platform does more.

The 2000 and 2004 platforms promised the party's support for full inclusion of "gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation," compared to the 2008 platform, which supports "all families."

The 2004 platform repudiated President Bush's divisive effort to politicize the Constitution by pursuing a "Federal Marriage Amendment" but did not repudiate that amendment itself. And the

2004 platform said nothing about the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) , and said only that marriage should be "defined at the state level." The 2008 platform says nothing about the Federal Marriage Amendment but says Democrats "oppose the Defense of Marriage Act and all attempts to use this issue to divide us."

The 2004 platform said the party was "committed to equal treatment of all service members."The 2008 platform, in discussing the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"policy, says, "it is wrong to deny our country the service of brave, qualified" service members and says Democrats "support the repeal" of that policy "and the implementation of policies to allow qualified men and women to serve openly regardless of sexual orientation."

The 2000 and 2004 platforms promised to enact legislation to bar "workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation." The 2008 platform promises to enact a "comprehensive bipartisan employment non-discrimination act."

And unlike the 2004 platform, the 2008 platform promises Democrats "will fight to end discrimination based on race, sexual orientation, gender identity in every corner of our country, because that's the America we believe in."

But the 2008 platform also includes a new section, "Fatherhood," that is reads more like a platform statement from the Republican Party. The section claims that "Children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and are more likely to commit crime, drop out of school, abuse drugs and end up in prison." The sweeping nature of the statement, while perhaps true of families headed by heterosexual couples, is not supported by research that has examined the well-being of children in families headed by lesbian couples.

Openly gay Alabama State Rep. Patricia Todd, who serves on the 186-member platform committee, acknowledged that the "whole section on fathers bothered me."

"I'm uncomfortable with this being in the platform," she said during a telephone conference call with gay media reporters and gay leaders Aug. 11. But she said there was never any discussion about keeping that out of there.

As for the complete absence of the terms identifying the gay community explicitly, Baldwin said "there was no discussion about keeping any words out."

Said Diego Sanchez, a transgender activist from Boston serving as the first transgender person on the platform committee: "Whatever the word is, it's fully inclusive and delivers on that promise."

The Human Rights Campaign issued a statement saying: "The platform addresses many of our community's critical issues, however it does not explicitly use the words gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender. While this has prompted much discussion, it is our responsibility as a community in this election year to compare this document with the soon-to-be-adopted Republican platform and to judge which party would best advocate for us. Additionally, we challenge the Republican Party to, for the first time, adopt equally supportive language."