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Making History

Obama's Marriage Views Changed

Exclusive: WCT Examines His Step Back



pages 6-7

This week's Windy City Times features an exclusive look back at Barack Obama's views on same-sex marriage as they have evolved since his Illinois State Senate campaign in 1996. He has gone from a strong statement in favor of gay marriage in that race to what he viewed as a more practical support of civil unions when he ran for U.S. Senate and then president. See inside for WCT's exclusive review of Obama's marriage views, pages 6-7. This photo is from the "Yes We Can: John Gress on the Campaign Trail with Barack Obama" exhibit opening Friday, Jan. 16, at the third-floor gallery of the Center on Halsted, 3656 N. Halsted. Gress's work involves commercial and photojournalism/documentary photography, and the show will run through Sunday, March 1.

One state rep's take on Blagojevich

BY ANDREW DAVIS

History was made Jan. 9 as embattled Gov. Rod Blagojevich became the first person in his post to be impeached (formally charged with misconduct) by the State House. The vote, which was in favor of the governor's impeachment by a vote of 114-1, directs the Illinois Senate to put Blagojevich on trial—with the goal of removing him from office.

Later that day, Windy City Times spoke with State Rep. Greg Harris, one of the politicians who voted for Blagojevich's impeachment. Harris talked about various aspects of the vote and what he thought of the governor's press conference that took place earlier that afternoon. (During the press conference, Blagojevich said

that he was not surprised by the impeachment—not because of the allegations, but because of ongoing friction between him and the House.)

Windy City Times: I just want to make sure I understand this from a technical perspective: So now it's all in the Senate's hands, correct?

Greg Harris: Right, but there are a number of steps. We voted to create an investigative committee to look into the circumstances surrounding the accusations toward the governor. They can determine if, in their mind, there was evidence there for impeachment, to gather that evidence and then make a recommendation to the full House, which they did [Jan. 8]. Today, the House impeached the governor by a vote of 114-1.

Impeachment is akin to an indictment in this case, so it now goes to the Senate, and then there will be a full trial.

WCT: Were you surprised the vote wasn't unanimous?

GH: [Pauses.] I don't know if anyone knew what to expect; it's the first time this has happened in the history of the state. Everyone voted their conscience.

WCT: How difficult was it for you to vote to impeach the governor? What was that whole process like for you?

GH: There were certainly a number of allegations—dozens of pages in the investigative

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WINDY CITY TIMES EXCLUSIVE

Obama answers
1996 gay media

Friends of Barack Obama
2152 E. 71st Street
Chicago, Illinois 60649
Ph. (312) 363-1996
Fax (312) 363-5099

Outlines
1115 W. Belmont, 2-D
Chicago, Illinois 60657

Dear Ms. Ring:

Below are my responses to your questionnaire:

- 1) I would support and co-sponsor a state civil rights bill for gays and lesbians.
- 2) I do not favor a statewide registry of names of people who test positive for HIV.
- 3) I favor an increase in funding for state AIDS services.
- 4) I favor more aggressive (and better funded) prevention programs, particularly targeted at young people and minority communities where infection rates continue to increase.
- 5) I favor mandatory Medicaid coverage for persons with HIV/AIDS.
- 6) I favor legalizing same-sex marriages, and would fight efforts to prohibit such marriages.
- 7) I believe in the rights of gays and lesbians to become foster parents, adopt children and have the right to custody of their own children on the same basis as heterosexuals.
- 8) I support a woman's right to choose an abortion, favor Medicaid funding of abortions for poor women, and oppose parental notification laws.
- 9) I vigorously support existing affirmative action programs.

Please call me at the number listed above if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,



Barack Obama
Candidate for State Senate, 13th District

Shown here is a copy of Barack Obama's typed responses to the Outlines newspaper 1996 primary election questionnaire. Obama signed and dated the form Feb. 15, 1996, sending it to Outlines political reporter Trudy Ring. In 2000, Outlines newspaper purchased and merged with Windy City Times.



