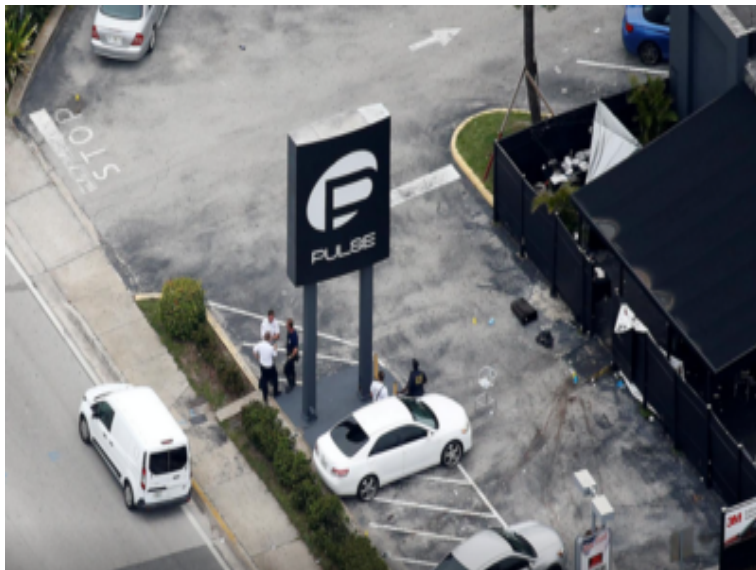


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# Gay nightclub Pulse to become US memorial after 2016 mass shooting

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WASHINGTON: US president Joe Biden will designate the Pulse gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, a national memorial on Friday, honoring the site where a mass shooting killed 49 people. A gunman stormed the popular venue five years ago, opening fire with an AR-15-style assault rifle and pistol in one of the most lethal modern mass shootings in the United States.

Biden, in a shift from his Republican predecessor, has sought to emphasize equality for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community, officially recognizing Pride Month with a June 1 proclamation and nominating LGBTQ officials to top US government posts, among other actions.

The Democratic president has also pressed for full rights for

LGBTQ Americans, including passage of the Equality Act in Congress, noting that protections are lacking in many US states.

On Friday, he also named Jessica Stern, head of the New York-based human rights group OutRight Action International, as a special envoy at the U.S. Department of State to ensure US diplomacy and foreign assistance include LGBTQ rights, the White House said.

In Florida, authorities branded the shooting an act of Islamic extremism by a 29-year-old US citizen of Afghan descent. But civil rights activists have asserted the 2016 massacre was also a hate crime targeting gay men and Latinos frequenting the club.

The new Orlando site will join the National AIDS Memorial Grove in San Francisco and New York City's Stonewall Inn, a national monument commemorating what is seen as the birthplace of the modern gay rights movement following riots after police raided the gay bar in 1969.

After signing legislation establishing Florida's National Pulse Memorial, Biden will deliver remarks at the White House alongside Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, who is openly gay.

Biden has sought to reverse course from former President Donald Trump, who did not officially recognize Pride month.

He has ordered federal agencies to protect LGBTQ people under federal anti-discrimination laws. He also reversed a Trump-era ban on transgender people openly serving in the US military and on flying rainbow Pride flags at US embassies.