Beat: News

Michelle Obama confronts gay-rights protester, threatens to leave fundraiser

-, 05.06.2013, 21:18 Time

USPA News - U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama confronted a gay-rights protester during a Democratic Party fundraiser in Washington, D.C. on Tuesday evening and threatened to leave the event if the activist did not stop interrupting her speech, witnesses said. Obama was about 12 minutes into a 20-minute speech at a private residence in Washington when she was interrupted by a heckler, calling for an executive order to bar discrimination by federal contractors based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

"One of the things that I don`t do well is this," she told the audience in response to the interruption. Amanda Terkel, a senior political reporter for the Huffington Post who attended the event as a pool reporter, said the first lady left the lectern and confronted the protester face-to-face. "Listen to me or you can take the mic, but I`m leaving," Obama told the heckler. "You all decide. You have one choice." Many of those attending the event began shouting for Obama to stay, and some of them turned against the protester by telling her to go. The protester was then escorted from the event as she shouted, describing herself as a lesbian who is "looking for federal equality before I die." Obama then returned to the lectern and continued her speech to loud applause. Heather Cronk, co-director of the pro-LGBT rights group GetEQUAL, identified the protester as one of their activists, Ellen Strutz. She said there were three other GetEQUAL activists at the event as well, including two college students. They were identified as activists from Ohio, North Carolina, and New Mexico. Tuesday`s fundraiser was hosted at the Northwest D.C. home of Dr. Nan Schaffer and Karen Dixon, a lesbian couple whom were legally wed in the Canadian city of Vancouver in 2008. The event was attended by approximately 200 people and tickets for the fundraiser ranged between $500 and $10,.000. President Barack Obama came out in support of same-sex marriage in May 2012, an unprecedented step for a sitting U.S. president. Obama has raised millions of dollars from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) donors as a result of his support for equal rights for same-sex couples, and his administration recently urged the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn a law that bans federal recognition of same-sex marriages. Support for same-sex marriage has increased across the United States in recent years. A Gallup poll in 1996 found that only 27 percent of Americans were in favor of same-sex marriage, but the latest survey conducted last year found that 50 percent of Americans are now in favor of allowing marriages between people of the same gender.

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-1067/michelle-obama-confronts-gay-rights-protester-threatens-to-leave-fundraiser.html

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