

Democratic Presidential Candidates Participate in Forum Sponsored by Human Rights Campaign

LIST OF SPEAKERS

CARLSON:

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, LGBT Americans were once invisible both in our communities and on the political landscape.

Today, after decades of progress, moments big and small, LGBT Americans are able and valued. They are also a force at the ballot box.

So tonight another monumental step forward. For the first time in history, the leading Democratic presidential candidates were invited to speak directly to a live LGBT television audience.

I'm Margaret Carlson on special assignment for LOGO, and I'm joined here on stage by panelist Jonathan Capehart, editorial writer of the Washington Post, advocate and artist Melissa Etheridge, and Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation.

Together, we'll be asking the candidates to answer the questions important to your lives, your families and your hopes for the future. Live from Los Angeles, LOGO and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation present the Visible Vote '08, a presidential forum.

For the next two hours, the Democratic candidates running for president will be here to talk directly to you live and commercial-free only on LOGO. You'll find a wealth of information about the candidates and their positions on the issues at HRC.org and at the visiblevote08.com where this show is also being streamed live.

Finally, before we begin, a word about the order of appearance at tonight's event. The candidates, who will appear one after another, picked their time spots in the order of their confirmation to attend the forum.

And now with that, it is my pleasure to introduce our first candidate. Barack Obama was elected to the U.S. Senate from Illinois in 2004. The senator previously served eight years in the state Senate in Illinois. Please welcome Senator Barack Obama.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Good to see you again.

OBAMA:

Thank you. Thank you.

CARLSON:

Well, welcome, Senator. You are a rock star, I think.

OBAMA:

Oh, I don't know about that.

CARLSON:

It's not quite as hot here as it was in Chicago the other night, literally and figuratively, perhaps.

OBAMA:

Absolutely. Well, it's wonderful to be here. I want to thank, first of all, HRC and LOGO for setting this up. I think it is a historic moment, not just for the LGBT community, but for America. And so I'm glad that I'm participating and glad I kind of got the ball rolling.

CARLSON:

Yes. Start-off batter here.

OBAMA:

Absolutely.

CARLSON:

Welcome.

(APPLAUSE)

OBAMA:

Thank you. Thank you.

CARLSON:

I'm going to have some questions for you, but first I'm going to turn it over to Joe.

SOLMONESE:

Senator, thank you so much for joining us. It's a real honor to have you here with us tonight. And thank you for being the first to accept our invitation.

You have said in previous debates that it is up to individual religious denominations to decide whether or not to recognize same sex marriage, and so my question is what place does the church have in government-sanctioned civil marriages?

OBAMA:

Well, it is my strong belief that the government has to treat all citizens equally. I come from that, in part, out of personal experience. When you're a black guy named Barack Obama, you know what it's like to be on the outside. And so my concern is continually to make sure that the rights that are conferred by the state are equal for all people. That's why I opposed DOMA in 2006 when I ran for the United States Senate.

(APPLAUSE)

That's why I am a strong supporter not of a weak version of civil unions, but of a strong version, in which the rights that are conferred at the federal level to persons who are part of a same sex union are compatible.

Now, as a consequence, I don't think that the church should be making these determinations when it comes to legal rights conferred by the state. I do think that individual denominations have the right to make their own decisions as to whether they recognize same sex couples.

My denomination, United Church of Christ, does. Other denominations may make a different decision. And obviously, part of keeping a separation of churches and state is also to make sure that churches have the right to exercise their freedom of religion.

But when it comes to federal rights, the over 1,100 rights that right now are not being given to same sex couples, I think that's unacceptable, and as president of the United States, I'm going to fight hard to make sure that those rights are available.

(APPLAUSE)

SOLMONESE:

So to follow up on your point about the state issue, if you were back in the Illinois legislature where you served and the issue of civil marriage came before you, how would you vote on that?

OBAMA:

Well, my view is that we should try to disentangle what has historically been the issue of the word "marriage," which has religious connotations to some people, from the civil rights that are given to couples in terms of hospital visitation, in terms of whether or not they can transfer property or any of the other -- Social Security benefits and so forth.

So it depends on how the bill would have come up. I would have supported and would continue to support a civil union that provides all the benefits that are available for a legally sanctioned marriage. And it is then, as I said, up to religious denominations to make a determination as to whether they want to recognize that as a marriage or not.

SOLMONESE:

But on the grounds of civil marriage, can you see to our community where that comes across as sounding separate, but equal?

OBAMA:

Well, look, when my parents got married in 1960 or '61, it would have been illegal for them to be married in a number of states in the South. So obviously, this is something that I understand intimately. It's something that I care about.

But I would also say this, that if I were advising the civil rights movement back in 1961 about its approach to civil rights, I would have probably said it's less important that we focus on an anti-miscegenation law than we focus on a voting rights law and a nondiscrimination employment law and all the legal rights that are conferred by the state.

Now, it's not for me to suggest that you shouldn't be troubled by these issues. I understand that, and I'm sympathetic to it. But my job as president is going to be to make sure that the legal rights that have consequences on a day-to-day basis for loving same sex couples all across the country, that those rights are recognized and enforced by my White House and by my Justice Department.

CARLSON:

Before I go to Melissa with a question -- I've been working with the LOGO people for a couple of days, so I have more of a feeling for what troubles them -- it seems like religion owns the word "marriage" or you're letting religion have marriage, and then civilly, you get civil unions.

But you got to get married and I got to get married, but Joe doesn't get to be married. And that really does mean that it's a lesser thing. It looks like a politically feasible thing to do, but...

OBAMA:

Well, as I've proposed it, it wouldn't be a lesser thing, from my perspective. And, look, semantics may be important to some. From my perspective, what I'm interested in is making sure that those legal rights are available to people.

And if we have a situation in which civil unions are fully enforced, are widely recognized, people have civil rights under the law, then my sense is that's enormous progress, and that is the kind of progress that I think HRC would be proud of and I would be proud of as president, and that's what I'm going to try to lead.

CARLSON:

Thank you.

Melissa?

ETHERIDGE:

Thank you very much. First, I just want to say how incredibly humbled and honored I am to be here. I am not a professional politician. I'm not even a journalist. I'm an incredibly privileged rock star...

(APPLAUSE)

OBAMA:

That's a good enough reason.

ETHERIDGE:

I'm very, very grateful and honored to represent my community and be able to speak for so many people who need to have their government's help. And with that, thank you.

I want to say hello. It's a pleasure to meet you, Senator Obama.

OBAMA:

It's great to meet you.

ETHERIDGE:

And you have this reputation, and not only in my heart and my experience of you, of being an incredible orator. You speak, you touch many of us, and you have. And we have lots of hope.

And I see you speaking to a very divided America. The last eight years we have been subject to a great fear that has divided us all -- between races, between economic classes and, of course, gays and lesbians often feel like we are at the very end of that "us" and "them" role.

OBAMA:

Right.

ETHERIDGE:

If you are elected president, what are you going to do? What are you going to do to bring this country back together?

OBAMA:

It's a great question. Part of the reason that LGBT issues are important to me is because I got into politics in part because I don't like people looking down on other people. It bothers me. Maybe it's something that my mother instilled in me. Maybe it's the experience of being an African American and at times being discriminated against.

So the cause that all of you are involved with is part of what prompted me to get into politics. But part of what prompted me is also this hopefulness, this belief that there is a core decency to most people, and certainly most Americans, and that our founding documents, I think, have a set of universal truths that are really important.

And the key question for the next president is can we tap back into that core decency? And can we appeal to what Lincoln called the better angels of our nature?

And part of that involves, I think, when it comes to LGBT issues, acknowledging the reality that people experience every day. That's why when I was at the Democratic convention in 2004, I said there are no red states; there are no blue states. But I also said we've got gay friends in the red states, and we played little league in the blue states, trying to acknowledge that people's experience on a day-to-day basis is they've got gay friends, they've got gay family members. They love them and they cherish them, and somehow our politics creates craziness and fear that doesn't match up with people's day-to-day experience.

And it's the job of the president, I think, to talk about these issues in ways that encourage people to recognize themselves in each other. And when I talk like this, by the way, sometimes the Washington press corps rolls its eyes and says, "Ah, he's so naive."

CARLSON:

No eye-rolling here yet.

(LAUGHTER)

OBAMA:

But people do, because the sense is, you know, Obama -- he's always talking about hope. I'm a hope-monger.

(LAUGHTER)

But I believe that, and...

(APPLAUSE)

ETHERIDGE:

I grew up in the Midwest. I grew up believing that if you work hard and you're good, then you'll succeed and you can be a good citizen. I grew up believing in our country, in this great America. It's the greatest country, and I grew up believing in those documents. And those documents say equality to everyone...

OBAMA:

Absolutely.

ETHERIDGE:

... given by our creator. And my creator made me what I am. And I believe that.

(APPLAUSE)

ETHERIDGE:

And please, as you go and as you leave, don't be afraid. Don't let that fear -- be the first one to make the change to bring it, all right? Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

CAPEHART:

You've gotten some praise for taking to the pulpits of black churches and telling the black community, talking to the black community about its responsibilities.

Now, you and I both know that there's a homophobia problem in the black community. So how are you going to talk to the black community about that, both as a candidate and, if you are elected to the White House, as president?

OBAMA:

I have already done so. Some of you saw at the Howard debate that Tavis Smiley had organized I specifically raised the homophobia in our community as an impediment to dealing with AIDS issues. I'm somebody who talks about LGBT issues not just before HRC.

