

Biden's talk highlights his views on gay rights

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He says he supports **civil unions** but not marriage for same-sex couples.

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Sioux City, Ia. - Democratic presidential **candidate Joe Biden** on Saturday discussed gay rights related to health care, **civil unions** and the military at a campaign stop in Sioux City.

Biden, speaking to an estimated 100 supporters at an early morning breakfast, said coverage under his proposed health care plan, or any universal plan, must be guaranteed as a constitutional right to all citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Biden added that he supports **civil unions** but not marriage for same-sex couples. He added that he does not think "it is the responsibility of the government to be able to define for a religious-based organization what constitutes a marriage."

The issue of gay marriage heated up in Iowa recently after a ruling from a Polk County district judge struck down Iowa's ban on same-sex marriage. The ruling is on hold pending a state Supreme Court appeal, although two men were able to get married in Des Moines.

The Delaware senator also said he feels the military's current "don't ask, don't tell" policy related to gay service members is a "bizarre" one. The military's major responsibility is to keep high standards, he said.

He recalled a conversation with a serviceman in Iraq. Asked his opinion of the policy, the soldier's response to it, Biden said, was, "What difference does it make? The question is, 'Can he shoot straight?' "

Biden, accompanied by his wife, Jill, spent most of his time discussing the Iraq war, continuing his opposition to President Bush's latest report on Iraq, which Biden described as a "strategic tragedy."

"It's frustrating to see the truly brave kids over there, out every single day, riding down roads they know they can't fully protect and with an overwhelming chance of having their entire lives changed or ended," he said.

Biden called for "getting American troops out of the middle of a civil war," and, at the same time, moving troops to protect borders and American citizens in and near Baghdad's Green Zone, a heavily fortified and U.S.-controlled area that houses the U.S. and British embassies and major Iraqi government headquarters.

"I would also like to see a diplomatic surge and world conference of the world's major powers - such as we did in Bosnia - in order to implement the Iraqi constitution calling for a federal system," Biden said.