



With nomination cinched, Obama reaches out to LGBTs

June 13, 2008
by Eric Resnick

As soon as Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama cinched the nomination on June 3, LGBT political groups and individuals began to endorse him. At the same time, the campaign is promising LGBT outreach in all 50 states.

Promising a “moment to build power” for the LGBT community, civil rights activist and political strategist David Mixner joined former Human Rights Campaign president Elizabeth Birch and current HRC president Joe Solmonese, civil rights law professor Tobias Wolff, and openly gay Obama deputy campaign manager Steve Hildebrand in a June 6 conference call.

Birch attempted to articulate what Hillary Clinton supporters like her “are feeling at this juncture.”

Calling Clinton a “vanquished warrior,” Birch said there was “estrogen operating” for a number of Clinton supporters.

“The emotions women are feeling are not just about Hillary Clinton,” Birch said, “but about the experiences of all women projecting on the screen.”

Birch congratulated Obama on his victory, and asked for patience for grieving Clinton supporters as they join his campaign.

“It will happen,” Birch said. “It won’t happen in hours, but it will in days.”

Hildebrand said the campaign is planning “significant education programs for LGBT voters,” and LGBT outreach operations in all 50 states.

Hildebrand announced that openly lesbian rock star Melissa Etheridge will co-chair a 50-state LGBT voter registration program.

Brian Bond, who directed the Democratic National Committee’s Gay and Lesbian Leadership Council and the Lesbian and Gay Victory Fund, will join the Obama campaign as the director of all constituencies.

Former Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation director Joan Garry and Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network founder Kevin Jennings will head the campaign’s LGBT fundraising efforts.

In a gesture to both the LGBT community and Clinton supporters, Wolff said the campaign is all about Obama earning the trust and loyalty of voters, including LGBT ones.

“We will do trust earning work for the balance of the race,” Wolff said.

On behalf of HRC, Solmonese joined the chorus of LGBT endorsements of Obama--the first being New Jersey's Garden State Equality, which hit e-mail inboxes within moments of Obama's announcement that he had the delegates to become the Democratic nominee.

"HRC is proud to throw our full support behind Senator Obama's presidential campaign," said Solmonese.

"Senator Obama has consistently shown that he understands, as we do, that, GLBT rights are civil rights, and human rights. Senator Obama has said that embracing 'our gay brothers and sisters' is true to Martin Luther King's vision."

Solmonese also discussed Obama's Republican opponent John McCain's record on LGBT issues, pledging "HRC will give resources like never before" to elect Obama over McCain.

The Obama campaign announced June 11 that Dave Noble will be joining it as the Director of LGBT Vote. Noble will leave his current post as the director of public policy and government affairs at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. He is the former director of the National Stonewall Democrats.

Noble will start full time with the campaign June 20. His assistant will be Chicago gay activist Jamie Citron.

During the conference call announcing Noble's appointment, few specifics of his job description were discussed.

However, Noble's duties will include overseeing the campaign's involvement in 60 Pride festivals during June, putting together LGBT surrogates to speak for the campaign, and seeing that LGBT people have volunteer and leadership positions throughout the campaign.

"My being hired means the campaign is serious about reaching out to all corners to include LGBT people," Noble said.