I was with Harold Ford. He organized a forum of black ministers in Tennessee. And I specifically talked about the degree to which the notion of gay marriage in black churches has been used to divide, has been used to distract. I specifically pointed out that if there is a pastor here who can point out a marriage that has been broken up as a consequence of seeing two men or two women holding hands, then you should tell me, because I haven't seen any evidence of it.

(APPLAUSE)

And what I've also said is if you think that issue is more important to the black family, which is under siege -- if you think that's more important than the fact that black men don't have any jobs and are struggling in the inner cities, then I profoundly disagree with you.

So this goes to the earlier point that we were talking about, Melissa. I think when there's truth-telling involved, people respond, as long as you don't come at people in a heavy-handed way, but rather you approach them based on their own experience and their own truth.

And the black community, I think, has a diversity of opinion, as you and I both know. There are people who recognize that if we're going to talk about justice and civil rights and fairness, that should apply to all people, not just some. And there are some folks who coming out of the church elevated one line in Romans above the Sermon on the Mount.

So my job as a leader, not just of African Americans, but hopefully, as a leader of Americans, is to tell the truth, which is this has been a political football that has been used. It is unfortunate. It's got to stop. And when it stops, we will then be able to address the legitimate and serious concerns that face the black families.

CAPEHART:

Senator, real quickly, a recent poll out of the New York Times and MTV of Americans ages 17 to 20 show that 44 percent of them favor same sex marriage compared to 28 percent of the public. Now, you're running as a candidate of change, but how can you run as a candidate of change when your stance on same sex marriage is decidedly old school?

OBAMA:

Oh, come on now. I mean, look, we can have this conversation for the duration of the 15 minutes, but there's a reason why I was here first. It's because I've got a track record of working on these issues.

If people are interested in ENDA at the federal level, they can look at who was the chief co-sponsor of Illinois' version of ENDA, which we passed. If people are interested in my stance on these issues, I've got a track record of working with the LGBT community.

What I have focused on, and what I will continue to focus on, is making sure that the rights that are provided by the federal government and the state governments and local governments are ones that are provided to everybody. And that's a standard that I think I can meet, and I don't make promises I can't keep. And on this issue, I have been at the forefront of any of the presidential candidates.

CARLSON:

Senator, I want to do a viewer-generated question. I want to do a moderator-generated question very quickly.

OBAMA:

Go ahead.

CARLSON:

Would you put the fight among gays and lesbians for civil rights on a par with the civil rights movement for African Americans?

OBAMA:

Well, my attitude is if people are being treated unfairly and unequally, then they are being treated unfairly and unequally, and it needs to be fixed.

So I'm always very cautious about getting into comparisons of victimology. The issues that gays and lesbians face today are different from the issues that were faced by African Americans under Jim Crow. That doesn't mean, though, that there aren't parallels in the sense that legal status is not equal. And that has to be fixed.

But I think it's important not to look at the black candidate and wonder whether or not he's going to be more sympathetic or less sympathetic to these issues. I'm going to be more sympathetic not because I'm black -- I'm going to be more sympathetic because this has been the cause of my life and will continue to be the cause of my life, making sure that everybody is treated fairly and that we've got an expansive view of America where everybody's invited in, and we are all working together to create the kind of America that we want for the next generation.

CARLSON:

Well, I had a great viewer-generated question here for you. You're never going to know what it is, but now you get to sum up for 30 seconds or a minute.

OBAMA:

Well, listen, it's a pleasure. This went too quick. I want more time, but I don't have it.

CARLSON:

We'd like to give it to you.

OBAMA:

But the only thing I want to say is this. All the candidates in this race are going to be terrific on these issues compared to, certainly, the candidates in the other party right now. And that's unfortunate, because this shouldn't be a partisan issue.

The one thing I guess I would say about my candidacy, and something you should think about, is I don't just talk about these issues where it's convenient.

There's a reason that I spoke about the importance of gay and lesbian issues in the most important speech of my life. I didn't have to. There's a reason why in my announcement I talked about these issues. There's a reason why I talk about gays and lesbians and transgender people in my stump speeches.

I'm somebody who I think is willing to talk about these issues even when it's hard -- in front of black ministers. I'm willing to talk about AIDS at Saddleback Church to evangelicals and talk about why we need to have condom distribution to deal with the scourge of AIDS. So that's the kind of political purge that I hope all of you recognize is going to be necessary in order for us to create the kind of America that we all want. And I appreciate your time. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

And we're happy you came here.

OBAMA:

I had a great time.

CARLSON:

It's good to see you. Bye now.

OBAMA:

Thank you. Thank you so much.

CARLSON:

Our next candidate, John Edwards, was elected senator from North Carolina in 1998 and ran for president six years later. And, of course, in 2004 he was the vice presidential candidate. Welcome to Senator John Edwards.

(APPLAUSE)

ETHERIDGE:

Hi.

EDWARDS:

We've been listening to your music. I want you to know that.

ETHERIDGE:

Good.

CARLSON:

Senator Edwards, welcome. We're so delighted that you're here. Thank you for coming.

EDWARDS:

Thank you. Glad to be here.

CARLSON:

Melissa's going to start off the questions. She was bragging that she's neither a politician, and not even a journalist.

(LAUGHTER)

But we can't sing.

EDWARDS:

That's a great place to start.

CARLSON:

All right.

Melissa?

ETHERIDGE:

Yes. Welcome and thank you so much for being here.

EDWARDS:

Of course.

ETHERIDGE:

We're so grateful for that. Your wife and I actually have a lot in common, both suffering through cancer and such, and I wish her the best.

EDWARDS:

Thank you.

ETHERIDGE:

And I send her lots and lots of love. And we also share more than that. Both her and I are very fortunate to be able to afford the best health care.

EDWARDS:

Yes.

ETHERIDGE:

And I remember being in chemotherapy and having a shot once a week that was \$3,000 and wondering how anyone else could afford this. And I know you understand the health care need of lower income people.

But do you understand the special needs of people in gay and lesbian couples who cannot depend on their partner's insurance for protection because they are not a legal spouse or have to pay extra on the benefit? What would you do about this?

EDWARDS:

Well, first of all, let me say thank you to HRC and thank you to all of you for your leadership.

And the answer to your question is those rights should be available to gay and lesbian couples. I actually was the first candidate to come out with a universal health care plan, which I'm very proud of, that made it very clear that those rights to gay and lesbian couples would be exactly the same as they would for straight couples. And so those health care benefits would be available to someone in that situation.

And I might add just a few weeks ago I was the LA Gay and Lesbian Center, which is an extraordinary place, which I'm sure some people here are familiar with here in the Los Angeles community, where they are doing amazing, amazing work.

But there's a message from my visit there that I think is really important for America to hear, which is I met a whole group of young people who were there because they were homeless, and they were homeless because they came out of the closet and told their parents the truth, and their parents kicked them out of the home.

And there they were -- the only place -- they were living on the street, had nowhere to go. Thank God for the LA Gay and Lesbian Center being there for them, and an extraordinary woman who runs the center. But without that place, where would these young people go?

And it just can't be that in America people think that's OK. They can't believe that's OK. And they need to hear and see exactly what I saw when I was there, because it was moving. It was touching, and I actually believe that that kind of experience would have a huge impact on the American people if they could just see.

(APPLAUSE)

ETHERIDGE:

It seems like it's had a huge effect on you, and that's really nice to see, because I have heard that you have said in the past that you feel uncomfortable around gay people. Are you OK right now?

(LAUGHTER)

It's OK.

CARLSON:

It's very common.

EDWARDS:

I'm perfectly comfortable.

ETHERIDGE:

But it's experiences like that that people need to know, people need to see, and just how universal -- how we are all just people. We're the same.

EDWARDS:

It is.

ETHERIDGE:

Now, my next question is...

EDWARDS:

Can I just tell you that's not true -- what you just said? You didn't say I said it, but...

ETHERIDGE:

I had heard of it.

EDWARDS:

Someone else said it.

ETHERIDGE:

Not true?

EDWARDS:

It's not true. It is not true.

ETHERIDGE:

OK. I take that back. I apologize.

EDWARDS:

No. I know where it came from. It came from a political consultant, and he's just wrong. And Elizabeth and I were both there, and both of us have said he's

wrong.

ETHERIDGE:

All right. I apologize for ever taking that and putting that out.

EDWARDS:

That's OK.

ETHERIDGE:

I have children in grade school, and they're now in third and fifth grade. But I remember in first grade and kindergarten the little kids coming up to me and going, "Why do they have two mommies?" And I always felt that this was my place to just bend down and go, "You know what? Some people have a mommy and a daddy. Some people have just a mommy, just a daddy. Some people have two mommies and two daddies." And they go, "OK," and they walk away, because it makes perfect sense to them, and they're fine with that.

Do you think public schools should teach about LGBT kids and families? How can we bring this into the public school system, or should we?

EDWARDS:

Oh, sure it should. The kids who go to public schools need to understand why same sex couples are the parents of some of the children. They need to understand that these are American families, just like every American family.

It's one of the reasons why, of course, we have tens of thousands of kids in foster care who desperately need a home. It's one of the reasons that we need to allow gay and lesbian couples the same rights to adopt children -- in fact, to provide for them to have the same rights to adopt children.

(APPLAUSE)

(CROSSTALK)

EDWARDS:

I'm sorry. I'm almost done. The only thing I would add to that is I do think it's important for the kids that their peers understand what's happening, because otherwise, you know, children are children. They can be mean and cruel, as I know that you have seen.

