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[Steve Ralls](#)

Director of Communications, Immigration Equality

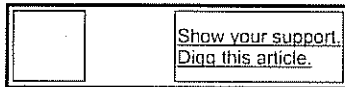
Posted: July 21, 2009 12:34 PM

[Comprehensive, Inclusive Immigration Reform: The Most Important Gift of All](#)

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Steve and Joe live in the shadow of the capital, both literally and figuratively.

The Washington, D.C. couple, who have been together for almost a decade, recently bought a new home in the city's Columbia Heights neighborhood. Two weeks ago, they were married in Connecticut. And in early August, they will celebrate their life together with friends and family who will gather to toast the couple and salute their commitment to each other.

But there will be no gifts at Steve and Joe's Washington celebration. Instead of registering at Macy's or collecting appliances and furnishings, they have asked guests to make a contribution that, they hope, will help them stay together. Despite their strong commitment to each other, and the life they have built together, Steve and Joe face separation before year's end because of the country's blatantly discriminatory immigration policies.

Joe is from Indonesia and was recently laid off from his job. Now, he faces the probability that he will have to leave the country ... due, in part, to the fact that he is gay.

If Steve and Joe were a married (heterosexual) couple, Steve (who is an American citizen) would likely be able to sponsor Joe for residency in the United States. But because they are both men, they now face living on different continents, or uprooting their lives in Washington and leaving America behind.

For them, Congress can't move quickly enough to right this unfathomable wrong. As lawmakers begin crafting comprehensive immigration reform legislation, they are urging Congress to ensure that "comprehensive" includes them, too.

In June, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) called a [Senate Judiciary Committee hearing](#) on the Uniting American Families Act (UAFSA), which would end the discrimination lesbian and gay bi-national couples now face. The bill, led by Leahy in the Senate and Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) in the House, enjoys growing support among lawmakers; 116 now support it in the House, and 21 Senators are on board in that chamber. But President Obama's pledge to fix America's broken immigration system this year presents a unique opportunity to act now for couples like Steve and Joe.

Both Senator Leahy and Congressman Nadler are steadfast advocates of including their legislation in the larger, comprehensive bill Congress will soon consider. That advocacy received another boost earlier this year when Congressman Mike Honda (D-CA) also included lesbian and gay couples in [The Reuniting Families Act](#), which would fix many of the problems that so many families -- both gay and straight -- encounter when navigating the United States' immigration system.

Steve and Joe are hoping the complete comprehensive immigration reform package will, at long last, bring couples like them out from the legislative shadows.

An estimated 36,000 lesbian and gay couples would benefit from immigration reform that includes all families. As the *Associated Press* [reported over the weekend](#), many are quickly running out of time. Some live part of each year abroad. Others are house hunting because they cannot stay in the country they love. Some, like Steve and Joe, are making "Plan B's" and hoping against hope that Congress acts soon.

"I feel like a third-class citizen," Steve recently said in [an interview](#), noting that, unlike most Americans, he is unable to sponsor his loved one for residency because he is gay. "We don't have the same rights as heterosexual couples. We also don't have the same rights as gay couples who are born in this country."

"If we were heterosexual ... Steve could sponsor me as family," Joe added.

But in the eyes of the United States, Steve and Joe don't count as family, despite all they've been through together.

Steve met Joe while he was studying in at a university in Pennsylvania. The U.S. government paid for Joe's PhD program ... an investment it now stands to lose. When the economic downturn hit his engineering firm hard, Joe lost his job. Along with it, he also lost his sponsor, and his pending green card, which was due to arrive any day. But the pink slip beat the green card, and now, unless he finds new employment in the structural engineering field soon, Joe will be forced to leave the country.

"The clock is ticking," Steve said in his recent interview, noting that the couple have already hired an attorney to look into the option of moving to Canada in order to be together.

That move, however, could be prevented if Congress takes up (and passes) comprehensive immigration reform soon ... and includes couples like them as part of that process. So, on August 8, in lieu of home decor or new dishware, the couple have asked those who will gather with them to celebrate their relationship

to make a donation to [Immigration Equality](#), an organization working to end anti-LGBT discrimination in the immigration system and include UAFA as part of immigration reform.

A resulting victory could be the most important gift of all ... and finally bring couples like Steve and Joe out from the shadows of Capitol Hill.

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<http://www.salon.com/opinion/greenwald/2009/03/16/immigration/>

(fixed the link to the greenwald article)

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epilogue-

Well there you go...no time for your rights is simple.

The reality is that this issue HAS been vetted over 20 years in other countries, in 10 years of proposed Legislation in the US and most recently in a very thorough investigation by the Senate Judiciary committee on June 3rd, which included more than 70 sworn depositions and testimony. The information, including, facts statistics, costs are all there for the "exploration".

After all that advocacy and support - congress simply couldn't get around to it.

