

Obama Will Skip Olympics Due to 'Schedule'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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U.S. President Barack Obama **Andrei Makhonin**

President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle will not be able to attend the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics in Sochi due to their busy schedules, a U.S. State Department spokeswoman said.

"The President's and the First Lady's schedules do not allow them to travel to Sochi, as I think the White House has said," deputy spokeswoman Marie Harf said when asked Wednesday whether their decision not to travel to February's Winter Games was intended as a "message" to Russia.

In a briefing available on the State Department website, she described the members of the official U.S. delegation to Sochi as people "distinguished by their accomplishments in government service, in sports, in civic activism."

The diplomat said she did not think the possible attendance of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry at either the opening or closing Olympic ceremonies had been considered, but cited a lack of information.

The official U.S. delegation at the Games' opening ceremony on Feb. 7 will be headed by former Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, while Deputy Secretary of State William Burns will lead the delegation during the closing ceremony on Feb. 23.

On Tuesday, the White House unveiled a delegation to represent the U.S. at the Sochi Olympics that includes two openly gay athletes, which was interpreted as a gesture to show to the Kremlin the U.S.'s support for gay rights following the passage in Russia of a law banning gay "propaganda."

President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that Russia's top responsibility as host of the Winter Olympics was to ensure equal conditions for all the athletes.

The law signed this year banning the distribution of so-called propaganda to minors about nontraditional sexual relationships has raised widespread concern about whether gay athletes and spectators would face discrimination at the Olympics, being held Feb. 7 to 23 in Sochi.

Putin told his annual marathon news conference on Thursday that "the main thing for us is the good organization of these competitions, the creation of equal terms for all athletes." (*AP*)

Also see:

[U.S. Puts 2 Gay Athletes on Official Delegation to Sochi](#)

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