And the question is whether we as adults have a responsibility to make sure that they're educated, that they understand this is a good thing, and it's something that we as Americans believe in and embrace.

CARLSON:

At what grade or what age would you introduce, for instance, that kind of education in the schools?

EDWARDS:

That's a good question. I've not thought about it enough to answer it.

CARLSON:

Well, think about it and come back later and tell us what you come up with.

(LAUGHTER)

EDWARDS:

Yes. There is a place, though, that I believe it's appropriate.

CARLSON:

Jonathan?

(CROSSTALK)

CAPEHART:

Senator, when you were the vice presidential nominee in 2004, many gays and lesbians felt that they were being used as a scare tactic by the right wing and the Republican party and that the Democrats didn't do anything to defend them. Why should the gay community think that it will be defended this time by you?

EDWARDS:

Well, first of all, this is only one area where the right wing uses scare tactics to divide the American people. And the truth is both in a presidential campaign and in governing, it is so important that we reject this hate-mongering.

I was actually very proud, I have to say -- Melissa mentioned my wife Elizabeth -- I was very proud of Elizabeth for taking Ann Coulter on, and taking her on head-on.

(APPLAUSE)

I have seen the impact of tolerance, for lack of a better word, of hate-mongering. I have seen it with language used when I was growing up in the segregated South. And if you stand quietly by and let it happen, what happens is it takes hold. And it takes hold, and then people begin to believe it's OK. It's OK to use the kind of language that Ann Coulter used. It's OK for the Republicans in their politics to divide America and use hate-mongering to separate us.

If we stand quietly by, it's not just bad for a political campaign -- and it is bad for a political campaign, because we have to stand up for what's right and fair and just, and we have to do it with passion and strength -- but it's also bad for America.

It is bad for America for us to let anybody, speaking to the American people, use these issues to divide us. And it is so important for anyone who seeks to be the leader of the United States of America to stand up strong and firm and denounce it and speak out -- and speak out strongly -- for equality.

CARLSON:

Senator, did you want to take on Ann Coulter? You could use the opportunity here.

(LAUGHTER)

Or just Mrs. Edwards?

EDWARDS:

No, no. As a matter of fact, I joined Elizabeth (inaudible) most things with Elizabeth. One of the reporters asked me afterwards, "So what kind of consultation did you have before Elizabeth called in?" I said, "The usual one. I found out about the same time the media found out."

(LAUGHTER)

No, I think that what Ann Coulter does is the worst kind of public discourse. I think she demeans everything that all the rest of us do.

(APPLAUSE)

And I think it is intended to go to the lowest common denominator in the American people and to divide us.

And it goes to the same point I was making just a minute ago with what I saw when I was growing up in the South, which is if you stand quietly by and let this happen, then what happens is hatred gets a foothold. And when hatred gets a foothold, it is much harder to unseat.

And you cannot let these people go by quietly and continue what they're doing, which is why Elizabeth spoke up. And I think it's absolutely crucial that we speak up in a presidential campaign with strength and passion, not quietly and carefully, to do what's right.

CARLSON:

Joe, do you have a question?

SOLMONESE:

Yes. Senator, thank you for being here.

EDWARDS:

Thank you.

SOLMONESE:

Susan Stanton is in our audience tonight. She was for 17 years the city manager in Largo, Florida. She did her job well. She was respected and admired, and when it was revealed that she was transgender, she was fired.

So my question for you is, if a member of your staff came to you and told you that they were transgender and that they were thinking of transitioning, how would you react to that? And who in your life has influenced what your reaction might be?

EDWARDS:

I would support them in every possible way, including on a personal and an emotional level, provide every bit of help and support that I possibly could in going through what they were going through.

And by the way, can I say about the first point you made in your question -- it's the reason we need powerful employment nondiscrimination laws in the United States of America, so that people cannot be fired.

But I will say I do think that you deserve, and the American deserve to know beyond your policy position what your reaction is, too. I mean, what is it you're actually willing to do on a personal level? Will you stand with them? Will you support them? Will you support them publicly? Are you willing to do what's right under the circumstances?

And I can tell you I know in my heart and soul that I would. I've had -- not on that specific question -- similar experiences when I was younger on issues of race that were extraordinarily difficult in the place where I grew up, when I did what I believed was right, when my family did what we believed was right, and I think that's at least some indication of what I would do under these circumstances.

SOLMONESE:

And finally, Senator, you've expressed your opposition to same sex marriage, and you've raised your faith as part of the reason for your opposition. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about what is it within your religion that's leading you to this position?

EDWARDS:

Well, you know, I have to tell you I shouldn't have said that, because first of all, I believe to my core in equality. My campaign for the presidency is about equality across the board.

And I listened to your discussion with Senator Obama a few minutes ago. I was backstage, and I was able to hear what you were saying and what anyone here was saying. And it makes perfect sense to me that gay and lesbian couples would say, "Civil unions -- great; 1,100 federal benefits -- great; you know, give us these rights. We deserve these rights." And they're absolutely right about that. But it stops short of real equality.

It makes perfect sense to me that people would feel that way. I totally can understand it. It makes sense. And the only thing I would say about the faith question is I think from my perspective it is wrong, because we have seen a president in the last six-plus years who tries to impose his faith on the American people. And I think it is a mistake, and I will not impose my faith belief on the American people. I don't believe any president of the United States should do that. I believe in the separation of church and state.

And these things that we have talked about -- all these substantive issues of equality, which is really what the discussion has been about, these are part of my heart soul and core. And they are not just issues that I will answer when I am in front of you. They are things that I will fight for every day, both in the presidential campaign and as president of the United States, because I think America desperately needs it, and I believe in it deeply.

CARLSON:

Joe, very quickly, one more question.

SOLMONESE:

I was just wondering, then, if you could briefly talk about, as you said, it is not your faith. Then what is at the core of that resistance? I know that you said you're on a journey, and I'm curious where and when you might end up on that journey.

(LAUGHTER)

CARLSON:

How old are you?

EDWARDS:

I'm too old. I'm 54. I can tell you where I am. First of all, I think you deserve to know the truth. And the truth is that my position on same sex marriage has not changed. We're past the time of political doublespeak about this. I do believe strongly in civil unions and the substantive rights that go with that. I believe we desperately need to get rid of DOMA. I think we need to get rid of "Don't ask; don't tell." I think we need to get rid of those things.

(APPLAUSE)

And now what? Just as an aside, "Don't ask; don't tell" is not just wrong now. It was wrong when it began. It's been wrong the entire time, as is true with DOMA. Exactly the same thing is true with DOMA. All I can tell you is where I am today. That's the best I can do. You deserve to know that from me. Today, I believe in all these other things, but I do not support same sex marriage.

CARLSON:

I want to squeeze in a viewer-generated question. And it's about "Don't ask; don't tell." This is from Jason Knight in Washington, D.C. He was a former native linguist who was dismissed under "Don't ask; don't tell." We have so many fewer Arabic speakers, thanks to that rule.

EDWARDS:

I know. I know.

CARLSON:

And he said since the ban cannot be lifted by executive order, he claims you need more than the president. President Clinton wanted to do more, but ran into the generals, ran into Congress, ran into a lot of roadblocks. So how do you do it? What are you going to do?

EDWARDS:

Well, I think the president of the United States can get rid of "Don't ask; don't tell." I appreciate the question, but if the president of the United States believes that "Don't ask; don't tell" is bad for America -- in fact, bad for our military, and it's discriminatory, all of which is true...

CARLSON:

And when General Colin Powell says no, you can't do it.

EDWARDS:

I'm not sure Colin Powell would say no.

CARLSON:

I think he did say no.

EDWARDS:

Back then. Back then. But it doesn't matter. It's not the job of the generals to make this determination. It is the job of the president of the United States to make this policy decision.

(APPLAUSE)

And I can tell you I am firmly committed to eliminating "Don't ask; don't tell."

CARLSON:

Well, we're out of time with our questions.

EDWARDS:

Oh, come on.

CARLSON:

Would you like to wrap up? You know, you get to ask us questions if you'd like to. Anyway, you have a minute to yourself.

EDWARDS:

OK. Thank you. Thank you all very much for being here, and thank all of you. You're so important. The truth is America owes you a debt of gratitude.

Some of you heard me talk in the past about two Americas and trying to have one America. If we actually believe in having one America, we've got a lot of work to do, don't we? And nobody understands that better than the people in this room and the people you're advocating for.

We have such work to do to keep loving couples together who are separated because of immigration laws that are unfair; to have exactly what was described in one of the earlier questions, to have an employer be able to walk in to an employee and say you are fired because of your sexual orientation, and nothing can be done about it; to have someone brutally murdered in the United States of America because of their sexual orientation and not have that be a hate crime.

We're better than this. The United States of America is better than this. And we, and all of you, are important in bringing about the change that's necessary in this country.

And the last thing I want to say to every single person in this room and everyone who can hear the sound of my voice -- it's great that you're having a presidential forum; I love that; I'm glad we're talking about these really important issues of equality -- but I want to add to that, the real change and the real movements in America didn't start in the oval office. They started in places and in communities just like this with people with courage and strength that went out and stood up and fought for what was right, who marched and spoke up. That's what you're doing today, and you're going to change this country along with the next president of the United States. Thank you all so much.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Our next candidate is Congressman Dennis Kucinich, who has represented the 10th district of Ohio since 1996. This is his second run for president. Congressman Kucinich?

KUCINICH:

Good to see you.

