

Phoenix equality march for LGBT rights to reflect current political worries

BrieAnna J Frank, The Republic | azcentral.com 10:55 a.m. MT June 10, 2017



(Photo: Diego Nacho: Graphic Design + Photography)

An equality march scheduled for Sunday in downtown Phoenix will have a more political tone than in years past because of the current political climate, which march organizers say worries the LGBT community.

Phoenix Pride is hosting the march and rally as a sister event to the larger Equality March for Unity and Pride being held in Washington, D.C., organizers said.

"The theme is unity, and the overarching message is we are our strongest when we stand together as a community," said Phoenix Pride spokesman Jeremy Helfgot. "That means community as a whole, whether it's LGBT or straight allies, regardless of religion or place of origin or legal status, and that's true regardless of the political climate."

But some say Sunday's gathering will be notably different from previous years' LGBT rallies and marches because of President Donald Trump.

"As much as this is about solidarity and unity and intersectionality, it's also about resistance and standing up to fight for what we must do, and that is to fight for our lives," said Ray Bradford, chairman of the Arizona Democratic Party's LGBT caucus.

Helfgot said as a 501(c)(3) organization, Phoenix Pride does not make political statements at its events but that speakers have the ability to weave politics into their speeches if they want to.

In some cases, though, Phoenix Pride does get involved.

"Where there are issues of injustice or issues of concern within the (LGBT) community, Phoenix Pride will act in whatever manner is appropriate," Helfgot said.

He said the LGBT community does have some concerns and "uncertainty" in the current political climate, but said that's why Sunday's message will be so important.

"There are all kinds of possible changes to policy that could be looming and some directly impact some members of the LGBTQ community and that's always a concern," he said. "But it just rides home the importance of that message of unity which is the driving theme."

Bradford said even though many in the LGBT community are concerned about Trump's actions, he sees a silver lining in the uncertainty of the future.

"In many ways, the Trump administration will be the best thing that ever happened to the left and possibly the LGBT community because of the way it's invigorated everyone and reminded them of the importance of participation in politics," Bradford said.

Bradford is concerned that the White House under Trump has not recognized June 2017 as Pride Month, breaking former President Barack Obama's precedent of recognizing the event each year during his presidency.

Bradford said the current administration has prompted more LGBT youths to mobilize and recognize the impact politics has on them.

"They're saying, 'Oh my gosh, I just realized politics affects me, it affects my life, my rights and my daily life and I have to protect myself from that,'" he said.

Jade Richardson also works with the LGBT caucus and said the political undertones for Sunday's march are reminiscent of the LGBT movement's beginnings with the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City.

"Everyone's been really supportive and really excited that it is more of a resistance," she said. "They really want to take Pride back to the Stonewall roots of 'We need to fight for our rights.' Just because we have marriage equality doesn't mean the fight is over."

Richardson said each LGBT march and rally has its own tone, but said that she believes the March for Equality generally should be more focused on politics than partying.

"I see that as a resistance march and rally rather than a place of celebration," she said. "But every time you have a bunch of LGBT folks around, it always turns into a good time."

The march and rally is set for 7 p.m. Sunday at the Heritage Square Historic District in downtown Phoenix.

Helfgot said the event will close with a tribute to the 49 people killed in last June's mass shooting at a popular gay nightclub in Orlando.

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