From a photo from Windy City Times archives, 2004

Obama changed views on gay marriage

1996 statement: 'I favor legalizing same-sex marriages'

NEWS ANALYSIS BY TRACY BAIM

During the final weeks of the presidential campaign last fall, several media outlets contacted Windy City Times because of an old Internet story from the 1996 Illinois State Senate race. In that campaign, Outlines newspaper, which merged with Windy City Times in 2000, reported that 13th District candidate Barack Obama supported gay marriage. Reporters wanted to know what exactly Obama had said.

Outlines newspaper, as with the new Windy City Times, surveyed candidates for all levels of elected office, and also reported on the results from pro-gay and progressive groups. We summarized the results in that 1996 article by Trudy Ring, but did not list exact answers to questions. In that article Outlines did note that Obama was a supporter of same-sex marriage; that article was never challenged or corrected by Obama.

Now, in the process of sorting through my 25 years of archives of Chicago gay reporting to eventually post materials on www.ChicagoGay-History.org, I have found the original surveys on which Ring's reporting was based. Sometimes, it pays to keep those boxes.

IMPACT, which was Chicago's main GLBT political action committee for several years, surveyed Obama and other candidates, as did Outlines. What we are including with this special Presi-

dential Inaugural issue of Windy City Times are copies of the answers to the IMPACT and Outlines questions. For IMPACT, the Obama campaign simply responded on the form. For Outlines, the candidate typed in his answers and signed his letter.

More recently, as Obama has run for higher office, from senator to president, he has further shaped his views on marriage, and now he does not back same-sex marriage. In a January 2004 interview I conducted with Obama at the Windy City Times' office, Obama clearly stated that lack of support for full marriage equality was a matter of strategy rather than principle, but in even more recent comments, it appears he is backing off even further, saying it is more of a religious issue, and also a "state" issue, so he favors civil unions. Both are compromises most gays do not support. First, the U.S. has a separation of church and state, and laws are in place locally and nationally that give benefits based on the very word, "marriage." Therefore, marriage as it is now defined is a government (both state and federal) institution that comes with specific financial and social benefits (taxes, benefits, inheritance, immigration, custody, etc.). So, until government eliminates the word "marriage" from state and federal laws, it is a government issue, and that includes the federal government.

Obama's answer to the 1996 Outlines question was very clear: "I favor legalizing same-sex marriages, and would fight efforts to prohibit such marriages." There was no use of "civil unions," no compromise whatsoever.

The IMPACT marriage question was a bit less direct. It asked if Obama would support a Mar-

riage Resolution being considered at the time, which read in part "Because marriage is a basic human right and an individual personal choice, RESOLVED, the state should not interfere with same-gender couples who [choose] to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitment of civil marriage." Obama responded: "I would support such a resolution."

What follows are Obama's responses in our Windy City Times 2004 interview, six years after his successful 1996 state Senate run, when he was now running for U.S. Senate:

Tracy Baim: Do you have a position on marriage vs. civil unions?

Barack Obama: I am a fierce supporter of domestic-partnership and civil-union laws. I am not a supporter of gay marriage as it has been thrown about, primarily just as a strategic issue. I think that marriage, in the minds of a lot of voters, has a religious connotation. I know that's true in the African-American community, for example. And if you asked people, 'should gay and lesbian people have the same rights to transfer property, and visit hospitals, and et cetera,' they would say, 'absolutely.' And then if you talk about, 'should they get married?', then suddenly ...

TB: There are more than 1,000 federal benefits that come with marriage. Looking back in the 1960s and inter-racial marriage, the polls showed people against that as well.

Obama: Since I'm a product of an interracial marriage, I'm very keenly aware of ...

TB: But you think, strategically, gay marriage isn't going to happen so you won't support it at this time?

Obama: What I'm saying is that strategically, I think we can get civil unions passed. I think we can get SB 101 passed. I think that to the extent that we can get the rights, I'm less concerned about the name. And I think that is my No. 1 priority, is an environment in which the Republicans are going to use a particular language that has all sorts of connotations in the broader culture as a wedge issue, to prevent us moving forward, in securing those rights, then I don't want to play their game.

TB: If Massachusetts gets marriage and this gives momentum to the proposed federal Constitutional amendment against gay marriage?