CARLSON:

Congressman, nice to see you.

KUCINICH:

Good to be here. Thank you.

CARLSON:

Have a seat.

KUCINICH:

You bet.

CARLSON:

They really like you here on the left coast.

(LAUGHTER)

KUCINICH:

Actually, I represent mainstream America.

(LAUGHTER)

CARLSON:

That's true. You can't get more mainstream than Ohio. Thank you for coming. We're delighted you're here.

And, Jonathan, would you begin?

CAPEHART:

Congressman Kucinich, you're seemingly for everything the gay community wants. I took a look at your HRC questionnaire -- support, support, support, support, support. So is there anything that the LGBT community wants that you're against? There's got to be something.

(LAUGHTER)

KUCINICH:

All I can say is keep those contributions coming, and you'll have the president that you want.

CAPEHART:

I'll take that as a no.

KUCINICH:

That's a no.

CAPEHART:

All right. So you're one of just two candidates who fully supports same sex marriage. Why do you think that is?

KUCINICH:

Well, I can tell you from my own experience, this is really a question of whether you really believe in equality. I see the equal sign there, and I have that same sign in my office in Washington, D.C. And imagine that equal sign inside a heart, because what we're really talking about here is human love. And there's no power on this earth greater than human love.

And when you understand what real equality is, you understand that people who love each other must have the opportunity to be able to express that in a way that is meaningful and that the states should not be intervening against people. The state should be there on behalf of people, to make sure that that love has a chance to be facilitated. So to me this isn't either a closed question.

CAPEHART:

So Congressman, what you're saying is that Senator Obama and Senator Edwards, who sat here just moments ago, both espousing equality -- they're for equality; they're for all these things you just talked about -- so are you saying that they don't truly oppose same sex marriage, that they're just playing politics?

KUCINICH:

I'm saying that I stand for real equality and that I believe...

(APPLAUSE)

... this is really part of an American tradition, because when you look at the founding documents, the idea of all being created equal, we hold these truths to be self-evident. They all are created equal, endowed by our creator with certain inalienable rights.

To me, this is a foundational principle of who we are as a country. So because I believe in that and because I live it, to me it's very easy to be here to take a stand for that principle.

It would be very easy for me as president of the United States to issue executive orders that will require all federal contractors, anyone who's doing business with the federal government in any way, every federal agency to have to follow the principles that are written in ENDA and to let the federal government be the agent of change that it should be and then to lead the way as president of the United States in bringing about the kind of unity that shows that real unity is to respect each other's inner equality, and real unity is to respect the power of human love.

The greatest commandment is love, and I think that if someone buys that and lives it, then things change in a country. Love has that transformative power, and that's what I have always tried to bring into public forums, and that's what I'll bring into the White House as well.

CARLSON:

Congressman, you're so evolved for a member of Congress.

(LAUGHTER)

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

You're at the end of your journey, if I may borrow a phrase from Senator Edwards, but as mayor of Cleveland, did you feel this way -- when you were in high school? I mean, how did you get here?

KUCINICH:

When I was mayor of Cleveland, I was attacked for hiring a police chief who was said to be sympathetic to gay rights. And I had members of my cabinet who were gay, and to me, who cares? I mean, it really doesn't matter.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Again, totally evolved.

KUCINICH:

Listen, every one of us through taking a stand has the potential to help any one of us evolve. That's the gift that we give to each other.

And when someone is president of the United States and is willing to share that with the nation, we can help lift up the whole nation in so many ways -- not only in matters of equality, but in matters of peace, in matters of all social and economic justice. I mean, that's what I'm about.

So to be here is an honor, because I recognize the journey of so many people in this room -- of solitary journeys of courage, real courage -- and when you understand that, then of course as president I want to exemplify that, because so many of you have already taken that path, and you deserve a leader who's ready to take the same path.

CARLSON:

Congressman, Melissa is quite courageous. Do you have a question?

ETHERIDGE:

Thank you. They told me not to fawn over you, and I'm trying not to. But it's kind of hard not to. I hope you always run for president until you are elected. I do. I'm fawning. I wasn't supposed to do that.

KUCINICH:

I feel I need to point something out to you, although I'm hopeful it's not going to take that long, but I was elected to the Congress on my fifth try.

ETHERIDGE:

Oh. See, OK. I'm with you.

KUCINICH:

If at first you don't succeed -- it took me five times. I'm working on the second time.

ETHERIDGE:

I think this country really, really needs a leader -- someone who will sit or stand and say this is what I believe in, because it's right. And that's so refreshing, so amazingly refreshing to me.

(APPLAUSE)

I do have a question. I actually do. Many people in our community with AIDS and HIV and then many people in general with cancer -- I, myself, one -- have benefited, especially here in California, one of 11 states who have legalized medicinal marijuana. And it relieves symptoms and many, many things.

And we are completely at odds with the federal government, and they even have come in to California and have raided our medicinal marijuana shops, and it's quite bad.

So do you think we should have this law for the whole country? What is your stance on this?

KUCINICH:

Well, four years go when there were raids in California, I as a member of the Congress objected to that. And, of course, it's a matter between doctors and patients, and if doctors want to prescribe medical marijuana to relieve pain, compassion requires that the government support that.

And so as president of the United States, I would make sure that our Justice Department was mindful that we should be taking a compassionate approach.

I want to go one step further, because this whole issue of drugs in our society is misplaced. Drugs have infected the society, but I think we need to look at it more as a medical and a health issue than as a criminal justice issue.

(APPLAUSE)

And let me say one step further, for those who do or whose friends may suffer from AIDS, I'm the only person in this race who is standing for a not-for-profit health care system, single payer, universal Medicare for all where long-term care is totally covered.

People should not be locked into these higher premiums, co-pays or deductibles which are destroying people's economic capabilities. So under the plan that I have, if someone has AIDS, they're totally covered. Under the plan that I have, if anyone needs long-term care for any kind of an illness, they're totally covered.

The fact of the matter is we already are paying for a universal standard of care. We're just not getting it.

Other candidates are talking about maintaining this for-profit health care system. And anyone who has ever had a loved one who has needed medical care

and couldn't get it because they didn't have the money understands the urgency of having someone not just in the race, but in the White House, who's ready to rally the American people in the cause of not-for-profit health care, Medicare for all. And I'm doing that. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

It may take you five times, because you're further out than many people -- I mean most Democrats. And I'm wondering how are you going to get elected president?

KUCINICH:

Well, let me tell you why. I am the candidate right in the center of the aspirations of the American people's hopes and dreams.

I led the effort in the House of Representatives five years ago in challenging the administration's march towards war against Iraq. No other candidate in this race can say that, nor can they say that they voted against the war and/or voted against funding for the war consistently. The rest of the country's come in my direction on that. I took the stand when it was really unpopular to do so.

Being president of the United States means that you have to do the right thing the first time, and it means that when you're talking about civil liberties, marriage equality, employment nondiscrimination, when you're talking about standing for people's rights to be who they are without fear of being attacked, you're talking about something that is really essentially American.

And so I'm at the center of all those discussions. And my candidacy for president is not only transforming the race, but I want you to understand how it will transform this nation when you have a president who cannot be bought or bossed, who has the willingness to stand up and speak out when others would be silent, who can challenge war, who can challenge corruption, because my heart is clean, because I have the ability to see and pierce that veil of falsehood which covers so much of our country today.

I see the world as one, Margaret. I see the world as being interconnected and interdependent. Anything that separates any of us needs to be looked at, and we need to find ways of discussing the imperative of human unity, but not just discussing it. It's one thing to talk about it. It's another thing to act from that understanding and awareness. And that's what I'm prepared to do as the next president of the United States elected in 2008.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Well, Congressman, I have a viewer-generated question for you or the people who have the same aspirations as you do. This is Robert Armstrong from Morristown, New Jersey.

He said, "I'm living with AIDS and speak regularly to students in high school. The kind of AIDS prevention outreach is no longer eligible for Ryan White funding if it includes talk about gay people. Will you reinstate AIDS prevention as a category in Ryan White funding? And how can you bring Congress along, given that you're perceived as being in the left wing of the political spectrum?"

KUCINICH:

I'm the co-author of the bill that creates a -- first of all, the answer to your question is yes. And I'm the co-author of the bill that creates Medicare for all.

You know, this is a very serious health issue, and through our education system, a president must help the country and help our children in particular learn the kind of conduct that promotes health. And that also means sex education. Now, some parents may not want that, and they should have the right to opt out. But the truth of the matter is that we need to have sex education.

We also need a president who is ready to embrace people with AIDS in a real meaningful way that says, "Look, we want you to receive all the care that you need" by having a not-for-profit health care system so you don't have to worry about working a lifetime having AIDS and then losing everything you've ever worked for and not being able to give it to your partner, for example, or to share it with someone you love.

This is something that to me the challenge of AIDS relates to not just funding, but it relates to having a president who's wise enough and courageous enough to take this issue on in a very direct way and do it without any fear whatsoever.

CARLSON:

Let me give Joe a few minutes here for a question.

SOLMONESE:

Congressman, you haven't just been an outspoken hero for our community as a presidential candidate; you've been there for your entire time in Congress, and I want to thank you for that.

And to that end, we are engaging in an attempt to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, as you mentioned, in the House of Representatives. And I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about what you see as a potential hurdle to getting that done and what you might be able to do or what you might be able to talk to us about in terms of getting that done.

KUCINICH:

Well, as you know, Barney Frank has introduced the bill again, and I think we need to acknowledge the role that Barney Frank has played as someone in the Congress who has been very powerful.

