

## **Day 1 of our DNC coverage: LGBT delegates get on board for Obama/Biden**

by Lisa Keen  
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DENVER - Not everyone in the LGBT contingent to the Democratic National Convention is happy with how things turned out but everyone's on board the Barack Obama boat and rowing towards the White House.

Although his running mate doesn't have a perfect record on gay issues, the LGBT people attending the 2008 convention in Denver this week say he's good enough and can be trusted to stick up for gay civil rights. Although the platform omits any mention of "gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people," most LGBT delegates and their supporters say it's the most pro-gay platform in history. And although only two openly gay speakers are -as of today-slated to speak from the convention podium, most LGBT caucus members say they don't believe their issues are being pushed aside.

"No, things are not perfect," said Stamp Corbin, co-chair of the Obama campaign's National LGBT Leadership Council, "but civil rights struggles are incremental, and we're moving the ball up the field here." Corbin, who lives in San Diego and Ohio, said he's in Denver this week "to celebrate a candidate who is really fantastic."

Corbin's sentiments were echoed time and again. In interviews with more than two dozen delegates, alternates, and activists attending this week's convention, which officially gets underway today, most LGBT people brushed off their frequent laments and focused on what they like about the Democratic presidential ticket headed by U.S. Senator Barack Obama (D-Ill.) and what it can mean for the community and the movement.

### **Backing Biden**

One thing the LGBT caucus members interviewed agree upon is Obama's vice presidential choice: They like U.S. Senator Joe Biden (D-Del.). Biden, whose addition to the ticket was announced Aug. 23. Biden does not have a perfect record on gay civil rights but "it's like Barack's record," said Keith Boykin, an openly gay appointee in the Clinton White House, a frequent commentator on CNN, and a former classmate of Obama's at Harvard Law School.

Jim Hormel, the San Francisco philanthropist who, in the Clinton administration, became the first openly gay ambassador, said he's known Biden since 1988, adding, "I respect him highly."

Biden's Congressional Scorecard, as calculated by the Human Rights Campaign, was a perfect 100 in the session 2001 to 2002, but it dropped to 63 in 2003 to 2004, and in the last session, 2005 to 2006, it stood at only 78. Biden voted for the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996 but has opposed efforts to amend the federal constitution to ban gay marriage and says legal rights for gay couples is inevitable. He was also one of the few Democratic presidential candidates who did not show up for the HRC-Logo Channel candidates' forum in Los Angeles a year ago. His campaign cited scheduling conflicts but there were no scheduled appearances the day of the forum.

But on the campaign trail, Biden has been anything but tepid in his support of equal rights for gays. In Iowa, Biden was the first presidential candidate to meet with a group of gays - Connections, in Iowa City - at their own reception, broadcast on C-SPAN. And in an early debate in June 2007, he spoke forcefully against the military's policy excluding gays, saying it was "ridiculous."

Biden's assessment came up in the context of a very public remark by then Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Peter Pace, who had advised Congress to keep the current "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy and added his belief that homosexuality is immoral.

Biden said Pace was "flat wrong" to support the policy. "I've been to Afghanistan, I've been to Iraq seven times, I've been in the Balkans, I've been in the foxholes with these kids, literally, in bunkers with them. Let me tell you something: Nobody asks anybody else whether they're gay in those foxholes." Biden also noted that "all our major allies" allow gays to serve.

"And by the way," added Biden, "we've got a war on our hands we're trying to end, and, in the meantime, we're breaking the military. Nine thousand of these people have been kicked out. This is not a rational policy."

An attorney, Biden has represented Delaware in the U.S. Senate since 1972 and is widely seen as one of the country's most knowledgeable politicians on foreign diplomacy.

Week ahead

Denver is shaping up to be one of the busiest Democratic National Conventions in terms of LGBT events. At their several events during the weekend, the National Stonewall Democrats heard from Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius and Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick. Sebelius told the crowd she had tried to stop the anti-gay marriage amendment in her state "because it was the wrong direction and the wrong message." Patrick encouraged LGBT to "stake a claim" on the Democratic Party and "don't let anybody push you to the margins."

**Stonewall and the Matthew Shepard Foundation hosted a fundraiser Sunday night, as did the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. The Task Force reception highlighted a documentary film, For My Wife, about how Seattle lesbian Charlene Strong became an activist for same-sex marriage after she was denied access to her partner, Kate Fleming, as she lay dying in a hospital following an accident.**

Stonewall is holding a tea party Tuesday afternoon where Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean has been invited to make an appearance. The National Black Justice Coalition is hosting a reception for people of color on Tuesday, along with the Human Rights Campaign. HRC and the Victory Fund are hosting a lunch for the LGBT caucus on Tuesday, at which Michelle Obama has been asked to appear. And the Human Rights Campaign is staging a concert Tuesday night with performers Melissa Etheridge and Cyndi Lauper, among others.

LGBT people attending the convention say they are hopeful that both Obama and Biden will at least make mention of gay people explicitly in their nationally televised acceptance speeches this week. But aside from that, the gist of this convention for LGBT people seems focused on celebration. Among other things, they are celebrating the largest LGBT caucus in Democratic Party history (372 strong as of Sunday), a third openly gay member of Congress (Jared Polis of Colorado) likely to win a seat to join Reps. Tammy Baldwin and Barney Frank, and a platform that not only includes specific pro-gay policy statements but also, for the first time, opposes discrimination based on gender identity. And, like other Democrats attending the convention this week, the LGBT caucus and activists are busy rallying the troops behind the party's nominee for the push to November.