

Obama, Clinton at prayer breakfast denounce Ugandan anti-gay proposal

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WASHINGTON (ABP) — President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton used the occasion of the National Prayer Breakfast Feb. 4 to denounce a draconian proposed anti-homosexuality law in Uganda — even though the event’s organizers have been closely associated with the Ugandan leaders pushing the bill.

In [a speech](#) largely about maintaining civility among political and religious diversity, Obama said, “We may disagree about gay marriage, but surely we can agree that it is unconscionable to target gays and lesbians for who they are — whether it’s here in the United States or, as Hillary mentioned, more extremely in odious laws that are being proposed most recently in Uganda.”

Obama referred to Clinton’s remarks earlier at the event, when she said the United States was “standing

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up for gays and lesbians who deserve to be treated as full human beings” around the world. She added that she had called the president of Uganda to express “our strongest concerns about a law being considered in the Parliament of Uganda.”

The remarks came at the event — a Washington tradition, attended by every president since Eisenhower as well as many members of Congress, administration officials and the diplomatic corps — amid calls from many

gay-rights supporters for Obama to boycott the prayer breakfast altogether.

The breakfast is not an official government event, but is organized annually by a secretive Virginia-based Christian organization known as “The Fellowship” or “The Family.” The group — which coordinates similar prayer-breakfast events in scores of states and nations around the world — has come under more scrutiny in recent years for its connections to developing-world politicians with autocratic or oppressive regimes as well as its connections to scandal-plagued U.S. politicians, such as South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford (R).

The proposed [Ugandan legislation](#) would impose extreme penalties on gay sex, make some sex acts punishable by death or life imprisonment and even require heterosexuals to turn in their gay family members and acquaintances in to authorities or face prosecution themselves. When it was publicized last fall, international leaders broadly condemned it. But The Family came under fire after journalists discovered the group had close ties with the bill’s chief supporters in the Ugandan Parliament.

As a result, many moderate and progressive leaders in the United States called on Obama and other government leaders to boycott the breakfast this year. They organized alternative events, called the [American Prayer Hour](#), in cities around the country. [Calvary Baptist Church](#) in Washington hosted one of the alternative events.

Wayne Besen, a longtime gay activist and chief organizer of the alternative prayer events, said Feb. 4 he was pleased that Obama used the event to speak out against the Ugandan proposal.

“The easy and safe course would have been for President Obama to remain silent,” said Besen, who is also founder of [Truth Wins Out](#), a group that fights the notion that gays can be converted into heterosexuals through prayer and counseling. “Instead, he walked into The Family’s house and

held them accountable for their actions in Uganda. It was a huge victory for human rights and the president's actions were courageous and honorable."

While many prominent conservative Christian leaders in the United States — [such as](#) Southern Baptist mega-pastor Rick Warren — have also denounced the Ugandan proposal, a handful of conservatives have defended it. They have claimed that the powerful evangelical Christian majority in Uganda is simply trying to protect the nation's children.

"Uganda's people and government deserve support, not criticism, from the United States," said Cliff Kincaid, editor of the conservative group [Accuracy in Media](#), in a press release issued after Obama's comments. "They are up against the international homosexual lobby... They are trying to create a Christian culture that is protective of families and children."

-Robert Marus is managing editor and Washington bureau chief for Associated Baptist Press.

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