This simply is not the way it's supposed to work, in a free democracy. A large group and a huge fan base brushed under the carpet in the 3rd inning after scoring a few runs, in a game they've been forced to play over and over?

Exactly how many more lives need be destroyed before congress decides they can squeeze them in?

How many more - children, mothers sons daughter and family members will be separated kept by the 'Family immigration system'.

How many more older family members will die off - before being reunited?

How many more - children, mothers, sons, daughters and family members will be kept apart by the 'Family immigration system'?

HOW much longer will this Apartheid on it's Citizen's be perpetuated and condoned before the congress and president fulfill their promises?

How much longer will our collective voices be ignored?

How much longer can this go on?

How can this go on?

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Part 5

Not sure which of these is worst-

- 1) That the 'land of the free' practicing such blatant discrimination.
- 2) That the WH . understands the consequences of their policy, yet allows it to continue.
- 3) The hypocrisy of the whole damned thing.
- 4) Appearing so intolerant to the rest of the world.
- 5) The untold heart ache and suffering this lack of rights truly causes.
- 6) The pittance of political capitol a small push on this issue would have cost.
- 7) No type of "stop loss" even considered or mentioned by anyone.

Sadly, after all this unprecedented support for Immigration Equality, the grim reality ,may be-

"Congresswoman Speier said the Uniting American Families Act, introduced by Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-New York) in February, has no chance of being passed. Instead, same-sex couples fighting deportation proceedings will need to seek intervention by one of their state's senators for the time being, she

said. Such "holds" can be reintroduced in each session of Congress. "There is great likelihood that ENDA will pass before the Uniting American Families Act passes. I am just being honest," said Speier, who worked with Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-California) to secure a hold for one of her constituents. (Shirley Tan). "I don't think we have had the opportunity to explore this issue as intensely as it needs to happen." (Bay Area Reporter July 16, 09)

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(Part 4)

"Asked about Obama's stance on UAFAs (the Uniting American Families Act) and the likelihood of its inclusion in comprehensive immigration legislation, White House spokesman Shin Inouye said in a statement that: "The president thinks Americans with partners from other countries should not be faced with a painful choice between staying with their partner or staying in their country. We will work closely with Congress to craft comprehensive immigration reform legislation." (3/30/09)

Obviously this means the White house and the President are very well aware and disagree with current immigration law and lack of civil rights, (sounds familiar) - yet as w/ DADT Citizens continue to be discriminated against every day! (Of course in this case they throw you out of the entire country after the Nazi treatment by the US Immigration system, which can include - home raid, search, seizure, arrest, freezing bank accounts, investigation of US citizen, partner's deportation notices and hearing, 10 year or permanent exile of non-US partner.)

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(part 3)

If the President really wants to "reach out to the rest of the world" - he needs take care of his own house first. If this systematic apartheid was being propagated in another country against any other group (besides gays), the US would probably call for sanctions. That thousands of US citizens have been forced to find refuge in one of these progressive countries is a sad reality and national embarrassment.

Over the last 10 YEARS (since UAFAs introduction), there has been on the record hundreds of Newspapers stories. Hundreds of endorsements by various high profile groups and media. Hundreds of personal stories via the media and web, including excellent pices by Journalist who are bi-national like- <http://www.salon.com/opinion/greenwald/2009/03/>... Tremendous advocates like Leahy, Honda, Abercrombie, Nadler, Schumer and Rachel Tiven from Immigrationquality and true heroes like Julian Bond, along w/ an incredible array of Bloggers and activist on-line. There has been a Senate judiciary Committee Hearing - http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/06/05/jeff-sessions-irked-by-cr_n_211786.html - Currently the bill enjoys excellent sponsorship in the House and Senale and even this endorsement from the White house in March -

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(Part 2)

Currently at least 25 countries, and most English-speaking countries, aside from the US, provide immigration equality to their citizens. Since 1989, countries around the world began offering same-sex couples the chance to immigrate their foreign-born partners. Greenland will become the 25th country in June 2009 when it becomes an autonomous nation within the Kingdom of Denmark behind Andorra (year needed); Croatia (year needed); Denmark (1989); Norway (1993); Sweden (1994); Australia (1995); Iceland (1996); Belgium (1997); United Kingdom (1997); France (1999); New Zealand (1999); South Africa (1999); Israel (2000); Portugal (2001); The Netherlands (2001); Germany (2001); Finland (2001); Switzerland (2003); Brazil (2003); Canada (2005); and Spain (2005); Czech Republic (2007) Colombia (2009) and Japan (2009). The following four countries need to be verified: Hungary, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Uruguay. All of the previous four countries have some sort of civil unions and same sex couples are granted certain federal rights, it's just unclear if immigration benefits is one of them. (wik)

It's been 20 Years since Denmark provided equal rights. TWO DECADES! South Africa? Germany? Brazil? Czech Republic? , COLOMBIA???? Some of these countries have notorious civil rights histories yet in 2009 they are leaps and bound ahead of the United States in offering rights and recognitions of their LGBT Citizens.

