

Obama Blasts Republicans for Silence After Gay Soldier Booed During Debate

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At Saturday's Human Rights Campaign dinner, President Obama delivered his remarks in a tone that many of his supporters wish he had adopted months ago, chiding GOP presidential hopefuls for not saying anything after a gay soldier serving in Iraq was booed by the crowd at the Sept. 22 Republican debate. President Obama criticized his Republican rivals, explaining that any candidate who hopes to be Commander-in-Chief must support all military members regardless of sexual orientation.

"We don't believe in the kind of smallness that says it's OK for a stage full of political leaders — one of whom could end up being the President of the United States — being silent when an American soldier is booed," Obama said.

It was Obama's first public acknowledgment of the tense moment during the debate, where gay soldier Stephen Hill asked a question via YouTube. Host Megyn Kelly fielded the question to former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum about the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" just days earlier on Sept. 20.

In the video clip, Hill noted that he had to "lie about who [he] was" just to serve in the Army, and asked if the candidate would attempt to circumvent the newly repealed law.

As the video clip finished and the sound faded back up, boos were heard ringing throughout the arena. Santorum carried on answering the question with no response to those booing, an odd reaction given the high level of respect usually afforded to active soldiers. In his answer, Santorum made clear that "sexual activity has no place in the military," and called the repeal of DADT "tragic."

In attacking Santorum's response (or lack of it) and that of all GOP candidates, Obama took a tough line. "You want to be commander-in-chief? You can start by standing up for the men and women who wear the uniform of the United States, even when it's not politically convenient," he told the crowd of human rights advocates Saturday night. Vice President Joe Biden had already spoken out against the moment last week, calling the lack of Republican response "reprehensible."

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