

## President Joe Biden appoints Jessica Stern special envoy for LGBTQ rights

By [Donald Judd](#) and [Kate Sullivan](#), CNN

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Slaven Vlasic/Getty Images

Jessica Stern at Build Studio on March 12, 2018 in New York City.

**(CNN)** — President Joe Biden named Jessica Stern as the US Special Envoy to Advance the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons on Friday, reinstating a position that existed under the Obama administration but was not filled by President Donald Trump/

Stern currently serves as executive director of OutRight Action International, an organization aimed at ensuring human rights for LGBTQ people both domestically and abroad and joined Biden at the White House Friday for remarks commemorating Pride Month.

She's the second person to be named to the role – her predecessor, Randy Berry, served in the then-new role from its inception in 2015 until 2017, at which point the position was left vacant by Trump. Berry, a career diplomat, now serves as ambassador to Nepal.

“The Special Envoy will play a vital role in leading implementation of the Presidential Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons Around the World,” the White House told CNN in a statement. “At a time when the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons are increasingly threatened in all regions of the world, the Special Envoy will bring together like-minded governments, civil society organizations, corporations and international organizations to uphold dignity and equality for all.”

During his remarks on Friday, Biden denounced state-level anti-LGBTQ legislation. A slew of anti-LGBTQ bills have been introduced by Republican state lawmakers around the country in 2021, including a record number of measures targeting transgender Americans, according to the Human Rights Campaign. So far this year, eight states have enacted anti-trans sports bans, while one state, Arkansas, has approved a law prohibiting physicians in the state from providing gender-affirming treatment for trans youth.

Biden called those laws “some of the ugliest, most un-American laws I’ve seen.”

“Many of them target transgender children receiving the appropriate medical care, for using the bathroom in high school, the one where they’re most safe, even preventing them from joining the sports teams with their classmates,” Biden said. “Let’s be clear, this is nothing more than bullying disguised as legislation.”

The President also pushed the Senate to pass the Equality Act, which has been passed by the Democrat-led House of Representatives, and would provide “overdue, explicit civil rights protections” to members of the LGBTQ community across the country.

“Representation matters, recognition matters, but something else matters – results. Results matter. I’m proud to lead the most pro LGBTQ equality administration in US history,” he said.



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Biden on Friday signed H.R. 49 into law, which designates the site of the Pulse Nightclub shooting as the “National Pulse Memorial.” The President was joined at the White House by first lady Jill Biden, survivors of the shooting, members of the Florida congressional delegation, members of the Congressional Equality Caucus and others.

“Just over five years ago, the Pulse nightclub, a place of acceptance and joy, became a place of unspeakable pain and loss, and we’ll never fully recover, but we’ll remember,” Biden said. “And we have to, what we’re going to do is, what the members of Congress here is enshrine in law, as a consequence of that law, enshrine in perpetuity a literal monument to a loss that occurred there.”

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, the first Senate-confirmed LGBTQ Cabinet secretary, will open the event with remarks. The President will be introduced by 16-year-old transgender advocate Ashton Mota of Lowell, Massachusetts, according to the official. Mota is a leader with the GenderCool Project, an organization dedicated to uplifting the

positive stories and experience of young transgender Americans.

The official said the President and first lady “will welcome LGBTQ+ advocates, faith leaders, state and local elected officials, and members of Congress to the East Room – right near the Ground Floor Corridor that has been illuminated in rainbow colors for the first-time as part of a historic Smithsonian LGBTQ+ exhibit on display.”

Stern, who is based in New York, also serves as an adjunct associate professor at Columbia University’s School of International & Public Affairs and as a member of the LGBTI Reference Group of UNWomen, the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

As executive director of OutRight Action International, Stern supported the legal registration of LGBTQ organizations globally, helped secure the mandate of the United Nations Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, expanded the UN General Assembly resolution to include gender identity, and co-founded the UN LGBTI Core Group.

Stern’s appointment is the latest in a series of efforts by the administration to protect LGBTQ rights. In March, Biden became the first US president to acknowledge International Transgender Day of Visibility. Earlier this week, Biden Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough announced the administration would expand VA care to include gender confirmation surgery.

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CNN’s Devan Cole contributed to this report.

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