(APPLAUSE)

And I've been privileged to work with HRC in the past as being the person who goes to members of Congress and asks them to sign up to support the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. And I have certainly looked forward to working with you again to do that.

I think that this issue of employment discrimination is acknowledged as affecting everyone, because if any group could be discriminated against, then all

groups can be discriminated against. And so, yes, I'm there on that issue. There's just no question about it.

And when we're talking about discrimination, I'd like to go back to the marriage equality issue for a minute. When you look at the Orange County case, you really see where we have a society that wants to enshrine separate and unequal.

This is a basis for discrimination in employment, but it's also a basis for discrimination when two couples want to get married and have that partnership recognized as equal before the law.

In our society, when you go to math in first grade, you learn one plus one equals two. But when you're talking about domestic partnership before the law, sometimes one plus one equals zero. And that's not right.

And so what I'm saying is that a president who understands that real equality means that you take a stand: Equal protection before the law; equal justice; equality of opportunity, and it has to be equality of opportunity without regard to race, color, creed or sexual orientation, period. I mean, this is what it means to be an American.

CARLSON:

Congressman, we're almost completely out of time. Do you want to take 30 seconds to wrap up?

KUCINICH:

I send you great love. I want you to know that the love of country, the love of equality is something that every one of us embodies.

But we need a president who's ready to testify to that, to be an exemplar of equality, to understand love in the deepest sense. My wife Elizabeth is here, and let me tell you something. We've talked about this.

I can't imagine what it would be like to have met the love of my life and to have such a depth of feeling for her and then be told that no, you can't be married, because there's a certain rule or law that won't let that happen. That would be devastating.

And because we understand it, and because I understand it, I'm ready to be your president. I'm ready to be the person that transforms this nation, that lifts up this nation, that causes not just an American evolution, but takes us and reconnects us with the deeper truths of who we are.

I love all of you. Thank you so much for the chance of being here.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Again, I'd like to thank Congressman Kucinich -- I feel the love -- Senators Obama and Edwards for sharing their time with us. We should note that all of the major Republican candidates running for president were invited to take part in a similar forum, and all of them declined.

But who did not decline? Up next: former Senator Mike Gravel, Governor Bill Richardson and Senator Hillary Clinton.

We're going to take just a quick break now for some messages from the sponsors of tonight's event, LOGO and Human Rights Campaign Foundation. If you want more information on the issues raised tonight and the candidates' positions, please go to visiblevote08.com or hrc.org. We'll be right back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

CARLSON:

Welcome back to the Visible Vote '08, a presidential forum presented by LOGO and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation. This is an historic opportunity: Presidential candidates speaking directly to a national LGBT television audience for the first time ever.

Our next guest, Mike Gravel, served as an elected official in Alaska, beginning in the state house in 1963 and as a United States senator from 1969 to 1981. Join me in welcoming former Senator Mike Gravel.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Senator Gravel, thanks for joining us.

GRAVEL:

Thank you for having me.

CARLSON:

We're delighted. Melissa is going to begin our questioning.

ETHERIDGE:

Great. Hello. I am so grateful that you are here. You are unusual.

GRAVEL:

Well, I've heard that said.

ETHERIDGE:

You are unusual for your generation of straight white men.

(LAUGHTER)

You actually support same sex marriage. How do you speak to men of your generation and how do you speak to your generation in general about your issues to convince them?

GRAVEL:

Before I answer that, I want to thank our friends, the Harvey Milk Club in San Francisco, the gays in New York, the gays in San Francisco who really put the pressure on Joe and others to get me here, because I was cut out of the pack, as I was with the AFL-CIO just recently.

And so I'm very grateful that, Joe, you reversed yourself, and I'm here. And I'll try to give a good account of myself for you. OK?

(APPLAUSE)

Now, about my generation -- most of them are wrong, dead wrong.

(LAUGHTER)

When I was a kid, there was a lot of homophobia around. I can recall when the gay issue was 55 percent opposed, 40 percent for, and lo and behold, now if you're talking about the gay issue in general, it's probably 55, almost 59 percent for, and the rest are in the dustbin of history.

The same thing's going to happen with the marriage issue. I'll tell you. I'll make you a promise. Five years from now the marriage issue will be a non-issue in the presidential campaign. Just that simple.

(APPLAUSE)

I hope I answered your question.

ETHERIDGE:

No, I believe you're absolutely right, and it's so refreshing to sit here, and I'm glad we have the opportunity to have you sit here and tell us that. You are from Alaska.

GRAVEL:

I live in Virginia now, but my heart is still in Alaska.

ETHERIDGE:

All right. There are many gay people up in Alaska? No.

(LAUGHTER)

GRAVEL:

We have gay people. My cadre of support within the Harvey Milk Club is the Alaskans that are in that club. They're in the audience right today. I think they're sitting up front somewhere. But we're talking about Maxine; we're talking about John from Delta, Alaska; and of course, Patrick, who's not from Alaska, but boy, he sure acts like an Alaskan with his enthusiasm.

ETHERIDGE:

Well, great. I love seeing you here, and I'm glad that you are running for president to keep everyone honest. I love that you are joining us today, and just best of luck to you.

CARLSON:

If you think it's changing so much, you could put gay marriage up to a popular vote, and it would win?

GRAVEL:

I think so. I think so. I think the American people have basically got a really underlying sense of values of fairness.

What happens is we had the leadership that demagogues the issue to a fare-thee-well, whether it's presidential candidates who can't quite get their arms around the marriage issue and, of course, will give you an argument. And it could be a real argument that it's their morality that doesn't permit it. Or it's a political argument.

First off, I have some advice. I want to share some advice with the gay community nationally, and with all of you, and that is when people like myself or Dennis move the ball down the court a little bit, that benefits the gay community.

And it's sort of ironic that we see the gay community supporting people like Hillary, Obama, Edwards, who for some reason can't get their arms around marriage. Stop and think, what is marriage? And I resent religions saying that it's a religious term. It is not.

Marriage preceded all forms of religion in civilization. Marriage is a commitment between two human beings in love. And understand me, I'm saying human beings. They can be heterosexual; they can be two lesbians; they can be transgender; they can be two gays. What it is is a commitment of human beings in love, and if there's anything we need in this world, it's more love.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Then there's no daylight between you and Congressman Kucinich on this thing called love.

GRAVEL:

Dennis and I have our differences. But I won't go into them.

CARLSON:

But not on love.

GRAVEL:

No, not on love. In fact, if you look a little deeper and you look at life itself and the human psyche, there are only two divisions. There's love and fear. And love implements a whole beneficial area of our psyche. And fear, which of course is what we've been living under for the last 50 years in order to sustain the military complex.

Stop and think: We're afraid of everything in the United States. There's nothing to fear. There's nothing at all. And as president, I will call upon the courage in the people to step forward and express themselves with what counts, and that's love.

CARLSON:

Thank you, Senator.

(APPLAUSE)

Jonathan?

CARLSON:

Senator, just a second ago you said you couldn't understand why people were supporting Obama and Edwards and Clinton over you. Why do you think -- because you are in support of full same sex marriage rights -- Obama and Edwards and Clinton are ahead of you?

GRAVEL:

Well, it's because they're playing it safe. They're playing it safe. They're not going to lose any votes over not being for marriage, whatever their excuses are. They're going to win them. This is costing votes for us. I don't care. I don't want those votes. I don't want those votes.

(APPLAUSE)

So you want to know the difference? It's as plain as the nose on your face, and that is that what you're experiencing is politics as usual. And a gifted politician can tell you this -- and I don't mean this humorously; I mean it very accurately -- a good politician can tell you to go to hell and make you look forward to the trip.

(LAUGHTER)

And we see a lot of that.

CAPEHART:

Well, Senator, the nose on my face is rather sweaty at the moment. Now, you just said that marriage you believe in five years will be a dead issue. But right now there's a debate in the gay community where the central question is did we go for marriage too soon?

GRAVEL:

Go for what?

CAPEHART:

Did we go for marriage too soon?

CARLSON:

Should the community have started with civil union?

GRAVEL:

I understand the question. I know that Barney Frank initially said that we should not have gone for it. I disagree. And I think Barney Frank is the brightest person in Congress, period, bar none. And now he's changed his position. He feels that you draw a line in the sand by telling people that you can't use the word "marriage," which, of course, has been misappropriated by religion.

Go to the City Hall next time and look for where you go get your license. Does it say "Gay Same Sex Union" or does it say "Marriage License Bureau?" It says "Marriage License."

And so I would say that no, what you have to do is recognize that when people are telling you that can't be married, what they're telling you is there's something wrong with you; you're second-class citizens. And that's not so.

You're not second-class citizens, and the sooner our nation matures to that level -- and I say "matures" because in many areas of our society, we are adolescent, and so we have to mature -- and so leadership has the task of bringing us forward to civic maturity, and we don't have enough of that leadership at the presidential level, and we haven't had much of it for the last 50 years.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Joe?

SOLMONESE:

All right. So in an effort to redeem myself, I'm going to just give you some time to talk to people about yourself.

GRAVEL:

Now, Joe, that's a stupid question. Come on.

SOLMONESE:

But we've asked a lot of candidates to take a look forward tonight and talk about what they might do. But I'd like you actually to take a look back. And prior to getting into this presidential campaign, talk to us about what is the thing that you have done to advance gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender rights that you are most proud of?

