

## Gay City NEWS

08/30/2007

### Is the Closet Okay for Gay-Friendly Pols?

By: YOAV SIVAN

The morality of schadenfreude aside, it's easy to rejoice in the outing of US Senator Larry Craig, an anti-gay crusader who this week was revealed to have pleaded guilty to soliciting another man in a bathroom at the Minneapolis airport. History - and hopefully more in our community - will now judge gay activist Mike Rogers more kindly for having been the first to report on Senator Craig's being gay last year on his site [blogactive.com](http://blogactive.com).

But the tougher dilemma is what do we do about closeted gay politicians good on most of our issues, but who, for example, might still oppose marriage equality?

Does one have to be Larry Craig or the Reverend Ted Haggard to be judged a hypocrite and pass the litmus test of eligibility to be outed?

Most pro-gay Democrats, including closeted gay Democrats themselves, play it safe by endorsing legislation in Congress like the Employment Nondiscrimination Act and the Matthew Shepherd Hate Crimes Act. They speak out against the Pentagon's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy and gladly endorse civil unions. But they draw the line at marriage equality.



Yoav Sivan

As a gay activist outside the United States, I am stunned that the American gay activists give such politicians a pass. That includes closeted gay politicians who perpetuate the fraud that civil unions are equal to marriage - how many more times must New Jersey prove that wrong? - as well as straight politicians whom the American gay community refuses to out as anti-gay for their opposition to marriage for same-sex couples.

It's not enough for the American gay community to rejoice in the fall of the Larry Craigs of the world. It's time to hold the feet of our alleged champions closer to the fire. It's time for the American gay community to toughen up its message to politicians - you can't be for equality and be against marriage equality.

In Spain, Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero, a straight but impassioned supporter of gay rights, enraged the powerful Catholic Church by going all the way and institutionalizing marriage equality. Gay activists in Spain didn't even think of giving him a civil-unions pass, and his popularity in a near totally Catholic country remained at an all-time high.

In Israel, where weddings are performed only inside one's religious community, we are still lacking civil marriage altogether. Consequently the call for marriage equality here concerns primarily the state's recognition of civil marriage for straight couples. Yet my party, Meretz, is very clear on pointing out that our demand for marriage equality must include same-sex couples. True enough, Israel might be as far from same-sex marriage as America is, but when we articulate our political agenda we don't hide in the closet.

Make no mistake, most of us gay activists start from the baseline that coming out of the closet is a personal process that those around us must respect.

The task before gay politicians is how to emerge from two closets - their personal closet in which they can choose to hide their sexuality and their political closet in which they can choose to hide their pro-gay stands.

No one watching the recent Human Rights Campaign/Logo forum of Democratic presidential candidates could doubt that all three of the leading contenders, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and John Edwards, remain in the political closet. None of them was convincing in claiming to be against marriage equality.

In the race for the Democratic nomination, the Democratic presidential hopefuls are attempting to court gay voters without

coming out as too pro-gay. Even LGBT organizations tend to play along by providing them auspices, helping them fundraise while not asking for the political token in return.

They convince themselves that it is worthwhile to keep low profile now in order to install a friendlier face in the White House. But isn't about time that gay rights be allowed in the White House through the main entrance and not merely through the back door?

Yes, closeted liberal politicians - we know whom they are - can keep their private life out of view of the cameras. But due to the continuous efforts of gay rights activists, a politician cannot ignore the gay agenda any longer.

If those politicians want to keep to their personal closet, it cannot be at the expense of our rights. If they are not willing to advocate what's in their hearts - marriage equality and nothing less - we gay activists must drag them out of the political closet by whatever tools at our disposal and never let them back in.

*Yoav Sivan is the LGBT coordinator of the International Union of Socialist Youth and a board member of the Aguda ( the Israeli LGBT Association) and the Jerusalem Open House. His website is [www.yoavsivan.org](http://www.yoavsivan.org) .*

©GayCityNews 2007