



Obama's Selection of Evangelical Pastor Rick Warren for Inauguration Sparks Gay Outrage

The LGBT community is questioning Obama's commitment to gay rights

By Dan Gilgoff

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The selection of megachurch pastor Rick Warren to deliver the invocation at Barack Obama's inauguration has fueled outrage and protests from the gay community, who take issue with Warren's statements of disapproval for homosexuality and his support of Proposition 8, the gay marriage ban that passed in California on Election Day.

Gay rights activists said the Warren announcement came at time when the movement is already apprehensive about how forcefully the Obama administration will embrace their issues.

"The Obama team has sent a very uplifting message that positive change is coming for LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender] Americans, but we haven't seen it yet," says David Smith, vice president of the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest gay rights group. "There has been no concrete evidence of inclusion. That's the environment in which this Warren announcement happened—it exacerbates the level of disappointment that exists."

Leaders in the gay rights movement said that they were impressed with the degree to which the Obama transition team was including issues of concerns to the LGBT community in drawing up a policy agenda, but that such outreach didn't make them more willing to accept the news of Warren's high-profile role at the inauguration.

The inauguration represents the dawn of his presidency, so the symbolism is unmistakable," says Smith. "To have a man who so vociferously opposes LGBT equality... it almost gives license that the Reverend's views are somehow tolerable or acceptable."

"The president-elect has set up a transition team that is clearly engaging our community about policies, but we can't ignore Warren," adds Darlene Nipper, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "But when people sit down and listen to an inauguration, they are looking to see themselves reflected."

Warren, author of the bestselling *Purpose-Driven Life* and pastor of the Saddleback Church in Orange County, Calif., has sought to distance himself from Christian right leaders who frame evangelical political concerns mostly around fighting abortion rights and gay rights. At the same time, Warren opposes gay marriage and gay civil unions and has said that he objects to the homosexual lifestyle.

Responding to questions about Warren at a press conference in Chicago today, Obama said that America needs to "come together," even when there's disagreement on social issues, according to the Associated Press. "That dialogue is part of what my campaign is all about," he said.

In an interview today, Obama spokeswoman Linda Douglass defended the Warren selection. "It would be a mistake to assume that there were a lot of political considerations made here," she says. "This was a decision that was based on President-elect Obama's commitment to finding common ground with people with conflicting and divergent news."

"The important thing here," Douglass continued, "is that the President-elect clearly disagrees with those views and is a strong proponent of gay and lesbian rights and has a long record of championing those rights... It's his views on LGBT issues that are the views that matter."

A handful of gay rights organizations have released letters and statements calling for Obama to rescind his invitation to Warren.

"Your invitation to Reverend Rick Warren to deliver the invocation at your inauguration is a genuine blow to LGBT Americans," read a letter from the Human Rights Campaign to the President-elect. "...[B]y inviting Rick Warren to your inauguration, you have tarnished the view that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Americans have a place at your table."