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No U.S. Sochi Boycott Despite Tensions, White House Says

By The Moscow Times

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The United States is not considering boycotting the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, despite the high tensions between Washington and Moscow and calls from members of the LGBT community to shun the Games over Russia's anti-gay policies, a White House spokesman said.

The relationship between the two countries has been in the spotlight following the news that President Barack Obama canceled a meeting with President Vladimir Putin in Moscow that had been scheduled for September.

A number of factors have been touted as having influenced the decision, namely, Russia's decision to grant U.S. intelligence leaker Edward Snowden temporary asylum, in addition to the lack of progress on global security issues and human rights policies.

Spokesman Jay Carney said that Obama opposed the Russian law banning the promotion

of homosexuality among minors, as well as any other laws that discriminate against people for their religion, race or sexual orientation in any country.

The law — which has been dubbed "anti-gay" by critics — stipulates fines of between 4,000 rubles and one million rubles ($124 to $31,000) and was signed into law by Putin in late June.

When asked by journalists whether a boycott was being considered, Carney said that there have been no discussions on the subject.

He did say, however, that Russia had a responsibility to protect the rights of spectators and athletes at Sochi.

"It is in Russia's interest to guarantee the Olympics' success and we expect them to take all necessary measures for that," Carney said.

Earlier this week a petition with 300,000 signatures sent to the International Olympic Committee's headquarters in Switzerland asking for Russia to be banned from hosting the Games. It was signed by several former olympians and accompanied by a letter from openly gay British actor Stephen Fry.

Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko responded to concerns about the implications of the "gay propaganda" law, saying that athletes and organizers could afford to relax. "Their rights will be protected ... but of course you have to respect the laws of the country you are in," he said.

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