



Human Rights Campaign®

*Working for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equal rights.*

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
February 8, 2011

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### **HRC Announces 2011 Keynote and Featured Gala Speakers**

**NASHVILLE, TN** – The Human Rights Campaign announced today the speaker line-up for the 2011 Equality Dinner. On February 19, 2011, Chely Wright will serve as the event's keynote speaker. John Barry and Eric Alva will be featured speakers. Special guests will include current HRC President Joe Solmonese and Congressman Jim Cooper.

In May of 2010, Chely Wright became the first major country music artist to publicly come out as gay. Since then, she has become the national spokesperson for the organization GLSEN and been named one of Out magazine's annual 100 People of the Year. Locally, Chely was named Best Female Vocalist and Best Songwriter in the 2011 Nashville Scene reader's poll. *Lifted off The Ground*, her new album, was named Best Album in the same poll. Chely has released seven studio albums during her career, and is best known for her singles "Shut Up and Drive" and "Single White Female." She also recently released a memoir about her life titled *Like Me*.

John Berry was selected by President Barack Obama to head the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and is currently the highest ranking openly gay official in the Administration. Previously, Berry served as assistant secretary for policy, management and budget in the Clinton Administration and was a staunch advocate for equal LGBT rights while serving in the Interior.

Eric Alva was the first American wounded in the Iraq war and the war's first Purple Heart recipient. After 13 years of military service, Alva retired as a staff sergeant and went back to college to finish his degree. While at school, he decided to be true to himself and came out as gay. Since then Alva has been the national spokesperson for HRC's fight to repeal the military's

discriminatory LGBT policy, and on Dec. 22, 2010, he stood over President Obama's right shoulder as he signed into law the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

Under Joe Solmonese's leadership, the Human Rights Campaign has been an effective, strategic and creative force in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights advocacy. Solmonese knows that to promote a better life for all of America's LGBT people and their families, HRC must make inroads not only in legislatures, but in workplaces, communities, religious congregations, schools, universities and media outlets. HRC's work reflects this vision: Solmonese has overseen electoral and legislative victories and successful outreach to new audiences. A dynamic speaker with a powerful message, Solmonese is one of the most sought-after political voices in progressive politics today. He appears frequently in the national media as a voice for equality.

Congressman Jim Cooper continues to be a strong ally in the LGBT community. He was one of the original cosponsors of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) for multiple Congresses and has voted for various equal rights initiatives including the Domestic Partner Benefits and Obligations Act and the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act. Most recently, he voted for the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

The 2011 Equality Dinner will be presented by longtime supporter, Bridgestone. This year's silent auction will be sponsored by Fifth Third Bank.

To learn more about the 2011 HRC Equality Dinner and to purchase tickets, visit [www.equalitydinner.com](http://www.equalitydinner.com).

The Human Rights Campaign is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all.

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