Obama: I would oppose that.

After Obama's WCT interview, he called to clarify that he opposed the proposed U.S. Constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. He said he also opposed the two proposed state bills banning same-sex marriage.

During his presidential campaign, he has remained consistent with his 2004 position, but clearly he has moved away from the 1996 statement of "I favor legalizing same-sex marriages." A rose is a rose is a rose, but civil unions are not "marriage" unless 100 percent of the benefits are the same across all states and the federal government.

The full 2004 interview can be found at: <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/gay/lesbian/news/ARTICLE.php?AID=3931>

Tracy Baim is publisher and executive editor of Windy City Times. She was the co-founder and publisher of Outlines newspaper.

Obama makes an IMPACT

Shown here are copies of the 1996 primary election questionnaire issued by IMPACT, which was Illinois' Gay and Lesbian Political Action Organization. The form had been due Jan. 12, 1996, and was signed by Barack Obama on Jan. 7, 1996. In this election, he was running for the Democratic nomination for 13th District State Senator. He won the primary and eventually the election that fall.

IMPACT Questionnaire: All Offices

1. The following is based on the IMPACT Political Agenda. Please respond to each of these issues in the manner described on the cover sheet.

- A. The election and appointment of qualified, openly gay and lesbian candidates to public office. Please specifically address the following three questions:
- 1.) In general, do you support the election of qualified openly gay and lesbian candidates? **YES**
 - 2.) Have you ever publicly endorsed an openly gay or openly lesbian candidate for public office? **I HAVE NEVER HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO.**
 - 3.) In the current election cycle, IMPACT has already endorsed the candidacies of Larry McKeon (Candidate for State Representative, 34th District) and Judge Sebastian Patti, countywide candidate for Circuit Court Judge. Both are openly gay men. Have you endorsed these candidates or do you intend to? If you have not made an endorsement, what is your reasoning for not doing so?
I AM NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE CANDIDATES, BUT WOULD BE HAPPY TO LEARN MORE.
- B. The creation of a cost-neutral, city- or countywide domestic partnership registry which would certify gay and lesbian relationships through the issuance of a domestic partnership certificate.
- 1.) Would you publicly endorse legislation which would create such a registry? Would you agree to have your name published as an official endorser of such legislation? **YES.**
 - 2.) Would you assist in advocating for such legislation? **YES.**
- C. Amendment of the Illinois Human Rights Act to include prohibition of Discrimination based on sexual orientation. **SUPPORT.**
- D. Opposition to anti-lesbian or anti-gay public initiatives, such as Colorado's Amendment 2, which is currently being reviewed by the United States Supreme Court. **I WOULD STRONGLY OPPOSE SUCH LEGISLATION.**
- E. Repeal of Illinois Criminal Code Section 12-16.2 (a)(1) regarding criminal transmission of HIV. **I AM NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE LAW, BUT WOULD OPPOSE SUCH A LAW TO THE DEGREE THAT IT STIGMATIZES OR UNFAIRLY TREATS PERSONS WITH HIV.**
- F. Increased funding for HIV/AIDS education, prevention and health care services. **YES**
- G. Increased funding of women's health care related issues. **YES**

Putting Obama's questionnaire in context

BY TIMOTHY STEWART-WINTER

In this issue of the Windy City Times, the world learns for the first time that almost thirteen years ago, during his first campaign for office, Barack Obama answered a questionnaire with the phrase, "I favor legalizing same-sex marriages." The response appeared in a questionnaire that his campaign faxed to the office of Outlines—a local LGBT newspaper that purchased and merged with Windy City Times in 2000—on Feb. 15, 1996. Later that year, in its voter guide for the general election, Outlines summarized Obama's positions: "Supports gay rights, same-sex marriage; increased AIDS funding, abortion rights, affirmative action."

