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Gay U.S. Delegation Member Praises 'Welcoming' Atmosphere at Games

By The Moscow Times

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SOCHI — A member of the U.S. Olympic delegation sent to Sochi by U.S. President Barack Obama said she witnessed no backlash over the inclusion of homosexuals in the group as an apparent protest over anti-gay laws in Russia.

"Everyone knew who we were, and I am quite certain we did not experience a single problem," two-time Olympic medalist Caitlin Cahow said in a telephone interview from Boston on Thursday. "If anything, they were unbelievably welcoming."

A member of the U.S. women's hockey team that won the bronze in Turin and silver in Vancouver, Cahow, who is gay, was part of a delegation that originally included former tennis star Billie Jean King and figure skater Brian Boitano, who also are gay.

King was forced to withdraw because her mother was ill; she died the day of the opening ceremony. Cahow replaced King at the ceremony, where the group sat not far from President

Vladimir Putin.

The U.S. delegation at the ceremony also included former Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul and presidential adviser Rob Nabors. Cahow, who is 28, said she was honored to have been among athletes she looked up to and public servants.

"I am very proud to represent my country," she said. "I am also proud to be a member of the LGBT community representing the U.S."

Cahow said the only time gay rights came up on the trip was during media interviews after their arrival, and American reporters seemed more concerned about it than their Russian counterparts. Russians she met, whether officials or everyday citizens, were all friendly, she said.

"Everyone was wonderful," she said, adding that she had not expected to be a part of the Olympics again after retiring as a player. "The Olympics are humbling every time you go. It does not matter what your role is ... because you realize you are part of a global event."

A Harvard graduate who is now at Boston College Law School, Cahow called the trip "life-changing" and said it made her want to consider public service. She said the group got along well and joked that they spent a lot of time talking about "solving the world's problems."

"That is just the vibe that we had," she said. "For me, I did not want to sleep. There were too many things to learn, too many conversations to have."

Cahow said the biggest difference for this Olympics was that she did not have to concentrate the whole time on making sure she was eating and sleeping right. She also got to attend other events, and she especially enjoyed seeing the slopestyle skiing.

"As an athlete I was always kind of stuck in one area," she said.

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