GRAVEL:

I don't ask you your age, but I'll tell you the first piece of legislation in my entire career as a freshman in the Alaska state legislature was the creation -- and I fought it hard; I used political capital, and what I've learned is that when you use political capital, more capital comes to you -- but I fought it hard.

And do you know what it was? It was the Human Rights Commission of Alaska. And that dealt with gays and dealt with the black community. That was my first accomplishment, and I felt it deeply.

Now, of recent vintage -- and as you know, I've been gone from the scene for 26 years; I'm now back for some very good reasons, and not the least of which is this issue. I'm not afraid of this issue.

I love bringing forth this issue, because it really shows the competition to be a little weak, because they say they all want to lead. But what does a leader do? The turn around. A leader stands up with a little bit of courage and does something.

I filibustered the end of the draft. Bush can't go into Iran today because he doesn't have the boots on the ground. And so what did I do? I stopped the nuclear testing in the North Pacific.

And so I could go on, but back then mainstream media marginalized me. Oh, I was a maverick. I was Kooky Gravel. Well, I tell you what. All you've got to do is live long enough so they can look back and say, "My God, was he a courageous leader!"

(LAUGHTER)

(APPLAUSE)

That was not a backhanded swipe. I love you, Joe, and I appreciate your leadership in this area. I honor you more than you realize.

CARLSON:

For that Joe gets another question.

SOLMONESE:

And I'm 34, for the record.

(LAUGHTER)

GRAVEL:

Joe, you weren't even a twinkle in your father's eye when I got the first piece of legislation on this subject. That was 45 years ago.

CARLSON:

Thirty-four years ago?

GRAVEL:

Forty-five years ago. I was a state senator in the legislature -- representative -- and I had a burning desire, and I got it through that first year as a freshman.

And the point I made, when they said, "Oh, I can't use my capital because I've got bigger things to do," I tell you what -- I found out in life as a political leader, use your capital, because more is going to flow your way, because when you win, then more capital goes over the side for you.

Please, Joe.

SOLMONESE:

I wonder if you can comment on a statistic. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that nearly 50 percent of black, gay and bisexual men in some of America's urban cities may already be infected with HIV. I'm wondering what can we be doing a better job on to tackle this problem?

GRAVEL:

Of course, the obvious answer to that, Joe, is that we need to do a better job on health care. We need to do a better job with respect to how we treat Americans. I think Dennis mentioned a little bit of it.

I feel very deeply, and I don't know -- I couldn't hear Dennis all that well -- but a few issues back, I made the point that we have to address the whole drug issue. I see no reason between marijuana and booze or alcohol. There's no reason why you shouldn't be able to go to a liquor store and buy marijuana.

(APPLAUSE)

And it has recuperative powers.

And the next thing with hard drugs -- what you should do is you decriminalize it. You turn around and treat it like a health issue that it is. And so people who want hard drugs, let them go to a doctor, let them get a prescription. Then we can record them and be ready to help them when they're ready to be helped.

The way it is now, we fill up our prisons. It's the shame of this country that we have 2,300,000 human beings in prison -- half of them shouldn't even be there.

Is there anybody within the sound of my voice that doesn't know the social failure of prohibition in the '20s that criminalized our society, that turned around and caused people to lose respect for the law? And that's what we're doing all over again. It's been 25 years that we've been waging this war on drugs, and it's an absolute failure.

And is there anybody prepared to join with me and say -- and even Obama who's talking about he's going to do something for the inner cities -- what's ravaging the inner cities? It's the drug war, not the drugs, but drug war and all of the activity that gets on there.

(APPLAUSE)

And where's the leadership? Where's the leadership to end this? FDR had the guts to end it back in 1933. I will end it now. All you've got to do is make me the next president of the United States, period.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Senator, that sounds like a closing statement, but would you like to say a few more words in closing?

GRAVEL:

A closing statement?

CARLSON:

Yes.

GRAVEL:

Already we're closing?

CARLSON:

Yes.

GRAVEL:

Well, let me say I have worked all of my adult life on this issue and the issue of justice. For me it's justice. It's human rights. It's not whether you're gay. I've advocated many times for gays to come out of the closet, please.

Some people can't pay the price at a given point in time, but there's one thing that counts. You've got to assert your rights. Nobody is going to give you anything from on high. It just does not happen that way in a system of representative government, and so you have to step forward.

And I'll be happy to step forward with you as I have all of my life, and I can promise you one thing. You stand up for me -- and I need your support -- I need your support and want it and beg it, because I'll do more for your cause than any other human being that walks the earth as your president. Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Senator, thanks. That was great.

Our next candidate, New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson has served as secretary of Energy, ambassador to the United Nations and as a congressman representing the 3rd District of New Mexico. Welcome, Governor Richardson.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Two times in a week. Governor Richardson, welcome. It's great to have you with us.

RICHARDSON:

Thank you. Nice to be here.

CARLSON:

Jonathan Capehart of the Washington Post has some questions for you.

CAPEHART:

Yes, Governor. Thank you for being here. In response to a question on same sex marriage at the CNN YouTube debate, you said you would focus less on marriage and more on what's, quote, "achievable" in terms of rights and responsibilities for same sex couples.

When will same sex marriage be achievable? And what will you do to foster an environment where it would become achievable?

RICHARDSON:

Here's my view. The nation, I believe, is on a path to full inclusion. The president must lead that effort. In my judgment what is achievable is civil unions with full marriage rights, with domestic partnership. I believe that's achievable.

What we also need to do is redress some of the gross imbalances of the past. If I'm elected president, I would get rid of "Don't ask; don't tell." I didn't vote for it when I was in Congress. When you have an America that is asking men and women to fight and die, the last thing you need to do is give them a lecture on sexual orientation.

(APPLAUSE)

Secondly, I would repeal another horrendous initiative that I voted for, and I regret now -- DOMA. That would preclude a number of the full partnership rights that I want to see with civil unions.

And third, and here's another one that hasn't been focused on today, and that's "No Child Left Behind." That has initiatives in it that hurt diversity education. That is achievable. Hate crimes laws are achievable. But we have to bring the country to a position where there is public support.

All my life as a governor, as a congressman, as a U.N. ambassador, as a secretary of energy, I'm known for getting things done. And I'd like to get into that in some of the questions.

CAPEHART:

Governor, what was it about the time -- I believe it was 1996 when DOMA was passed -- that made it possible for you to actually vote for it?

RICHARDSON:

Well, I was the chief deputy whip of the Democrats at the time. President Clinton was president. And at that time the objective in passing DOMA was to fight a huge assault for a constitutional amendment in the Congress to ban marriage. It was sort of a cheap political way to decimate a bad initiative.

Now, in "Don't ask; don't tell," I reached a point, even though I was a deputy whip, that I voted against that, because it made no sense to me.

So my point is that we need to bring the country along. You need to build public support. You know, I like all these speeches here about how we're going to do this or that, but what makes sense is to have a president that not only knows how to lead, but how to get things done.

And we need a president, too, that recognizes that the country is moving in a journey or a path of more inclusion. States are moving a lot faster, and the president not only has to guide that, but has to lead.

CAPEHART:

Governor, as a guest on the Don Imus show, Imus in the Morning, in March 2006, you were asked by Imus in a gag on a staffer if that staffer were a, quote, "maricon," which, as you know, is Spanish for "faggot," in your response you repeated the epithet, but you've since apologized.

And now you've questioned, and I've seen you question the timing of this issue coming up. Do you not believe that you should be held responsible, held accountable for using that word, repeating that word?

RICHARDSON:

Sure. You know, I'm Hispanic. I felt the sting as a kid of being stereotyped, and I apologized. But I meant no harm when I said that. It was one of those exchanges that I was caught off guard. I am not backing off. I apologized.

But I think you should look at my actions, and not words. Let me tell you what I've done as governor. All of these issues that we've talked about today -- Bill Richardson as governor has done. Number one, I passed a hate crimes act that was based on nondiscrimination on partnerships. I was the first governor to include transgender.

(APPLAUSE)

Number two, I also passed domestic partnerships avoiding discrimination. I pushed that and got it done. I'm the only governor that called a special session to expand domestic partnerships. We didn't get it done in the last session in New Mexico. We will get it done in this next one.

I've appointed cabinet members that are gay and lesbian. All through my administration I have been inclusive of the lesbian and gay community.

So you can talk about what mistakes people have made. I've made plenty, and I've probably said things that I regret across the board. But we should look at what we've done. It's not just the speeches and the 10-point plan, but what we've done.

And as a governor, as a congressman, 15 years on gay issues -- I was there. I was there at the United Nations, too. You know, we should talk about human

rights around the world -- the Iraqis that are being discriminated and targeted today.

We should talk about international issues relating to HIV and AIDS. I was there. I have fully funded in my state HIV AIDS initiatives across the board. I think so when you ask me a question like that, which I accept, obviously, you should look at my record. Actions speak louder than words.

CARLSON:

Yes. Governor, I think everyone gets one mistake on Imus, because I myself made one. Before I go to Joe, you said you're calling a special session for domestic partnerships.

RICHARDSON:

No, I did.

CARLSON:

Oh, you did. And how did it go?

RICHARDSON:

It didn't pass. We lost by one vote.

CARLSON:

So I now know the answer to my question of why you didn't call a special session for same sex marriage -- because you can't get domestic partnerships through.

RICHARDSON:

No, no. Here's another thing that I did, all right? How many states don't have DOMA? There are six. New Mexico is one. I kept it off. I fought it. So I've done it, too. DOMA -- it isn't in New Mexico. It isn't in five other states. It's in the rest of the country. I kept it off. I kept it off. We killed it. Shouldn't that count for something?

