

Time to speak up for gays, Presidential candidates told

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An influential US campaigning group has spoken out against the silence Democratic presidential candidates have kept over the issues affecting gay people.

Matt Foreman, executive director of the Gay and Lesbian Task Force, says that despite their laudable support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, no candidate has vocally completely supported the rights of LGBT Americans.

Exit poll data estimates that the LGBT community in the United States makes up approximately four percent of the voting population.

"No major Democratic candidate has made the kind of sweeping statement of inclusion as Bill Clinton in 1992, when he declared to a huge crowd of LGBT people in Los Angeles, 'I have a vision for America and you are part of it,'" Foreman wrote on TheTaskForce.org.

"His words brought tears to the eyes of the audience and rang out across the United States. Even the most sceptical of us in the LGBT community knew that we heard something previously unspoken by any major political figure."

Foreman says that in the face of thinly-veiled and sometimes blatantly homophobic attacks from Republican candidates, the Democrats have been dangerously silent.

"You can find our issues explicitly referenced on only three candidates' sites (Dennis Kucinich, Bill Richardson and Mike Gravel).

"Frontrunners Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards carefully parse their support of our people into specific reforms.

"We find no evidence that the Democratic frontrunners counter Republicans' anti-LGBT speech with routine and positive inclusion of LGBT people in their visions for a whole and healthy society.

"We deserve and we must demand from the Democratic 2008 presidential candidates the simple and straightforward statement that our humanity requires full respect and fair treatment by all and, further, an equally simple and straightforward condemnation of those who seek to use our lives for political gain.

"This needs to be said in front of all audiences — not just in front of us."

Foreman may have been referring to the upcoming televised debate for the gay community, to be chaired by human rights activist Joe Solomnese and gay performer Melissa Etheridge.

Senators Clinton and Obama and former Senator John Edwards have confirmed they will participate in the debate, the first specifically for the LGBT community.

Republican hopefuls have also been invited.

The candidates will debate issues such as relationship recognition, marriage equality, workplace

fairness, the exclusion of openly gay people from the military, hate crimes and HIV/AIDS.

The hour-long event will be broadcast live on gay network LOGO and through live streaming at LOGOonline.com on August 9th.

Viewers will be able to submit questions online at the LOGO website.

Last month, the Gay and Lesbian Task Force released the first comprehensive analysis of the top 19 candidates for the 2008 presidency on LGBT issues.

The report, *The 2008 Presidential Candidates' Positions on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues*, and its accompanying chart were based on an analysis of the voting records and public statements of the candidates in eight key LGBT issue areas.

According to the report, all Democratic candidates are supportive of the majority of LGBT issues, including transgender-inclusive non-discrimination and hate crimes laws.

Across the board, Republican candidates were in opposition to the majority of LGBT issues, with most publicly opposing lifting the military ban on openly lesbian, gay and bisexual service members.