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A Convenient Dis

By: YOAV SIVAN

Should the Hollywood writers' strike postpone the Academy Awards scheduled for later this month, the academy might have time to create a new category - the Oscar for Outstanding Hypocrisy in Activism. With the academy's permission, I'd like to nominate the LGBT critics of Al Gore.

"Gay men and women ought to have the right to join together in marriage." Gore explained last week on Current, his cable network. "I don't see why it's considered by some people to be a threat to heterosexual marriage to allow it by gays and lesbians. Shouldn't we be promoting the kind of faithfulness and loyalty to one's partner regardless of sexual orientation?"

Never had anyone of Gore's commanding national stature endorsed marriage equality before. America's marriage equality movement now gained the support of a Nobel Prize winner, an Oscar winner, a former vice president, and the genuine 43rd president of the United States, all rolled up into one.

Now fast-forward to the reaction of the LGBT community. The overwhelming majority of our leaders praised Gore to the hilt - exactly as he deserved. But a discernible minority on the blogs and listservs chose to whine and malign.

It's easy for Gore to endorse marriage equality, some said, because he's not running for anything. Others said he should have done this while he was in office.

What gratitude. What graciousness. What bunk.

Al Gore's endorsement is far from the empty courage of a political has-been. To be sure, it's hard to see a path by which Gore could be anointed this year's Democratic nominee, even if the party winds up in a brokered convention. Either Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama will be close to having enough delegates to win and thus to make a deal.

But as the conservative commentator George Will has said, "Running for president is like sex: 'You don't do it once and forget about it.'" Eight years from now, Gore will be four years younger than John McCain is today. Who knows what will happen between now and then, other than that the legend of Al Gore will grow?

For now, Gore has been gutsier in goading the Democratic presidential candidates to support marriage equality than many LGBT leaders themselves have been.

Our community has given all three of the leading Democratic contenders a free pass on the issue - except for such rare occasions as the Human Rights Campaign-sponsored debate on Logo last year. To be sure, even marriage-equality champions understand the need to take account of the complexities of the American political canvass. Not every state is as pro-gay as New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, or California, all painted blue already.

But other than that one Logo debate, how many other times during this campaign have our national LGBT leaders dared to press the candidates on marriage equality? I'm not talking about parenthetical disappointment in the context of otherwise lavish praise for the Democratic candidates. That's so 2004. I'm talking about consistently tough questions.

Try these:

"Senators Obama and Clinton, you say civil unions are just like marriage and that we shouldn't get hung up on the term. But Senator Obama, as the child of parents of different heritages, how would you feel if your parents could only register for, say, an intercultural domestic union?"

"Would you consider that an assault on their dignity?"

"Senator Clinton, do you believe such a union would receive the same respect in society as a marriage?"

"If there's no difference between civil unions and marriage, would you trade your marriage to Bill for a civil union?"

Sadly, we don't hear anything close to those questions from our LGBT leaders, including some who couldn't find it in their hearts this week to embrace Al Gore. He brought up the M word - marriage - when they haven't dared.

And that's the inconvenient truth.

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