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Indeed. We're going to count it.

RICHARDSON:

All right.

CARLSON:

OK?

Joe? Joe's going to count it.

SOLMONESE:

That certainly does count, and you were such a champion on attempting to get domestic partnerships done in New Mexico.

But following up on the point that you made about the states moving in the right direction and the will of the people needing to be there, if the New Mexico legislature handed you a marriage bill, would you sign it?

RICHARDSON:

The New Mexico legislature -- I am pushing it very hard to expand domestic partnership. It's the same thing, Joe. It's a question of going through a path that is achievable.

Now, I'll give the most flowery speeches like several that have done here. I am in this business to get things done, to lead, to pass legislation, to bring coalitions together, to bring the country together.

SOLMONESE:

And you have been a hero on a number of issues. I think what we're really trying to get a sense of here is when you say the country needs to come along, we need to move people, and it's happening in the states, then if it's happening in a state and the legislature hands you that piece of legislation, in your heart where are you on that issue in that sort of a circumstance?

RICHARDSON:

Well, in my heart I'm doing what is achievable. And I'm not there yet. And the country isn't there yet. New Mexico isn't there yet. We have to bring the country on. We have to move it in the direction of making this happen. That doesn't mean that I'm closed on this issue. It means that you do what is achievable.

SOLMONESE:

I want to get to one of the other issues that you mentioned. Under our current immigration laws, one spouse can sponsor another to become a U.S. resident. Same sex couples are not covered by this law.

What would you do to help bi-national couples, couples who are playing by the rules, gay and lesbian couples who are playing by the rules, but whose families are being torn apart by the current immigration system?

RICHARDSON:

Well, I believe that when you have expansion of domestic partnership, of civil unions, it should be to all people, regardless of where you are -- overseas, underseas, anywhere.

So there is a bill in Congress which I have already said I would support to include, because it's currently an immigration issue. I know of friends of mine who have partners in Mexico that when I sign in New Mexico an executive order expanding domestic partnership, one of my constituents has a partner in Mexico, and my own constituent, because of the immigration law, and his partner cannot come together. I think that's wrong. I think that's discrimination.

CARLSON:

Thank you, Governor. Melissa?

ETHERIDGE:

Thank you. Do you think homosexuality is a choice? Or is it biological?

RICHARDSON:

It's a choice.

ETHERIDGE:

I don't know if you understand the question. Do you think a homosexual is born that way, or do you think that around seventh grade we go, "Ooh, I want to be gay?"

RICHARDSON:

I'm not a scientist. I don't see this as an issue of science or definition. I see gays and lesbians as people, as a matter of human decency. I see it as a matter of love and companionship and people loving each other. I don't like to categorize people. I don't like to answer definitions like that that perhaps are grounded in science or something else that I don't understand.

ETHERIDGE:

It's hard when you are a citizen of a country that tells you that you are making a choice when you were born that way and your creator made you that way and there's a document that was written 200 years ago that says you are entitled to certain rights that you are not given. How can there be anything other than absolutely equal rights for homosexuals?

RICHARDSON:

Well, that's always been my view, as I said. As a Hispanic, I grew up with people thinking, because of my darker skin and I wasn't fully speaking English at the time, that I was not equal. So I understand that issue of inequality.

And so across the board, I've always felt that every human being deserves the same rights, deserves the same niche in our society. All my life I've striven very hard to deal with these civil rights issues and immigration issues affecting families. I've always held these ideals very high, and my record speaks for it.

ETHERIDGE:

I've lived in your state. I've lived in Santa Fe, a beautiful, beautiful place. How is the bark beetle infestation going?

RICHARDSON:

It's still a problem. It's still a problem.

ETHERIDGE:

Environmentally, I hope you can do something.

CARLSON:

Governor Richardson, can I interrupt the bark beetle?

(LAUGHTER)

I wanted to ask you. People who are opposed to equality for gays and lesbians say it's a lifestyle choice and that it can be cured or changed. And it's just chosen. It's not how you're born, so therefore you don't get equal rights, because you're just choosing to be a certain way.

What do you say to those people that would take away rights because it's just like choosing anything else, and you can change back if you want? Why should it be a civil right?

RICHARDSON:

Well, I don't think it's a matter of preferences. It's a matter of equality. I would say that gays and lesbians -- I've seen some of those. I've gotten a lot of letters, because I've been very outspoken on this issue, that gays and lesbians are seeking special preferences. I don't believe that's the case. I think it's a matter of full equality.

And this is why in my public life I not only have spoken about these issues, I've done it. That's the point that I'm trying to convey, that I have issues relating to domestic partners, issues relating to hate crimes, issues relating to signing executive orders to protect all state employees, issues relating to "Don't ask; don't tell." I will strive to move this country in the direction of full equality for everybody.

CARLSON:

Thank you, Governor. We're just about out of time. Would you like to make a closing statement? If you want to address the bark beetle, you may.

(LAUGHTER)

RICHARDSON:

Before I do that, I want to just say to Melissa I admire your efforts on behalf of your fight against breast cancer. I loved your movie, "Inconvenient Truth," the Oscar you got.

ETHERIDGE:

Thank you.

RICHARDSON:

Just tell Al Gore not to run, please. I'm moving up.

(LAUGHTER)

ETHERIDGE:

He says it's too soul sucking. He won't do it again.

RICHARDSON:

I want to lead this country, because I believe I have the most experience and because I represent change. I also believe I'm electable.

Now, I notice how a lot of these candidates have talked about all the things that they want to do and where they stand. I want you to look at my record as a governor, as a congressman, and see what I have done. The full range of issues that has been discussed here I've delivered on as a governor, and I would do the same as president.

The issue is how can we bring this country together to achieve the goals of full equality? And the best barometer of that is your record, not your speeches. The best barometer of that is who has delivered, not your 10-point plan. And with that closing, I ask for the support of the many people here that support in this country full equality.

CARLSON:

Thank you, Governor.

(APPLAUSE)

Last and not least, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. She was the first lady of Arkansas and later first lady of the United States. She was elected to her first term as a senator from New York in 2000 and re-elected last year. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Senator Clinton, welcome.

CLINTON:

Thank you.

CARLSON:

I don't know if Senator Edwards is still here, but from the last debate, let me go on the record. I like the coral jacket.

CLINTON:

Thank you.

(LAUGHTER)

CARLSON:

Joe is our first questioner for you, Senator.

Joe?

SOLMONESE:

Senator, thank you for being here tonight. You've said in past settings like this and all across the country that you would like to repeal "Don't ask; don't tell." Now, since 2003 you've sat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, the committee that would decide this issue. Why haven't you introduced legislation to repeal this policy?

SOLMONESE:

Well, Joe, first, thanks for doing this and thanks for everybody being here and having this forum.

I think the very simple answer is we didn't have a chance with the Republican Congress and George Bush as president. And I want to get it done when I'm president. I want to do it and have it be successful. I don't want to try in a Republican Congress with a very negative president and have it defeated.

We're talking now that we have a Democratic Congress about what steps we can take to sort of lay the groundwork so that when we do have a change in the White House, which can't happen too soon to suit me...

(APPLAUSE)

... we will be able to move on that.

But I just want to put it into a broader context, because it's one of my highest priorities. I came out against "Don't ask; don't tell" in 1999. It was a transitional action that was taken back at the beginning of my husband's administration, because at the time there was such a witch hunt going on.

And we've got some veterans over here. I saw Staff Sergeant Eric Alba, who I have met before at HRC, and I was so glad to see him when I walked in.

(APPLAUSE)

And for people who don't know Staff Sergeant Alba's history, he was the first Marine wounded in Iraq, recipient of a Purple Heart, and 15 years ago he could have both been refused the opportunity to serve, but if he had gotten into the military under the rules that existed at the time and the attitudes that were prevalent, he could have been court-martialed or even accused and threatened with criminal action if he didn't reveal names of those with whom he might have had relationships who were serving in the military.

I think we have moved a long way on this and other issues, but I think it's important to recall how much of an advance "Don't ask; don't tell" was at the time. However, it was not implemented appropriately. It was still used to discharge a lot of patriotic men and women who were serving our country, often at great cost in the middle of a war where people were being told, "We don't need your services anymore," including linguists and translators and other specialty services.

But in 1999, it just struck me that it wasn't working and that what we needed to do was to try to move us toward using the Code of Military Justice and judge people on conduct, not status, no matter whether you're gay or straight. That's the way it should be. It should be even-handed across the entire services.

We're beginning to see some changes. I remember very well the intense debates about this back in '93, and honestly, it was so emotional in the military and in the Congress that the Congress did pass a law. But we have to get the law repealed.

But now it's beginning to change. Former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Shalikashvili has just come out in favor of a change. I've noticed General Powell, who was adamantly against my husband's efforts back in '93, has begun to say, "You know, maybe we should rethink this."

So I think we will lay the groundwork, but then when I'm president, we'll get it done. And I'm looking forward to doing that.

(APPLAUSE)

SOLMONESE:

Changing tracks, talk to us about what is at the heart of your opposition to same sex marriage?

CLINTON:

Well, Joe, I prefer to think of it as being very positive about civil unions.

(LAUGHTER)

It's a personal position, and you and I have talked about it. I've talked about it with a number of my friends here and across the country.