Publisher and Executive Editor Tracy Baim retrieved the form from her archives while working on the Chicago Gay History Project. Her release of the document occurs at a unique time. On Jan. 20, for only the third time since the Stonewall riots, a new Democratic president will be sworn in. Some LGBT activists, infuriated by the president-elect's decision to invite evangelical pastor Rick Warren to pray at his inauguration, argue that Obama must do better than the last two Democratic presidencies, which they believe have resulted in pro-gay judicial appointments but too little else. Jimmy Carter was the first to invite gay activists to a White House meeting (which he did not attend); Bill Clinton was the first to pursue gay voters during his presidential campaign. Yet the Carter years witnessed the rise of Anita Bryant and the religious right, and Clinton's left us with the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

To put Obama's stunning statement in context, it helps to know how things were going for him in mid-February 1996: he was in the middle of a messy standoff with the 13th District's incumbent state Senator, Alice Palmer. After promising not to run for reelection and publicly endorsing Obama, a civil rights lawyer who had never held office, Palmer changed her mind in December 1995 and tried to get back into the race. For several weeks, neither candidate backed down, while local political leaders sought a resolution. The conflict would end in a matter of days, when Obama supporters successfully challenged the validity of signatures collected by Palmer's campaign. But on the day the fax went to Outlines, Obama was an unlikely candidate, up against a progressive incumbent in a very progressive district, who needed all the help he could get.

Earlier, in January, Obama had filled out his first known questionnaire on LGBT issues, which his campaign faxed to IMPACT Illinois, which was then the state's LGBT political action committee. Instead of asking about marriage directly, IMPACT asked candidates if they would support a resolution stating that "marriage is a basic human right and an individual personal choice" and that the state "should not interfere" with same-sex couples' right to marry. Obama's response, which appears to bear similarities to his handwriting on other documents from the period that have been released, was "I would support such a resolution." Other answers, expressing unfamiliarity with HIV laws and with two openly gay candidates for office, reflect Obama's inexperience.

The two questionnaires are an artifact, of course, of a very different moment in Obama's history, but also in the history of the same-sex marriage debate. Beginning in 1995, after the highest court in Obama's native Hawaii began seeking to force that state to grant marriage licenses to same-sex couples, legislators in statehouses nationwide stampeded to ban the practice preemptively. On Feb. 13, 1996, just two

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H. Preservation of privacy and reproductive rights, including the right of women to choose an abortion. In your response, please address public funding of abortions for indigent women, and restrictions on a woman's right to choose abortion, such as parental or spousal approval. **I OPPOSE RESTRICTIONS ON A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE, AND DISCUSS VARIOUS NOTIFICATION STATUTES, AND OPPOSE PUBLIC FUNDING OF ABORTIONS.**

2. Please respond to each of the following issues in the manner described on the cover sheet.

- A. Restrictions on gay men and lesbians becoming foster or adoptive parents. **OPPOSE TO SUCH RESTRICTIONS.**
- B. Legislation that eliminates discrimination in custody and child visitation. **SUPPORT SUCH LEGISLATION.**
- C. Continued availability of free, anonymous HIV antibody tests. **SUPPORT CONTINUED AVAILABILITY.**
- D. Opposition to any initiative which requires mandatory HIV testing. **OPPOSE SUCH INITIATIVES.**
3. How have/will you reach out to the community to encourage and actively recruit qualified lesbian and gay persons to apply for jobs, boards, task forces, etc under your jurisdiction? **I PLAN TO SET UP A GAY/LESBIAN DISTRICT FORCE IN THE DISTRICT TO IDENTIFY AND PROMOTE.**
4. What specific steps have/will you take to educate the personnel in your office and others under your jurisdiction on lesbian and gay issues? **I WOULD WELCOME ORGANIZATIONS LIKE IMPACT COMING INTO MY OFFICE TO CONDUCT WORKSHOPS.**
5. Will you issue a statement and/or sign a policy prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in your office? Will you additionally grant certain domestic partnership benefits to your employees, to the extent allowed by current law, like bereavement leave? **YES TO BOTH QUESTIONS.**
6. If you receive IMPACT's endorsement, will you acknowledge it in your campaign literature and advertising? **YES.**
7. Do you endorse the Marriage Resolution, a statement of support for the right of same-gender individuals to marry:

Because marriage is a basic human right and an individual personal choice,

RESOLVED, the state should not interfere with same-gender couples who chose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitment of civil marriage.

