

Obama makes first transgender appointment

By [Andy Birkey](#) 1/5/10 3:36 PM [DIGG](#) [TWEET](#)



In a move that is being hailed by LGBT advocates and derided by the religious right, President Obama made his first appointment of a transgender person to a federal post this week. [Amanda Simpson will be the new Senior Technical Advisor to the Department of Commerce](#) where she will oversee weapons technology.

Simpson, a former test pilot who has worked in the defense and aerospace industries for 30 years, has downplayed the role her gender identity plays in her new job.

“Being the first sucks,” [she told ABC News.com](#). “I’d rather not be the first but someone has to be first, or among the first. I think I’m experienced and very well qualified to deal with anything that might show up because I’ve broken barriers at lots of other places and I always win people over with who I am and what I can do.”

Religious right leaders, are not looking at Simpson’s qualifications, however, and are instead targeting her appointment on political grounds.

“This isn’t like appointing an African-American in order to try to provide diversity and right some kind of discriminatory wrong,” [Peter LaBarbera of Americans for Truth, a group that opposes homosexuality](#), told a conservative website. “This is about political correctness. President Obama, before he was inaugurated, told the world that he had signed off on every single demand of the homosexual-activist lobby.”

Focus on the Family released a statement criticizing the appointment. Focus’ spokesperson Monica Schleicher said, “Efforts to promote ‘transgenderism’ in public policy deconstruct one of the most fundamental concepts known to mankind... In doing so, activists like Simpson are asking the rest of society to radically reorder the ways in which the culture makes reasonable and rational accommodation for the two genders.”

LGBT rights groups said it’s progress that a qualified transgender person wasn’t overlooked for the position.

“What is noteworthy about this appointment is not that a transgender person is serving this administration — many transgender people work for the federal government — the real story is that Amanda Simpson was selected based on her exemplary credentials and not because she is transgender,” Mara Keisling, Executive Director of the National Center for Transgender Equality

said in a statement Monday. “Countless transgender people are overlooked every day for jobs they can do very well. When an employer does not discriminate based on gender identity, they have access to more highly qualified people. That’s what happened here.”

Trevor Thompson of the Human Rights Campaign in a statement Monday said, “As the first transgender person appointed by the president, Amanda is not only eminently qualified for her new position in the Department of Commerce, but she is also a trailblazer for equality.”

Simpson is one of a number of LGBT appointments that Obama has made since taking office. Last week, the [Senate approved Obama’s selection of Minneapolis’ Sharon Lubinski](#) as the country’s newest U.S. Marshal.