And for me, we have made it very clear in our country that we believe in equality. How we get to full equality is the debate we're having. And I am absolutely in favor of civil unions with full equality, full equality of benefits, rights and privileges.

And I've also been a very strong supporter of letting the states maintain their jurisdiction over marriage. And I believe that was a right decision for a lot of reasons, because it's easy, again, to forget that just 2.5 years ago, we were facing all of these referenda that were enshrining discrimination in state constitutions. And a lot of people tried very hard to fight against them and prevent them from being passed, but unfortunately, they were.

Now, 2.5 years later we're beginning to see other states take different approaches. And what we were able to do -- and I really give HRC a lot of credit for your leadership on this -- in stopping the federal marriage amendment gave the states the breathing room to make different decisions.

So I want to proceed with equalizing federal benefits. I want to repeal Section 3 of DOMA, which stands in the way of the extension of benefits to people in committed same sex relationships, and I will be very strongly in favor of doing that as president.

SOLMONESE:

I wonder, Senator, if you can sympathize with the frustration of this argument that it's a states' rights issue. In the civil rights struggle, this argument that it was a states' rights issue was something that was typically used against people working against us as sort of a red herring. And so can you see where this argument of marriage as a states' right issue would resonate the same way in our community?

CLINTON:

Absolutely. And Joe, not only that, I really respect the advocacy that the community is waging on behalf of marriage. I think you're doing exactly what you need to do and should do, and I really am very much impressed by the intensity and the persistence of that advocacy. But this has not been a long-term struggle yet.

And I think it's really clear that people in the states are moving much more rapidly to deal with the inequality than you would find at the federal level.

When you and I were plotting strategy to beat the federal marriage amendment, the reason we were plotting strategy is we were worried it was going to pass. And, again, this was a terrifying prospect that we would have enshrined in the Constitution for the first time ever discrimination.

And we were very clear about what we needed to do to get the vote in order to prevent this mean-spirited, divisive effort led by Karl Rove to politicize the hopes and dreams of so many of our fellow Americans.

And we were able to defeat it, but I don't know that we could have defeated it if we had not had DOMA. That, if anything, has provided a great protection against what was clearly the Republican strategy blessed by George Bush, led by the congressional Republicans, to just cynically use marriage as a political tool.

CARLSON:

Do you think that's going to come up this time when the Republicans are running?

CLINTON:

No.

CARLSON:

Is it dead as an issue?

CLINTON:

You know, Margaret, I'm very optimistic, because I think that...

CARLSON:

I haven't heard it yet.

CLINTON:

I don't hear it either, and -- don't tell anybody, but I'm running for president...

(LAUGHTER)

... and so I'm traveling around the country a lot.

CARLSON:

"Don't ask; don't tell."

CLINTON:

Yes, that's right. And I don't hear it. I don't feel it. I don't see it. Even with the Republicans, with their various forums, you don't get the sense. Why? Because a lot of people who were in favor of that constitutional amendment knew better. That was a strictly cynical, political ploy on their part, and they were successful, unfortunately, in a lot of states.

But I think that now people are starting to say, "Well, maybe we don't want to do that," and because a Democratic Congress won't bring up the amendment, there's really nothing for them to be rallying around.

CARLSON:

Thank you, Senator.

Melissa?

ETHERIDGE:

Senator, I have a personal issue here. I remember when your husband was elected president, I actually came out publicly during his inaugural week. It was a very hopeful time for the gay community. For the first time we were being recognized as American citizens. It was wonderful. We were very, very hopeful.

And in the years that followed, our hearts were broken. We were thrown under the bus. We were pushed aside. All those great promises that were made to us were broken. And I understand politics. I understand how hard things are to bring about change.

But it is many years later now, and what are you going to do to be different than that? I know you're sitting here now. It's a year out -- more than a year. A year from now are we going to be left behind like we were before?

CLINTON:

Well, obviously, Melissa, I don't see it quite the way that you describe, but I respect your feeling about it.

From the moment that Bob Hathaway spoke at the Democratic convention through the appointments that were made, both to positions in Cabinet agencies as well as in the White House, to the ongoing struggle against Gingrich and the Republican majority, I think that we certainly didn't get as much done as I would have liked, but I believe that there was a lot of honest effort going on by the president, the vice president and the rest of us who were trying to keep the momentum going.

I remember when I was running for the Senate as first lady, marching in the gay pride parade in New York City. And to a lot of people that was just an unbelievable act.

ETHERIDGE:

Why not be the leader now?

CLINTON:

Well, I think I am a leader now. And I think that we are doing a lot to not only talk about laws, as important as they are, but to really try to change attitudes and persuade people that they should be more open, more respectful, more accepting.

If I were sitting where you're sitting with all you have gone through in the last 14 years, I'm sure I would feel exactly the same way, because not only did you bravely come out, but you've had health challenges and so much else. And so time can't go by slowly. You want things to move as quickly as possible, which I understand and wish could happen as well.

But as president, I think I have an opportunity both to reverse the concerted assault on people. It wasn't just on people's rights; it was on people. It was pointing fingers. It was demeaning. It was degrading. It was mean-spirited. And that will end. That is over. And when we began to...

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

We're almost out of time, believe it or not. Time flies when you're having a good time.

CLINTON:

Oh, I can't believe it.

CARLSON:

But Jonathan?

CLINTON:

To be continued, Melissa.

CARLSON:

Jonathan?

CAPEHART:

Senator, former Joint Chiefs Chairman Peter Pace called homosexuality immoral. And when you were first asked about it, you said, quote, "I'm going to leave that to others to conclude." The next day, after much criticism, you finally said you did not think that homosexuality was immoral. Why didn't you say that the first time?

CLINTON:

Well, it was a mistake, Jonathan, because what I went on to say after what you quoted was to launch an attack on "Don't ask; don't tell," because my view was that as a chairman of the Joint Chiefs, he had absolutely no right to say what he said.

I disagreed with him profoundly, but what was really offensive is that he was in a position of responsibility that had a direct impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of these young people in the military. So I went right at him on "Don't ask; don't tell."

And you know you say these things. Somebody sticks a microphone in front of you and you say, "Well, that's pretty good." And my friends started calling me and saying, "Well, that wasn't very good." I said, "Oh, you're probably right." So I immediately got the first opportunity I could to say the whole thing.

So I just was focused on one aspect of what I thought was really over the line. You know, Joe Blow, Joe Schmo walking down the street can say, "Here's what I believe." You say, "Who cares?" The chairman of the Joint Chiefs says it -- that has a direct impact on policy, and that's what I went after. But I should have put it in a broader context.

CAPEHART:

Senator, would you...?

CARLSON:

Well, we are just about out of time, Jonathan. I'm really sorry.

CAPEHART:

... who's anti-gay?

CLINTON:

I'm sorry. What, Jonathan?

CAPEHART:

Would you put someone on the bench who is known to be anti-gay?

CLINTON:

No. And that's why we shouldn't.

(APPLAUSE)

CARLSON:

Senator...

CLINTON:

That's one of the reasons why I'm against Southwick for...

CARLSON:

Senator, you told the AFL-CIO on Tuesday night, "I'm your girl." Do you want to express those same sentiments here?

CLINTON:

I am your girl. Absolutely.

CARLSON:

And you do get a closing statement, short though it may be.

CLINTON:

Well, I want to be a president who really does move forward the agenda of progress and equality in our country. That is what I have tried to do my entire life for 35 years.

This country, with all of its flaws which we can see manifest -- it doesn't move fast enough; it doesn't do what we want it to do -- has demonstrated extraordinary resilience and a lot of movement forward. And I think we will see that as the years unfold, and I want to be a part of that.

But I come to these issues not as a senator or as a lawyer or as a presidential candidate, but as a friend of a lot of members of the LGBT community who are my age who have suffered through a long period of coming out, of having to face families and having to deal with all of the issues that we know occur.

And I want to be a president who can clearly say to the American people, "These are our friends, our children, our parents. These are people we want to support as they live the best lives they can."

So it's very personal for me. And we are not going to agree on everything, but I will be a president who will fight for you, who will work to end discrimination in the employment area and "Don't ask; don't tell," finally get hate crimes through, do a lot of what we need to do on HIV AIDS and so much more. And I really hope we can be partners in trying to make our country a little bit better and a little more progressive for all of us. Thank you.

CARLSON:

Senator, wish we had more time. Thank you.

CLINTON:

I do, too.

CARLSON:

That concludes our forum, but the campaign is only heating up. From now through Election Day 2008, stay informed, follow the campaign and join with LGBT Americans across the nation to debate the issues of visiblevote08.com and at hrc.org.

On behalf of LOGO and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, thank you to your panelists, Jonathan Capehart, Melissa Etheridge and Joe Solmonese.

And thank you, Senator Clinton.

And here in Los Angeles and at home for joining us.

Right now CBS News on LOGO reports live from right here in this studio with a post-forum wrap-up. Stick around for the interviews and analysis. Thank you and good night.

CQ Transcriptions, Aug. 9, 2007

List of Speakers

SEN. HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON, D-N.Y.

FORMER SEN. JOHN EDWARDS, D-N.C.

REP. DENNIS J. KUCINICH, D-OHIO

GOV. BILL RICHARDSON, D-N.M.

FORMER SEN. MIKE GRAVEL, D-ALASKA

SEN. BARACK OBAMA, D-ILL.

MELISSA ETHERIDGE, MODERATOR

JONATHAN CAPEHART, MODERATOR

MARGARET CARLSON, MODERATOR

JOE SOLMONESE, MODERATOR

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