



DOMA defense puts DNC gay fundraiser in peril

By OnTopMag.com

June 19, 2009

<http://la.gopride.com/news/article.cfm/articleid/7575696>

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Wednesday's executive order signed by President Obama that extends certain benefits to the spouses of gay and lesbian federal employees has failed to stem the rising tide of defections from next Thursday's gay DNC fundraiser.

Gay activists called for a boycott on the LGBT Leadership Council's fundraiser for the Democratic National Committee to protest the Obama administration's defense of the Defense of Marriage Act, or DOMA, the 1996 law that allows states to ignore legal gay marriages performed in other states and defines marriage as a heterosexual union for federal agencies.

The number of gay donors who say they will skip the fundraiser is rising as the president remains mum about the brief that has troubled the LGBT community. While candidate Obama promised he would repeal DOMA, the administration defended the law in a lawsuit brought by a gay couple who have called it unconstitutional. The administration's defense has been labeled "homophobic" for drawing parallels between gay marriage and incestuous and polygamous relationships, and its reliance on outdated and inaccurate gay stereotypes.

"The brief was very troubling to a lot of people and rightfully so," Richard Socarides, a former special assistant to President Clinton, told ABC News. "Supporters of the Democratic Party and others who feel that gay and lesbian equality is an important issue for this administration to address are rightly concerned about this brief. Serious issues still need clarification." Activists had hoped for that clarification yesterday. But surrounded by a mob of media as he signed the federal benefits memorandum, Obama failed to repudiate the brief, saying only that he remains committed to repealing DOMA.

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs also passed on the opportunity to clarify the administration's position on the brief.

"[T]he Justice Department is charged with upholding the law of the land, even though the president believes that the law should be repealed," Gibbs said Wednesday at a press briefing.

"The president did not last night address what direction he would give the Justice Department when these issues come up in the future, he did not address the continued discharges of gay people from the military," Socarides, who will not attend next week's fundraiser, said.

Gay activist David Mixner was the first high-profile dropout of the event, writing in a blog post last Friday, "With Democratic friends like these, God help us."

Also 86'd are blogger Andy Towle, Alan Van Capelle, executive director of the Empire State Pride Agenda, a group that lobbies for gay marriage in New York, Rea Carey, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and Marty Rouse, national field director of the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest gay and lesbian rights advocate.

Wednesday, gay philanthropist Bruce Bastian told the *Washington Blade* that blanket donations to the Democratic Party were not "justified" at this time, adding he would continue to support individual candidates.

Also pulling out his support is Vermont Senate Pro Tempore Peter Shumlin, who shepherded the first gay marriage bill through the Vermont Legislature.

"This memo from the Justice Department is more Bush than Bush," Shumlin, who is straight, told the *Times-Argus*. "It takes the only minority group left in America that national politicians can publicly discriminate against and still see their numbers go up in

the polls and it reinforces the horrible stereotypes about our friends and neighbors."

The \$1,000-a-person minimum fundraiser will feature Vice President Joe Biden and is co-chaired by Congress' three openly gay members: Wisconsin Representative Tammy Baldwin, Massachusetts Representative Barney Frank and Colorado Representative Jared Polis.