

TRANSADVOCATE

The Sound of Silence: The HRC National Dinner Protest

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Abstract

Last week I received an email from the Human Rights Campaign informing me that Joe Biden will be speaking at the the Human Rights Campaign National Dinner on October 4th, 2008. Since that time I've expected to hear about an organized protest of this event from the transgender activist community in Washington D.C. Protests have already happened from coast to coast (and everywhere in between). Last February the New York City protest caused many prominent local politicians to boycott the New York City HRC Dinner. In July the Harvey Milk LGBT Democratic Club, Alice B. Toklas LGBT Democratic Club, Pride at Work, And Castro For All, the Lou Sullivan Society (FTM SF), and the Trans March came together to boycott the Human Rights Campaign Dinner. Such a strong presence of organized labor was especially important. The key note speaker for the San Francisco dinner, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, dropped out of the event because of labor's involvement.

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You can see video from the San Francisco protest here:

At upcoming Boston HRC dinner on October 25th, protesters are looking to build on the San Francisco success. From Left in SF:

"The group is working to build a coalition of trans and queer activists, anti-war activists, and women's rights activists to protest HRC's lack of grassroots coalition building, support for pro-war and anti-choice candidates, and support of a non-inclusive version of the Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA).

'It's time to show HRC what real solidarity looks like,' said Trevor Wright of QueerToday.com,

‘transgender and labor activists united in San Francisco to build the largest protest ever of HRC, and we plan to show the country Boston can too!’”

When contacted for comment about the upcoming National HRC Dinner, Pride At Work Executive Director, Jeremy Bishop, said

At Pride at Work we’re going to push it as hard as possible to make sure Obama is in office, but an inclusive ENDA is one of his top priorities. That’s kind of where we’re focusing some of our energy. Also educating Congressional folks so that when the next ENDA comes to their desk and we have a larger Democratic majority, the problems we had last year will not be recreated.

Boston transgender activist, Ethan St. Pierre, sees it differently.

“Even though other organizations dropped the ball last year, the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition had a two week notice to pick up the slack and move forward with a protest, and it was still a fairly successful event. Last October’s HRC national dinner protest was the kick off to the nations HRC dinner protests that have taken place across the country. We are now busy organizing protests in our own cities. Considering that this is the one year anniversary of HRC’s betrayal, that Joe Biden is speaking at the HRC national dinner in DC, and that the DC dinner takes in the MOST money, that the activists who live in the DC area would have done something on their own.”

Can we all agree that United ENDA is dead? The major organizations of “United ENDA” are located in the Washington D.C. area, yet the Human Rights Campaign is having a dinner without the voice of protest of the transgender community. The only transgender representation at the dinner will be on the inside. Founding member and current NCTE board member, Dana Beyer, is a table captain at the dinner. According to the HRC Dinner website:

Table Captains are the heart of the National Dinner’s attendance. Each Table Captain strives to fill a table of 12, creating their own guest list and spending an inspirational evening surrounded with friends and family. As a ‘thank you’ for helping to support the drive for equality, Table Captains are listed in Dinner advertisements, invitations and program books.

Where are the grass roots activists? Where are the protesters? The silence coming from Washington D.C. is deafening.

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