

HRC3 != Bright Future For Transgenders

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Abstract

“This is a story of the lives and loves, and hopes and dreams, of young Batswana [sic] in the context of the changing cultural norms and values of modern times. Each of the dancers are shaped and challenged by the forces upon them: love, power, money, lust, and authority. They must choose their destiny by [...]

Article

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It’s been a really blue funky week and a half for me. Seeing John Edwards drop out of the race just over a week ago, I’m left with nothing but second choices for the upcoming presidential election. I feel as if I’m waking from a really bad hangover.

My personal preference was for a presidential candidate who would address the rampant inequities, to eliminate poverty and end the disenfranchisement and disparity in this entitlement-oriented society. The last thing I wanted was a choice of gatekeepers for the corporate power stranglehold status quo.

With my last best hope for that out of the campaign at virtually the same time my job ended, it’s been consideration time over the two primary candidates who are left.

Sen. Barack Obama seems like a decent enough selection, but then the sublime (and not-so-sublime) race baiting started up from the Clinton campaign - specifically by Bill Clinton himself. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton’s closeness to the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) is bad enough, but this was a further turnoff. Soon that was followed by the opposition in the guise of Rep. James Clyburn (D-SC) and others turning it into tit-for-tat mud war with the two campaigns voting blocs breaking into race vs. gender lines.

So much for us unifying.

To Obama’s credit, he’s been mostly above this fray and has done a remarkable job keeping this from being a “black presidency” / race-oriented campaign. While it’s been toned down a bit from the supporters on both sides, it feels more like a volcanic dome for now with a still volatile magma bubbling underneath awaiting catalyst.

More baffling is why Obama has not tried to capture the elemental message of Edwards’ campaigns (both ’04 and current) and indeed Martin Luther King Jr.’s. dream in this, Black History month: to give voice

to the ills that currently wrack this nation's economy. The rhetoric of wanting to work with and negotiate compromise with Corporate America - the very parties who've overwhelmingly benefited from and by-produced this avariciously stagflated malaise - is troubling. These guys are pros at business negotiation, and they never go to the table with intention of losing anything, period. To break even or gain are they're only options. Negotiating with them means the workforce stands to break even at best, or worse, lose even more. Neither option is palatable.

Sen. Ted Kennedy's endorsement of Obama also caused me to step back for a second look. Kennedy's great on most social issues, but is about as intransigent on opposing transgender rights as it gets in Democratic circles.

While I haven't particularly cared for Hillary Rodham Clinton's politics heretofore (most especially her "working with the system" approach mirroring Obama's rhetoric), I also had to consider the fact that she's the hopes and dreams of the Women's Movement, personified by the National Organization for Women (NOW). That's no small consideration as NOW has stood by the transgender community through thick and thin in recent years. Understandably I have a good deal of respect for them.

Meanwhile, the African American organizational leadership has done precious little for the transgender community - even for the African American trans community - recently. It would've been nice to have a prominent organization chime in during this session's House ENDA debacle where Barney Frank (seemingly in concert with the High Impact Coalition) managed to pull a number of significant African American legislators in the House into a bloc opposing transgender inclusion in ENDA. Rep. Clyburn himself was one of the chiefs among those.

Then again, none of the above occurring should necessarily read anything into the Obama campaign as they're disconnected incidents. Similarly NOW's desire for a Hillary Clinton presidency shouldn't be read as saying Hillary and NOW are on the exact same wavelength. Lord knows that the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) has sunk their hooks eye-deep into Clinton as well, which also doesn't bode well but may similarly be discounted as completely unconnected.

So now that Super Tuesday's come and gone, and both candidates are close in delegate count - with an recent slight shift in momentum towards Clinton, I began giving both campaigns a serious look. Meanwhile, a friend of mine who knew of my transgender status and I believe knew I was an Edwards supporter sent me a statement from Sen. Hillary Clinton to the LGBT community via the Bilerico Blog, title of which was "I Want To Be Your President." This was doubtlessly an attempt to sell me on supporting the Clinton campaign.

The statement started off impressively enough. Clinton noted that "[f]or seven long years, the Bush Administration has tried to divide us - only seeing people who matter to them. It's been a government of the few, by the few, and for the few. And no community has been more invisible to this administration than the LGBT community." At prima facie it's powerful statement with a very cohesive quality.

Then I caught myself and read it again. Indeed it does say LGBT. However, what we're seeing play out currently in Congress on Employment Rights is about sexual orientation only, and the Transgender community is still completely inconsequential (if not outright invisible) to this effort. It's not simply the Bush Administration trying to divide us. It's Democrats - worse, gay Democrats. Kinda renders the good senator's moving statement rather inert.

A little later, she follows it up with “I am proud to be a co-sponsor of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act” Really? So maybe, Sen. Clinton, when you were saying LGBT, it was one of those statements you just blurt out from habit, without really thinking about what LGBT (specifically the T part) infers?

Nope. Near the end of the same statement Hillary proudly claims “[w]e’re going to expand our federal hate crimes legislation and pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act and assure that they are both fully inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.”

