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Trump's State of the Union speech omits mention of LGBTQ rights

LGBTQ groups and allies knock president for ignoring them while touting recent actions to "protect religious liberty"

By John Riley on January 30, 2018

President Trump carefully avoided any mention of the LGBTQ community as he reflected on his first year in office in his State of the Union speech Tuesday night. While no one expected the president to recognize the LGBTQ community, the omission was still glaring for activists used to getting a shout-out during the years that former President Barack Obama was in office.

The Human Rights Campaign, which has established itself as a critic of Trump since he first launched his 2016 campaign for the White House, was harshly critical of the omission, and took to Twitter while the president was speaking to eviscerate him for a host of other policies he's pushed that they say harm vulnerable communities.

"Even with a teleprompter, @realdonaldtrump cannot hide his disdain for immigrants. His is an ideology rooted in racism and bigotry. We are not this," HRC President Chad Griffin tweeted.

[Chad Griffin](#)
✓ [@ChadHGriffin](#)

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HRC also noted that Trump's speech not only lacked references to the LGBTQ community or LGBTQ rights, but women's rights, civil rights, human rights, or disability rights. Griffin personally tweeted that the administration appears to have given up on promoting itself as LGBTQ-friendly, as it did during the 2016 campaign.

"For a man who once claimed he would be 'a friend' to the LGBTQ community, it seems @realdonaldtrump has now dropped the charade. Not even a mention after a year of unceasing attacks led by this administration on the LGBTQ community," Griffin tweeted.

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Griffin was also among those on the political Left who mocked Trump’s delivery of the speech, which he read haltingly off a teleprompter.

“@realdonaldtrump deserves no praise for managing to read a speech off a teleprompter. There is nothing “presidential” about the harm his reckless and hateful policies have caused to countless Americans,” Griffin tweeted.

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“Managing to read a pre-written speech off a teleprompter does not make one Presidential or lend a single ounce of legitimacy to Trump’s anti-LGBTQ agenda,” Sarah Kate Ellis, the president and CEO of GLAAD, said in a statement. “Trump has spent the past year targeting vulnerable communities and surrounding himself with anti-black, anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, anti-women, and anti-LGBTQ activists with the goal of exacerbating discrimination and erasing LGBTQ Americans from the fabric of this nation.”

Vanita Gupta, the former head of the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice, struck a similar tone in a statement released by The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, which she now heads.

“TelePrompter Trump may have delivered a coherent speech before a live studio audience, but the behind-the-scenes footage reveals his administration’s hostility toward civil and human rights,” Gupta said. “He touts the notion of one united American family, but his actions paint a different reality. Trump actively seeks to disadvantage, divide, and discriminate against women, people of color, people with disabilities, immigrants, the LGBTQ community, those aspiring to join the middle class, and so many more.”

But Gupta also cast some of the blame at Republicans in Congress who have enabled the president and failed to serve as a check on the executive branch, particularly as it pertains to

judicial nominations. The GOP, she said, “has continuously put party over country.”

“Lawmakers have been unwilling to enact much-needed reforms on a range of civil rights issues including the Dream Act, and have failed in their responsibility to serve as a check on the executive,” she added. “Most ominously, Congress is also rubber-stamping Trump’s biased and unqualified judicial nominees, allowing him to reshape the courts in his image.

“Our civil and human rights may be under siege, but the state of those willing to stand up and speak out remains strong,” Gupta concluded. “The civil and human rights community has fought back against each of President Trump’s many egregious actions, and we will continue to do so.”

In his speech, Trump mentioned several actions he’s taken to appease right-wing religious conservatives, including touting his nomination of judges, including [Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch](#), who will interpret the Constitution “as written,” and steps he’s taken to “protect religious liberty,” referring to executive branch actions designed to allow people with religious objections to homosexuality to exempt themselves from serving LGBTQ people and others, [even when providing life-saving medical care](#).

Rabbi Jack Moline, the president of the Interfaith Alliance, issued a statement in response to Trump’s attempts to portray himself as a defender of religious freedom.

“Trump clearly doesn’t know what the words ‘religious liberty’ mean if he thinks he’s taken historic action to protect it,” said Moline. “His actions in his first year as president have in fact significantly undermined the rights of people of faith whose beliefs don’t align with the president’s allies in the Religious Right.”

In the official Democratic response to the State of the Union, U.S. Rep. Joe Kennedy III (D-Mass.) went where Trump dared not, explicitly mentioning or referencing some of the groups omitted in Trump’s speech, including LGBTQ people, and offering a vision where all Americans are treated equally under the law.

“This administration isn’t just targeting the laws that protect us, they’re targeting the very idea that we are all worthy of protection. For them, dignity isn’t something you’re born with, but something you measure, by your net worth, your celebrity, your headlines, your crowd size. Not to mention the gender of your spouse, the country of your birth, the color of your skin, the God of your prayers,” Kennedy said.

Kennedy accused Republicans and the Trump administration, in particular, of casting Americans as enemies, ruthlessly competing against one another for resources, setting up a “zero-sum” game where some are viewed as expendable and must lose in order for others to enjoy success.

“We are bombarded with one false choice after another: coal miners, or single moms. Rural communities, or inner cities. The coast, or the heartland. As if the mechanic in Pittsburgh, a teacher in Tulsa, and a daycare worker in Birmingham are bitter rivals, rather than mutual

casualties of a system forcibly rigged, towards those at the top,” Kennedy said. “As if the parent who lies awake terrified that their transgender son or daughter will be bullied or beaten up at school is any more or less legitimate than a parent whose heart is shattered by a daughter in the grips of opioid addiction. So here is the answer that Democrats offer tonight: we choose both.”

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