If you do not support the resolution, will you at least oppose any attempts to outlaw same-gender marriage and/or to amend reciprocity agreements with states which permit same-gender marriage? Will you oppose any federal initiatives which attempt to override certain state laws which allow same-gender marriage?

I WOULD SUPPORT SUCH A RESOLUTION.



Rocco Claps.

Righting wrongs: Talking with Rocco Claps

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Three years after the Illinois Human Rights Act amendment that bans sexual-orientation and gender-identity discrimination went into effect, the Illinois Department of Human Rights (IDHR) has seen its fair share of complaints being filed. Windy City Times talked with IDHR Director Rocco Claps about the complaints as well as domestic-partner benefits.

Windy City Times: How are things going with the amendment and filing?

Rocco Claps: What I find really interesting—and you should know that when I talk about numbers, I have three different stacks in front of me and we keep numbers by fiscal year—is that no matter if you look at fiscal year or calendar year, we see a distinct increase. So far, within 2009, 5 percent of all the charges coming in [involve] sexual orientation and gender identity, which is a big increase for us; originally, it was about 1 percent in '06.

WCT: And what do you attribute that increase to?

RC: We have an increase in charges coming in, which I [attribute to] the economy. Typically, the most vulnerable employees in a workplace setting are the ones who are victimized first, fired first or treated differently when the economy gets bad. We've seen that in repeated patterns over the years, so that's not so surprising to me. What is surprising is that we're at 5.3 percent—and I do believe that's because people know that we exist.

WCT: Well, I want to go back to something you said: You talked about a correlation between filing and economic hardships. So, when people have jobs, do they tend to not file and possibly [put up with] possible harassment?

RC: Well, it's very individualized, but we know that people are getting laid off more often now. People have less options; in other words, they can't find jobs [as easily]. That may prompt people to file, so that they can possibly get back pay or their jobs back. But we find that individuals in the workplace who are more vulnerable to discrimination tend to be the first ones to be fired first.

WCT: OK. I'm no sociologist, but what does that say about employees and employers?

RC: Frankly, I'm much more prompted to feel discrimination if I don't have options; unfortunately, people tend to fire those who are different from [themselves] or who they don't like—and if I'm one who is fired or laid off, and I don't have an immediate ability to find another job, I think that my life is more affected by it so I might try to get some sort of remedy for it.

WCT: The other bases of discrimination [besides employment] include real-estate transactions; public accommodations; sexual harassment in higher education; and financial credit. Could you explain that last one?

RC: Basically, it's issuance of a loan, but keep in mind that real-estate transactions covers business transactions as well.

WCT: How long does it take to process a complaint?

RC: We're in pretty good shape right now. Our average number is about 320 days right now; we're required by law to process a claim in 365 days, and that's from walking in the door to a resolution. And about 33 percent of our charges are settled within the agency; we offer mediation throughout so the parties often come to terms within the process of investigation.

WCT: How much evidence does a person need? Obviously, the more evidence you have, the better off you are.

RC: It varies by what they're charging. But in our typical charge—employment—we tell people to bring in comparables. If a gay man is alleging harassment, you should be able to [show] that he is being treated differently than a straight man who does the same job he does. In employment cases, showing comparables often means getting records from the employer.

WCT: I don't know if you heard about this case in England, but a straight man was allowed to file a homophobia-based charge against his former company because his co-workers attacked him with gay slurs...

RC: You should know that the bill that the governor signed in 2005 does say "perceived sexual orientation," so that would be valid in Illinois as well. So it can be someone who isn't gay but who is treated like they're gay.

WCT: When you and I talked in '07, something you said regarding outreach was that you felt that you all could do more downstate. How has that progressed?

RC: Well, we need to do better at it. We've done a number of informational workshops around the state, and sexual orientation is always part of those [events] because it's part of the law. We've partnered with Equality Illinois in a number of things here in Chicago and a few places downstate, but we need to do a better job of that. It's always a challenge when you have budget restrictions and you're teaching people about what's available to them.

I do think that it's getting through, which is why we have an increase in charges. We've had an increase every year since the bill became law.

