

Obama admin first to host 'transgender' meeting at White House

by Christine Dhanagom

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WASHINGTON, DC, May 5, 2011 (LifeSiteNews.com) - This past Friday, the Obama Administration became the first administration ever to host a meeting at the White House focusing exclusively on the discussion of federal policy related to "transgender" issues.

According to a report in the Washington Blade, the meeting, which was hosted by the Office of Public Engagement (OPE), was attended by transgender activists and White House officials from the White House Domestic Policy Council, the Office of Cabinet Affairs, the Office of Public Engagement, and the counsel's office, among others. The president himself was not in attendance, however.

"While transgender issues have been covered in previous OPE meetings, and transgender leaders have been included in other OPE meetings, this would be the first time OPE has held a meeting solely focused on transgender issues," Shin Inouye, a White House spokesperson, said.

Beyond general information about who would be in attendance, the White House reportedly would not reveal any further information.

"This meeting, like most OPE meetings, is closed to press and off the record," said Inouye.

Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, revealed to the Blade that his organization had been invited to the meeting. He would not give any information about what specific policy issues he intended to raise, but commented that employment policy, access to health care, military policy and immigration detention standards were all issues of concern for her organization.

"We're not prioritizing them in that way, and I'm not going to prioritize them that way just so you can have a good story," Keisling said.

Michael Silverman, executive director for the Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund, told the news service that employment was a "top priority" in the transgender community.

Homosexual activists have been lobbying the president to issue an Executive Order barring workplace discrimination on the basis of "sexual orientation." Homosexual groups such as Equality Matters and the Human Rights Campaign have come out in support of such an Executive Order.

Keisling's Center for Transgender Equality claims on its website that a "disproportionate amount" of such discrimination is targeted against "transgender" individuals.

"As the American economy worsens, the discrimination faced by transgender people is becoming even more acute," says the organization. "Often forced into already unstable jobs and careers, and often facing compounding bias because of race or age, the economic well-being of transgender people is being challenged today like never before. The federal government has a responsibility to protect people from discrimination."

Obama has demonstrated his sympathy for transgender issues in the past, declaring June to be "National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month." Last January, he also became the first President to select a transgender appointee when he named Amanda Simpson to the position of Senior Technical Advisor to the Department of Commerce.