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# Seattle's LGBTQ+ Community Cautiously Optimistic for Biden Administration

Andru Zodrow, News Editor

Since the election of President Donald Trump in 2016, the White House has organized a sustained effort to curb federal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals. From orders to the Health and Human Services Administration to create religious exemptions to serve LGBTQ+ people, to the banning of transgender servicemembers from the military, the Trump Administration has worked hard to deprive the queer community of federal protections.

The newly inaugurated Biden Administration has stated that it hopes to reverse this legacy. Pete Buttigieg is the first gay cabinet nominee, and is set to become Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation. Biden has also nominated Dr. Rachel Levine, a transgender woman, as the administration's assistant health secretary. Given that transgender people are often discriminated against in the healthcare system specifically, Levine's nomination is a significant step forward for the LGBTQ+ community. In addition, Jan. 20 marked President Biden's signing of an executive order banning discrimination based on "gender identity or sexual orientation."

Jay Conrad, President of the Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming and Allies Student Association of Seattle U's School of Law, spoke to the difficulty of having non-binary individuals recognized in conversations surrounding LGBTQ+ inclusion.

"The last four years have been particularly difficult for transgender individuals, and the misfortune of non-binary identities, being a small subset of transgender issues, is that the specific issues that we face as a community sometimes aren't even a part of the same conversations," Conrad said.

They emphasized that recognition of the importance of interlocking racial, gender, sexuality and ability identities will be key to progress during the Biden era.

"With the new administration, we're starting to hit that baseline of where we would need to be to make any progress at all," Conrad said.

They also emphasized the importance of federal and state recognition of non-binary individuals. Only 11 states recognize non-binary gender identification on identification documents.

"The majority of the United States doesn't recognize my gender," Conrad said. "That can make it difficult to bring cases around discrimination around housing, healthcare issues access to resources when there's not even a place for you to exist in the system."

Kate Rogers, the association's vice president, underscored the importance of the Biden administration recognizing the needs of two spirit identifying members of the LGBTQ+ community.



Kim Nucum

"I'm Comanche and Cherokee—I identify as two spirit and am part of the Native American Law Students Association. I'm very excited because one of Biden's appointments for his cabinet is Deb Haaland to Secretary of the Interior, which is fantastic," Rogers said.

Haaland will be the first Native American to serve as a cabinet secretary, signaling a significant shift for Native Americans and Alaska Natives. While the Biden administration has nominated a historically diverse cabinet, LGBTQ+ advocates continue to push for greater intersectional representation.

"It's fantastic to see Deb Holland in the cabinet," Rogers said. "I'd really love to see more two spirit representation. I think that two spirit folks encompass a very important intersection in terms of being non-binary and native because those are two identities in our culture and our nation that are very much invisible."

Mark Rosén, acting president and CEO of the Greater Seattle Business Administration (GBSA), the largest LGBTQ+ business chamber in the U.S., also recognized the importance of intersectional representation in Seattle's business community to reverse systemic injustices.

"Part of what we have done this past year is creating a new 'ready for business' small business recovery fund," Rosén said. "In the first round of funding we had \$200,000 worth of grants that went out to 65 diverse small businesses, specifically targeted to LGBTQ+ owned, women owned or BIPOC owned businesses."

Rosén is optimistic for the economic relief that the Biden Administration has promised to move through Congress, which will be vital for the survival of several LGBTQ+ owned businesses in the broader King County area. He is also hopeful that the federal government, like a great deal of businesses and organizations across the U.S., will work to promote racial and gender diversity within its LGBTQ+ staff choices. The GBSA is currently working towards the same goal.

"We were started by a group of nine gay male business owners over 40 years ago, and we've had over our evolution some definite changes to become more of a diverse organization," Rosén said.

He stressed that from a federal governmental level down to locally owned businesses, this is a transformative process that takes time and concerted effort.

"Centuries of systemic oppression and white supremacy are part of every institution, and we have done and are continuing to do a lot of internal work with our organization, and one of the things that I think we all are trying to do is to work towards more economic equity," Rosén said.

Tatiana Tomanek, a third-year math major and Events Manager for the Triangle Club, expressed her excitement at the LGBTQ+ representation in the Biden cabinet.

"I'm glad to see that there is at least representation and people who he can talk to about LGBTQ+ issues," Tomanek said.

Megan Fore, a member of OutLaws, an association for LGBTQ+ law students, expects more from the Biden Administration than going "back to normal," and hopes for more active allies in the Biden White House.

"Hope is a little bit of a tricky thing at the moment, because the president and the majority in congress has a track record of supporting certain rights, but we want to see progress," Fore said.

Julissa Rachor, president of OutLaws, is hopeful that the Biden Administration will push Congress to create more protections for sexual and gender minorities. She is specifically hopeful that President Biden will advocate for and sign the Equality Act.

"We want to ensure that it takes effect at least by an executive order and passes Congress ultimately, because it would allow the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to take into consideration the language of sexual orientation, sexual identity and transgender status," Rachor said.

She also highlighted her support of the Therapeutic Fraud Prevention Act. The policy would ban conversion therapy, the medically dubious attempt to change someone's sexuality which has resulted in trauma for LGBTQ+ young people.

"I am hopeful for the first time in a long time that maybe a policy will be pushed, especially since President Biden actually used language speaking to the LGBTQ+ community in his victory speech," Rachor said.

Sean Zeyou Dong, an OutLaws member, hopes that undergraduate LGBTQ+ students reach out to OutLaws members if they need help navigating the job and academic market, which can often be more burdensome for the queer community.

“To all the undergraduates who want to reach out, please reach out. We are here to help, I myself can say that this is a safe place and you can talk to any of us,” Dong said.

Much of the LGBTQ+ community expressed their hopes for a more diverse queer community which remains strong through bonds which cross generational lines. Whether these hopes are realized within the Biden era remains to be seen. However, despite the need for continued progress, a collective sigh of relief can be heard throughout Seattle’s LGBTQ+ community that the Trump era is over.