



## POLITICS

## Scenes from a celebration of the same-sex marriage law — at Mar-a-Lago

“We are fighting for the gay community, and we are fighting and fighting hard,” Donald Trump told a Log Cabin Republicans gala.



Thursday night's Log Cabin Republicans' "Spirit of Lincoln" gala in the main ballroom of Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago beachfront club was a joyous celebration of gay rights. | Steve Helber/AP Photo

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PALM BEACH, Fla. — Hundreds of guests in tuxedos of all styles — sequined, quilted, velvet — and colorful gowns sipped on Trump-branded champagne

and martinis. Between courses of steak and bite-sized Key lime pie, they danced to “YMCA” and “Macho Man,” the disco anthems at Trump rallies.

Thursday night’s Log Cabin Republicans’ “Spirit of Lincoln” gala in the main ballroom of Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago beachfront club was a joyous celebration of gay rights and — in a case of ironic timing — the historic same-sex marriage law signed by President Joe Biden days earlier.

The long-planned event in honor of the conservative LGBTQ organization’s 45th anniversary brought in Republican notables like former Ambassador Ric Grenell, Rep. Kat Cammack (R-Fla.), former State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortagus, who emceed the evening in a feathered turquoise gown, and former GOP gubernatorial candidate from Arizona Kari Lake, who was swarmed by guests eager to meet her and take a photo.

But the main attraction, obviously, was Trump. He received a standing ovation after delivering an enthusiastic affirmation of gay rights not often heard in the GOP.

“We are fighting for the gay community, and we are fighting and fighting hard,” the former president and 2024 candidate said. “With the help of many of the people here tonight in recent years, our movement has taken incredible strides, the strides you’ve made here is incredible.”

Throughout the evening, speakers praised Trump for his embrace of the gay community. They credited him for his initiatives to combat the criminalization of homosexuality, his work pushing for public health initiatives to combat the HIV epidemic, and for appointing the first openly gay Cabinet member, Grenell, as director of national intelligence.

Trump and his administration had a mixed record on LGBTQ issues. He’s been criticized for driving a wedge between gay and transgender communities, and for promoting extreme religious liberty policies and [executive orders they say](#) allowed for discrimination against LGBTQ people that pushed the movement

backwards. The Log Cabin Republicans' first female executive director, Jerri Ann Henry, resigned in 2019 over the group's decision to endorse Trump.

The Log Cabin Republicans' gala came just days after the Respect for Marriage Act was passed with support of 39 House Republicans and 12 GOP senators and signed into law by Biden. But the issue of same-sex marriage has continued to spark debate inside the GOP. Conservative Christian and right-wing groups lobbied against the legislation, arguing that it stepped on religious liberties.

[According to Gallup](#), 55 percent of Republicans and 71 percent of Americans overall support same-sex marriage.

In an interview on Fox News earlier this week, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis — a Trump rival widely viewed as a top GOP hopeful in 2024 — said there was “no need” for the Respect for Marriage Act and called the right's concerns over religious liberty “valid.”

Trump did not mention the law in his speech. But attendees at the gala were quick to credit the former president: For all his recent missteps, they said he has gone further on LGBTQ rights than many others in the GOP.

Charles Moran, president of the Log Cabin Republicans, challenged other 2024 hopefuls to also say they are willing to fight for gay rights.

“I just heard a Republican candidate for president stand up and say he is willing to fight and I challenge every other Republican to make the same pledge Donald Trump made tonight,” Moran said.

“I'm going to hold all candidates to that same standard,” he added in a later interview. “We're really at a place now where we're going to have an open election and there are going to be other Republicans running, and we have a responsibility to look at the entire Republican field.”

Moran and his group worked behind the scenes to build support for the Respect for Marriage Act and brought at least four GOP members of Congress

on board. He noted that House Republican Majority Whip-elect Tom Emmer is an ally of the group and wants to proactively engage on legislation.

A primary legislative goal for Log Cabin Republicans is the “Restore Honor to Servicemembers Act,” which would provide an opportunity for those dishonorably discharged under “Don’t ask, don’t tell” to have their discharge status changed.

The appearance by Trump came weeks after his lackluster presidential campaign debut and bruising headlines, brought on by the former president himself. As his campaign has sputtered, he has largely avoided the spotlight. On Thursday night, he pushed back on the idea that his approval ratings as a result are down, calling polls showing as much “fake.”

In an effort to move on from recent controversies, Trump is expected to deliver policy speeches tied to specific parts of his platform and has plans to do interviews with a mix of outlets, according to aides. He will also be announcing more campaign hires, they said.

While the gala centered around the new same-sex marriage law, speakers at the gala also made lighthearted jokes. Trump, for one, mused about his wife Melania Trump joining Grenell, who is gay, for a Log Cabin Republicans trip to Beverly Hills, Calif., last week.

“She flew out to California with Ric, and I trusted him 100% with her,” Trump said to laughs.

Lake, who recently lost her gubernatorial bid but has not conceded defeat and recently launched a legal challenge over the election results, credited the group with supporting her campaign but sounded off on her recent lawsuits.

“We just had such a huge movement going into Election Day, to watch these people — these evil bastards, can I say that here? To watch them steal this election in broad daylight, and if they think they’re going to get away with it, they messed with the wrong bitch,” she said to cheers.

But for all the applause lines and hobnobbing, the members of the group at times recognized themselves as being a part of the Republican Party that has felt mislabeled, judged, and ostracized over the years.

Tammy Bruce, a lesbian and conservative commentator, was awarded the group's 2022 "Spirit of Lincoln" award and talked about challenges she has faced.

"I know there are problems still with how we are viewed on occasion. But what I also know is that visibility matters and that bigotry only survives because

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