

Obama: I Am A Champion For Gay Americans

President Obama, who has come under harsh criticism from gay rights advocates for not yet acting on many campaign promises on gay issues, Monday afternoon said that his administration has made some progress on behalf of gay Americans and plans to do more.

"I know that many in this room don't believe that progress has come fast enough, and I understand that," Mr. Obama said at a reception for LGBT Pride Month at the White House. "It's not for me to tell you to be patient anymore than it was for others to counsel patience to African-Americans who were petitioning for equal rights a half-century ago."

"But I say this: We have made progress," the president continued. "And we will make more. And I want you to know that I expect and hope to be judged not by words, not by promises I've made, but by the promises that my administration keeps."

"We've been in office six months now," he said. "I suspect that by the time this administration is over, I think you guys will have pretty good feelings about the Obama administration."

As a candidate, the president promised as a candidate to repeal the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy banning gays from serving openly in the military as well as the Defense Of Marriage Act. Gay rights advocates have grown increasingly impatient as his administration has made little progress on those or other issues important to them.

"I believe preventing patriotic Americans from serving their country weakens our national security," the president said in reference to "don't ask, don't tell." He said the administration is working with the Pentagon and Congress to end the policy. He also insisted that doing so will require an act of Congress, though many believe the president could halt discharges of openly gay servicemembers through an executive order.

I do have a responsibility to see that this change is administered in a practical and a way that takes over the long term," he said.

The president said that prejudice against gay people endures and that some citizens "still hold fast to worn arguments and old attitudes, who fail to see your families like their families and who would deny you the rights that most Americans take for granted."

"We seek an America in which no one feels the pain of discrimination based on who you are or who you love," he said.

The president noted that he has signed a memorandum extending some federal benefits to LGBT families and is urging Congress to pass the Domestic Partners Benefits and Obligations Act, which would mean the extension of health care benefits.

He also said his administration is working to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination bill and a hate crimes bill named after Matthew Shepard.

"There are unjust laws to overturn and unfair practices to stop," the president said.

First lady Michelle Obama was also present at the reception, which commemorated the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion in New York City, widely seen as the spark for the gay rights movement.

"The riots at Stonewall gave way to protests, and protests gave way to a movement, and the movement gave way to a transformation that continues to this day," he said. "It continues when a partner fights for her right to sit at the hospital bedside of a woman she loves; it continues when a teenager is called a name for being different and says, 'So what if I am?'; it continues in your work and in your activism, in your fight to freely live your lives to the fullest."

"We are all witnesses to monumental changes in this country," Mr. Obama concluded. "That should give us hope, but we cannot rest. We must continue to do our part to make progress step by step, law by law, mind by changing mind. And I want you to know that, in this task, I will not only be your friend; I will continue to be an ally and a champion and a president who fights with you and for you."

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