So maybe she’s not paying attention to the actual text of the legislation she’s “proudly” co-sponsoring? I can only speculate on this. Didn’t she get into trouble for supporting legislation giving presidential authorization to Bush to unilaterally decide upon war with Iraq? One would think she would be more diligent about legislative text after such an incident.

Sen. Clinton proclaimed “I am proud to have fought Republican efforts to demonize and marginalize the LGBT community, and I will continue to do that as President.” Good, good. How about the marginalizing of us from the Democrats’ efforts? Say, like, maybe taking a stand against these progressive legislators supporting anti-discrimination for gays and lesbians in employment, but still saying we can’t have trans folks in the workplace in positions of responsibility? That would be helpful! Then again, Clinton herself answered in a Town Hall (to a transgendered questioner, no less) that she supported a fully inclusive ENDA in theory, but had concerns about trans people in certain positions of responsibility.... But she’s also “fully committed to the fair and equal treatment of LGBT Americans.” The doublespeak is starting to bleed through a bit too conspicuously.

The good senator couldn’t help but to gush over her credentials, to have “spoken in front of so many LGBT audiences” such as “the Human Rights Campaign, Empire State Pride Agenda” Hmmm. there’s something to win back the transgender hearts - two prominent organizations that also support non-inclusive, incremental, “sexual orientation only” rights. Really warms your heart, doesn’t it? Or maybe that’s just heartburn - I can’t decide.

Somehow, either Penn & Associates (Clinton’s Campaign advisors) or the LGBT Steering Committee is failing badly at what Hollywood calls “continuity.” Did they really think that lucid trans folk would find these claims attractive? Boy, I just love being considered as clear-thinking as a box of rocks! I suppose you’ve got to admire their chutzpah, if nothing else - nice try!

To close the deal, our Mrs. Clinton then vows “to have openly gay and lesbian staffers serving at all levels of my campaign.” Finally! Now that’s a statement I can believe without hesitation. Sure, there is no “transgender” mentioned there - but at least she was honest in this particular part. To me, falseness is deceitful hoax. With certainty there is at least comfort in knowing.

Is it sad that Sen. Clinton believes that any openly transgender staffer - even at an entry level - is a total non-starter? Surely! But we transgenders need to understand that at the current level, we are only “rhetorically” equal - not “egalitarian” equal. It was something that Sen. Edwards pointed out while in office, and that also earned him the cold-shoulder from the likes of HRC, et. al. Heaven forbid that transgenders end up in positions of responsibility! Can you imagine their embarrassment and shame? (Pardon me while I extract tongue from cheek.)

Actually, this entire Clinton “statement to LGBT” could well have been written by HRC. No surprise, though. Hilary Rosen (former board member and mate of former executive director, Elizabeth Birch) is the Chair of the LGBT Steering Committee for Hillary Clinton’s campaign. Thus we complete the trinity of HRC to the third power: Hillary Rodham Clinton, Human Rights Campaign, and Hilary Rosen, Chair of the LGBT Steering Committee (okay, that last one was a bit of a stretch). Nevertheless, they feel it’s foregone conclusion, it’s in the stars and in the numbers and that their dream agenda of LGB incremental rights is eminent and will come to pass.

Both of my contacts on the Hill noted that it was the dream game plan was to not have a transgender-inclusive piece of employment legislation crossing the desk of “President Clinton” (as one staffer put it one year ago). According to one of the contacts, the lobbyists and a couple of the leaders in the House appear to be seeking ways to inconspicuously “ease away from [gender identity].”

As I write, we’re seeing this scenario play out before us in the House and shortly the Senate as well, and not strictly with ENDA.

Even former HRC board member, Donna Rose, also noted in her blog that “I’d be remiss if I didn’t share that a large group of LGBT steering committee supporters is floating a string of emails in the background recommending that she use the term “gay and lesbian” instead of GLBT when talking to broader audiences.” I couldn’t help but note that Donna also got the same “I Want To Be Your President” statement being passed around (widely it seems as hers came from a different source).

As it turns out, my friend’s forwarding of the Clinton statement did make up my mind. It did not form my decision as she likely intended. After yet another rather HRC-centric statement coming from the Clinton campaign, I’m tossing my lot in with Sen. Barack Obama. Hopefully we might see a more Edwards or Kucinich or Richardson-level of support for transgenders from Sen. Obama.

One thing that is for certain: a vote for Sen. Clinton may as well be a vote for HRC and it’s incremental and non-egalitarian approach to equality. It’s a case of “just buy the campaign message and don’t ask questions.” They’ll manipulate and bury our issues, we’ll never be heard from and then hope disappears.

The last thing I want to do is give HRC any easy victories courtesy of the transgender community. If they can brazenly work to marginalize our organizations and leaders and to thwart rights for transgenders, then we shouldn’t be faint of heart nor have misgivings when it comes to returning like in kind. With Obama we have at least a sliver of hope. It’s certainly better than the current alternative!

“Freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose” -- Me and Bobby McGee, Kris Kristofferson

“The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.” -- Pres. Franklin Delano Roosevelt

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