



Barack Obama Can't Have It Both Ways

By GayWebMonkey.com

Charleston, SC - If you are a gay or lesbian American, you no longer need to wait for the first Democratic primary to test Barack Obama's mettle as a presidential candidate, because his campaign is presently faced with a definitive test that should determine his commitment to the LGBT community and the LGBT community's support of him.

At issue is the question of whether or not Mr. Obama will go forward with plans to have a gospel singer by the name of Donnie McClurkin, who has written about being an 'ex-gay' and openly condemned homosexuality, perform at a series of fundraising concerts scheduled to be held in South Carolina this weekend.

As of press time, despite calls from the Human Rights Campaign and others to cancel Mr. McClurkin's appearance at the 'Embrace The Change' Gospel Series, Mr. Obama has resisted making the tough call, opting instead to add an openly gay minister, Rev. Andy Sidden, as a speaker on the concert program. Well that's not good enough, Mr. Obama. Our lives as gay Americans are not up for debate, so we don't need you to present both sides of the argument, we simply need to know on which side of the debate you stand.

It's quite a predicament the Obama camp has gotten itself into. On the one hand you have a candidate sweeping through a very conservative Christian state with a "40 Days of Faith & Family" campaign that has the kind of marquee value destined to appeal to the state's core voters. It seems like a smart enough move. On the other hand you have a campaign committing political suicide by allowing a character as controversial as McClurkin to slip into the well orchestrated-mix... a move that threatens to alienate a significant segment of the gay constituency.

Now if Obama backs down and cancels this McClurkin character's appearance, he runs the risk of coming out too strongly in favor of gay and lesbian issues. That may not sit well with the very group of people for whom this forty day song and dance has been designed to appeal. Meanwhile, if he doesn't back down, the Senator from Illinois will have shown himself to be as much a panhandler for the votes of Christian right as his Republican counterparts. Oh dear. What to do?

What's most disturbing about this whole mess is that I find it almost inconceivable that none of the Senator's aides could have seen this whole McClurkin-sized storm brewing on the horizon. Does the good Senator not have a single gay senior aide that might have raised a red flag about this issue? Or, even worse, were his staffers daft enough to think they could slip this one past an unsuspecting gay community? I don't know the answers to these questions, but I do know that this all makes me a little concerned about a potential Obama presidency.

Yes, there is a lot riding on this decision from Obama, because as far as I'm concerned, it could be like pulling a thread and watching an entire seam unravel. Gay and lesbian support is too important to Obama's campaign. Let's not forget it was openly gay billionaire David Geffen who hosted one of Obama's biggest (and glitziest) fundraisers to date. In a tight race with Senator Hillary Clinton this could well turn into the litmus test, indicating how much of the LGBT community will support Obama in the primaries. More importantly for me though, this is a test of character.

Just as civil rights activists would be outraged if another candidate were to have a known member of the Klu Klux Klan as a speaker at a campaign rally where such ideology might be well received, so should the gay community continue its pressure and expressions of disdain over Mr. McClurkin's inclusion on Sen. Obama's South Carolina gospel concert ticket. There is no difference. Either the Senator from Illinois respects and values human rights in general and the gay and lesbian community in particular or he just sees both as pawns to be played to his advantage in a political game where winner takes all.

How the Senator handles this situation is likely to indicate how he will handle similar trials in the future. Will he stand for what he says he believes in, or will he kowtow to the shifting interests of whatever constituency he happens to be addressing at the time? One way or another, by the end of this weekend, we will have our answer.

Written By Duane Wells