

Obama Anti-Discrimination Executive Order Will Make Homosexuality Like a New Race

President **Barack Obama** will sign an executive order barring federal contractors from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, a White House official said on Monday, handing another victory to gay rights activists.

The White House has been pressing Congress to pass legislation to ban employment discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people and has resisted issuing an executive order in favor of pursuing a broader, legislative solution.

But Obama has spent the year taking executive action on other domestic priorities where Congress has failed to make legislative headway, and activists have pressed him to do the same on gay rights.

A White House official who spoke condition of anonymity said Obama had directed his staff to prepare the executive order on **gay rights**.

Since coming into office, Obama helped end the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that prohibited gays from serving openly in the military, and, after what he described as an evolution in his thinking, gave backing to gay marriage during his 2012 re-election campaign.

Pursuing the executive order is a shift for the White House, which has said since last year that such a move would carry far less weight than broader congressional action. The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) passed the Democratic-controlled U.S. Senate but has languished in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives.

An order barring discrimination by federal contractors would apply to about 20 percent of the U.S. workforce, according to HRC. It would make it illegal for companies with U.S. government contracts to fire or avoid hiring employees based on sexual orientation and gender identity, just as it now is with race.

Federal protections are necessary because state laws vary, activists say. In 29 states, it is legal to fire someone or deny employment because of sexual orientation, HRC said.

The White House official declined to say when Obama would sign the order. Obama returns to Washington on Monday after a weekend getaway in California.

The move may energize gays and young people, two groups that make up an important part of Obama's political base, ahead of congressional elections in November that could shift control of the Senate to Republicans.

The order could increase pressure on the White House to take executive action on immigration. Similar to the non-discrimination order, Obama has resisted such a move while holding out hope that the House would advance broad legislation.

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