WCT: To our knowledge, have you received a substantial number of gender identity-related complaints?

RC: As a snapshot of fiscal year '09 (from July '08 to today), we've had 89 sexual-orientation charges and, of those, 11 are related to gender identity. But we've also had 2 bisexual, 67 homosexual, 2 heterosexual and 3 perceived orientation.

Visit www.state.il.us/dhr or call 312-814-6200.

LGBT couple murdered in Indianapolis

BY ANDREW DAVIS

A man arrested Dec. 31 for two murders in Indianapolis has admitted to committing the crimes, according to WTHR.com.

Christopher Conwell, 20, confessed to Indianapolis Metro Police Detectives that he killed Avery Elzy, 34 (who police said lived an "alternative" lifestyle, according to the Web site), and Michael Hunt, 22, on Dec. 26 at the couple's house at 5853 Rosslyn. One of the couple's three dogs was also killed.

When asked what was meant by "alternative," Sgt. Paul Thompson of the Indianapolis Police Department told Windy City Times Jan. 8 that the couple was "in the LGBT spectrum." Thompson added that, so far, the double murder does not look like a hate crime; however, authorities are still investigating the motive.

Andersonville eatery reopens

Andies, 5253 N. Clark, passed re-inspection Jan. 9 and was given its business license back a day after being shut down the previous day by Chicago Department of Public Health inspectors.

The inspectors visited Andies in response to a report that a customer became sick after eating a meal. Inspectors discovered a faulty walk-in cooler that was about five degrees warmer than the maximum of 40 degrees required by law.

'Cabaret' Jan. 16 at Center

Center on Halsted Youth Program's "Diva" workshops will culminate in "Gender Queer Cabaret, Showtime at the Apollo," an evening of gender-bending queer musical performances based upon shows at the historic landmark Apollo Theater in Harlem. "Cabaret" will take place Friday, Jan. 16, at the Center's Hoover/Leppen Theatre, 3656 N. Halsted, 7-9 p.m.

Tickets are \$10 and may be purchased at the door; they're \$3 for students and seniors with valid IDs. See www.centeronhalsted.org.

Brotherhood meeting on Jan. 17

Brotherhood of the Phoenix, a Chicago neopagan order for LGT men, will hold a celebration Saturday, Jan. 17, 5:30-10 p.m., at LifeForce Arts, 3148 N. Lincoln.

The suggested donation is \$10. See www.brotherhoodofthephoenix.org.

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days before Obama submitted the questionnaire, Republican Peter Fitzgerald of Palatine had unveiled a "defense of marriage" bill in the Illinois State Senate. The bill was signed into law in May by Gov. Jim Edgar; soon, Bill Clinton would sign the federal DOMA, which remains on the books. Obama clearly stated his opposition to such laws.

Today, the president-elect says he does not support "legalizing same-sex marriages." As late as his early 2004 interview with Baim in this publication, he added a qualification, saying, "I am not a supporter of gay marriage as it has been thrown about, primarily just as a strategic issue." Since the 2004 election, same-sex marriage has become far more widely discussed, and more politically explosive, than in 1996. Meanwhile, with his every word under scrutiny, Obama phrases his policy positions meticulously. To his credit, Obama, whose parents' interracial marriage in 1961 would have been illegal in several states, has generally avoided the phrase "traditional marriage," which has become popular among politicians who prefer not to mention the gay and lesbian people who are concretely helped or harmed by their decisions. On the other hand, the Warren debacle raises questions about his commitment to deliver for a constituency that overwhelmingly backed him against John McCain.

President Obama will be the first occupant of the Oval Office who has a real history with the LGBT community. Even Clinton, who famously embraced gay voters on the campaign trail in 1992, had never done so as governor of Arkansas. It will be a major change to have a president who has spent his entire 12-year political career in environments in which the LGBT community has been an organized constituency, and has sought LGBT endorsements in every campaign. What remains to be seen, though, is whether it is a change we can believe in.

Timothy Stewart-Winter is a doctoral candidate in history at the University of Chicago, writing his dissertation on lesbian and gay politics in Chicago.

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