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(Part 1)

-The EXCLUSION of ALL LGBT persons from using the US Immigration System and the resulting devastation it reeks on thousands of her own lawful citizens and their family's, is quite simply - A NATIONAL DISGRACE!

-As David Mixner so aptly penned recently - "Let's call it what it is - Gay Apartheid."

-To simply DENY the rights of a lawful, qualified, tax paying US citizens to sponsor their Permanent Partners, in the same way as opposite sex couples do - is just BLATANT DISCRIMINATION!

-Land of the free? Leader of the free world and Civil Rights?
(not so much lately and forget the poor huddled masses stuff for now)

-Most civilized Countries have realized that provisions need to be made for ALL their citizens to use the Immigration system (some of these countries do not offer same sex marriage) but realize not to offer Immigration rights would be inhumane and force their citizen to choose between the person and country they love.

Currently at least 25 countries, and most English-speaking countries, aside from the US, provide

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@ Britannicus, UAFAs has nothing to do with broader immigration reform, we just want to be with our loved ones. You said many things that are truth in your comments. But we want to sponsor our loved ones, we will sign affidavit of support they will not depend on social services nor suck of the budget.

If you are against it, how about we forbid heterosexual from sponsoring their partners, then I will be happy as well. But do not discriminate against us just because we are gay.

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- [Brittanicus I'm a Fan of Brittanicus](#) [permalink](#)

NO MORE FREE RIDES:

America should rigidly adopt a "points system" on immigration reform as many industrialized countries have? Only the cream at the top of the milk, should get priority to immigrate. Simply stated people with outstanding credential, who are Ph.d in scientific research, top grade engineers and highly rated professionals, will be readily sponsored for a good paying jobs, exceptional health care, a great pension on retirement, in major industries. They are not going to become bottom feeders who take advantage of federal state and county welfare benefits. They will not be illegal pregnant Mothers who intentionally steal across the border, so the good taxpayers will support her and her instant citizenship baby. They are not the 20 plus million who are going to suck America dry, because either political party patronizes the corporate parasites that have attracted cheap labor. We can never have a balanced health care program, as long as taxpayers are forced by federal mandate to give free education, health care and a host of other benefits. The border fence must be a two layer system, that goes from Brownsville Texas, to San Diego, California--with a permanent special National Guard unit. v

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E-Verify must be in-perpetuity, not voluntary, for everybody throughout the United States. Not employees who have just been hired, but everybody who is on the payroll. There should be a large formidable force of interior ICE inspectors who make lightning strikes on large and small business. The penalty for hiring illegal aliens should be extremely severe, as they are stealing jobs from Americans and legal residents. Confiscation of assets, heavy fines and certainly prison sentences. Without these pre-requisites, E-Verify will not be efficient enough. NUMBERSUSA for more details Without any question's workers in industry should have be able to call ICE, and leave a message about their suspicions of illegal activity in their working location. Those illegal workers confronted by a upgraded application in the workplace, will soon shy away from any contact with employers who stipulate the use of E-Verification. Inferior enforcement for years of neglect and inefficiency whether intentional or not by previous administration, are to blame for the incessant illegal immigration that has clogged the American labors work environment. SAY NO TO ANOTHER AMNESTY! SAY NO TO ANY PATH TO CITIZENSHIP. RESCIND THE INSTANT BIRTHRIGHT LAW. RESCIND ANY KIND OF BENEFITS TO THOSE WHO CANNOT PROVE THEIR CITIZENSHIP! NO TO IRREVERSIBLE OVERPOPULATION! ERUPT YOUR ANGER IN THE EAR OF YOUR Senator and Congressman today at 202-224-3121---BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.


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- [roberthbcatho I'm a Fan of roberthbcatho](#) [permalink](#)

il want to be with my partner now, I am tired of politics and games, Obama could have used executive orders to help us stay together with our loved ones. When our money was good to his campaign, why our rights are not important now?
I am USA citizen my partner is Thai, I have traveled to Thailand 7 times in 3 years he came here 3 times.
We both spend a lot of money on flights and taking unpaid leave of absence to be together., At the same time when I fly, I see straight guys, mostly Americans going to meet their girls true the hook up agency, love has no borders but I spoke to a guy on the plane that brought 3 girl friends to USA in 10 year period. So is this a straight folk's privilege to sponsor who ever they want and whenever?
I live in Georgia and when I write to my congressman I get back a generic response, one can tell that they even did not pay attention to what I have written. Democrats became very ignorant to our rights, they play with our feelings and emotions.
Who can guarantee that if UAFA is included in CIR they will not compromise us out so they can pass CIR alone?

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Call it what it really is: US Apartheid Laws against GLBT. We produce best we can, we pay taxes like everyone else, but are denied basic human rights. 19 other (western, advnaced) allies have moved on from this Apartheid, but the US remains a laggard.

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