

Obama Backs Gays in Boy Scouts

President Barack Obama on Sunday encouraged the **Boy Scouts of America** to end its ban on gay members and leaders, days before the group is expected to vote on the controversial and long-standing rule.

In an interview with CBS, anchor Scott Pelley asked the president if he believed scouting should be open to gays.

“Yes,” Obama said simply.

Asked to elaborate, Obama—who last year gave his backing to the right of same-sex couples to marry—said gays and lesbians should be able to participate in “every institution” that others can.

“My attitude is ... that gays and lesbians should have access and opportunity the same way everybody else does, in every institution and walk of life,” he said.

“The Scouts are a great institution that are promoting young people and exposing them to, you know, opportunities and leadership that will serve people for the rest of their lives, and I think that nobody should be barred (from) that.”

After criticism from gay rights groups as well as gay former Scouts and Scout leaders, the BSA national executive board is expected to vote Wednesday, the last day of a three-day meeting, on whether to lift the ban it had reaffirmed just last year.

The organization said last month it was considering ending its national ban on gay youth and adult members and leaving policies on sexual orientation to its local organizations.

Since coming into office, Obama has presided over several

moves to reduce discrimination against gays, including ending the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that prevented gay men and women from serving openly in the military.

He also stopped his administration from defending the **Defense of Marriage Act**, which forbade gay married couples from obtaining the same benefits that heterosexual couples receive.

Obama also voiced his support for gay rights during his high profile second Inaugural address last month.

Separately on Sunday, Obama said he would have no hesitation sending women into combat after the Pentagon lifted its long-time ban last month. Women, as a practical matter, were already in combat, he said.

“Women as a practical matter are now in combat,” Obama said. “When they’re in theater, in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, they are vulnerable, they are wounded and they’ve been killed,” Obama said in the CBS interview, broadcast live shortly before the Super Bowl football game.

“I meet extraordinary women in uniform who can do everything that a man can and more,” Obama told CBS.

Editing by Todd Eastham

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