

What Joe Biden Just Said at Davos Will Leave You Shaking Your Head

U.S. Vice President Joe Biden urged executives in Davos to use their influence to drive change in countries where lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people face repression, putting gay rights at the heart of this year's meeting.

The issue is on the official agenda for the first time at the World Economic Forum, where political leaders from countries that discriminate against gay people, such as Nigeria and Russia, schmooze business leaders and billionaire investors.

Biden told U.S. executives including Nathan Blecharczyk, co-founder of apartment-sharing firm Airbnb, Muhtar Kent, chairman and CEO of The Coca Cola Company, and Anthony Scaramucci, founder of hedge fund SkyBridge Capital, to push for change.

"You can change the terms of debate," he said. "You actually put governments on notice."

He said he and President Barack Obama privately raise the issue of repression of the LGBT community when they meet political leaders.

"I have had some run-ins with at least four heads of state already on this," said Biden.

Banging his fist on the table, Biden said there was no national cultural justification to discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

"People used to be cannibals as part of their culture, people used to do terrible things as part of their culture," he said.

Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign, the United States' largest LGBT civil rights organization, said business leaders should take the opportunity in Davos to confront the leaders of countries with "hateful laws."

Big business has been key to lobbying for change on gay marriage around the world. Some leading companies, including Google, Twitter and eBay, released videos of their employees voicing their support for marriage equality ahead of a country-wide vote on the issue in Ireland.

Apple CEO Tim Cook came out last year, but according to the Center for Talent Innovation, 41 percent of LGBT people do not feel comfortable disclosing their sexuality at work.

A U.S. Supreme Court ruling legalized same-sex marriage nationwide last year but it is still legal in many U.S. states to fire someone based on their sexual orientation.

(Editing by Sarah Young)

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