

Anti-LGBT bigot caught engaging in election fraud in Texas

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Published June 30, 2014 | Updated March 31, 2026

https://www.transadvocate.com/anti-lgbt-bigot-caught-engaging-in-election-fraud-in-texas_n_13887.htm

Abstract

Engaging in fraud in order to overturn LGBT and especially trans equality in cities throughout the nation is nothing new for anti-equality bigots. In the past anti-equality efforts, election fraud was limited to purposefully deceiving voters about trans equality or intimidating voters. Recently, the TransAdvocate documented an anti-equality activist using county property to attempt to circumvent [...]

Article

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The Houston Area Pastor's Council (AKA, the Texas Pastor's Council, AKA, the US Pastor's Council) is the Texas-based anti-queer group that is heading up the effort to overturn a recent Houston equality ordinance which protects groups such as Jews, LGBT people, etc from discrimination. For this reason the Houston/Texas/US Pastor's Council (HTUSPC) is attempting to have the ordinance repealed.

While railing against the supposed immoral nature of LGBT people, the HTUSPC is currently mired in its own sex scandal. HTUSPC spokesman, Pastor Baker, was recently fired for harassing, assaulting and soliciting sex from his female employees. HTUSPC Director, Pastor Welch, attempted to get keep Baker from facing the consequences of his deviant sexual behavior. Now, a man believed to be working for HTUSPC, was caught using Harris county property to attempt to commit election fraud.

The pressure of history

When the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance passed on May 28, 2014, opponents had 30 days to collect enough qualified signatures to put the ordinance up for popular vote. The last time Houston opponents of LGBT equality attempted to roll back equality was in 1985. The equality opponents were a mix of Ku Klux Klan and so-called "Moral Majority" leaders. That effort successfully gained enough qualified signatures to put the ordinance up for popular vote. The equality ordinance was repealed during an election that featured a group of candidates known as the "Straight Slate," one of whom infamously said that the way to deal with HIV would be to "shoot the queers." This statement translated into more

than \$150,000 (in 2014 dollars) in campaign contributions within just 24 hours.

[Figure] "Save Our Children" - The KKK marching against the 1985 Houston equality ordinance that protected LGBT city employees against employment discrimination.

Obviously the forces of bigotry are vexed to find themselves in a Houston that's far different than the Houston of 1985. They can't joke about murdering people and the Klan is longer accepted as being the vanguard of Southern tradition. Today, Houston is the most diverse city in America, has a very popular out lesbian Mayor and a political climate that frowns upon hate. Apparently the foes of equality are feeling the pressure and are willing to risk committing election fraud.

The risk

On Thursday, June 26, the TransAdvocate was alerted that a man inside of a county building, was gathering signatures to "get rid of a law allowing men inside the women's restroom." Generally speaking, it's not permissible to do political work inside county buildings because it gives the appearance that the county officially supports a side in partisan politics. When I arrived at the Harris County building located at 1721 Pech Rd, I found an official-looking man in business clothes sitting at the entrance of the county building:

While greeting people as they entered the county building, there was nothing overtly identifying him as anything other than a worker inside a county building. He busied himself directing people to county offices, registering voters and, of course, getting people to sign his anti-equality petition. While he was busy registering a man to vote, acting as if I might be amenable to his views, I approached to ask about what he was doing. He said, "Okay, the City Council passed an ordinance that allows men into women's restrooms." I, acting shocked asked, "City Council voted to allow men into the women's restrooms?!?" He agreed and went a step further saying that the ordinance allows sexual predators into the women's restroom.

At that point, the individual this man had been registering to vote interrupted us, handing the bigot back his clipboard. Here's how the election fraud went down:

Bigot: Thank you very much Mr. Santos.

Mr. Santos: Give this to Anna? [pointing at the completed voter registration card]

Bigot: Yes, and I'm not sure if she'll take it but if she won't, put it in the mail.

Me: Oh, so you're registering people today and having them sign...

Bigot: No, no, no. This is not a registration drive. If you're already registered, you can sign this (points at his petition) to be put on the ballot because it becomes law...

Me: Mr. Santos, did you just register to vote?

Mr. Santos: Yes.

Me: You helped him register? [directed to the bigot]

Bigot: Uh-hmm.

Me: Oh, okay.

Bigot: Yeah, uh-hmm.

Me: [looking at Mr. Santos] But you're not registered right now?

Mr. Santos: No, no. Not right now.

Bigot: By the time this gets checked (points at petition), he will be registered.

Me: [smiling] Ah, that's fraud!

Bigot: [laughs]

Mr. Santos: Yeah

Bigot: Okay?

Me: [laughs]

Mr. Santos: [Inaudible]

Me: Oh, okay [laughing]

Mr. Santos' name on the petition

Having established a rapport, I asked for the bigot's name. Smiling he said, "My name is Victor Lawrence." I introduced myself saying, "I just want to let you know, I am transgender." I continued, "I've been recording this conversation and I have you - here in a country building [when] you're supposed to be outside, but you're inside - fraudulently collecting the signature of Mr. Santos; you just admitted that he will be a registered voter by the time they find out about it."

In Texas, it is not legal to register people and have them sign petitions. The Texas election code site states, "someone who has just applied [for voter registration] that day will not be able to legally sign a petition." In fact, the way the election law is written, only those registered voters who were registered at the time the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance passed can submit legal signatures.

Lawrence clearly states that his intent is to circumvent Texas election law by passing off signatures - without the voter registration number - as valid signatures in the hope that by the time the petition is checked and the registration number found and verified, the number will be in the system.

Note that Lawrence is tricking his targets into committing fraud. His petition states, "We, the undersigned hereto, who are qualified voters..."

Lawrence was helping people misrepresent themselves in the hope of circumventing Texas election law. Note also that the petition doesn't seek to simply repeal the gender identity section of the ordinance, the petition seeks to have the ordinance "repealed in its entirety."

A Bigot's "Equality"

After I had outed myself, I turned to leave. As I began to walk out the door, Lawrence called after me saying, "I am not anti-transgender." Believing that I had misunderstood him, I incredulously asked him

to repeat himself. Again Lawrence said, “I am not anti-transgender.”

Wanting to see how Lawrence squared his behavior with his assertion, I proceeded to challenge that assertion. What follows is the exchange I proceeded to have:

Me: I know that’s what you think, but you are out here saying that I am a potential rapist and I think that’s pretty crappy.

Lawrence: I don’t know that...

Me: You don’t know? You’re saying that maybe I am a potential rapist? Is that what you’re saying?

Lawrence: Have you had the surgery?

Me: You’re asking me about my genitals in public?

Lawrence: I’m sorry, but what I’m concerned about is transgender people who have not had the surgery...

Me: But that’s none of your business and unless someone like me is going in [to the restroom] to create a disturbance, it’s none of your business. Right?

Lawrence: I agree with that.

Me: But what you’re wanting to do is create a situation where if I go to the restroom, I get arrested.

Lawrence: No, I just said that someone can ask you to leave.

Me: So you want me to hang out in the men’s restroom?

Lawrence: No, I don’t want you hanging out in any restroom.

Me: So you don’t want me to use any restroom?

Lawrence: No, I don’t have any problem with you going up to a woman and saying, “I am a transgender individual, I would like to use this restroom. Would you mind?” Okay? And if she...

Me: So, I have to go up to every single women in the restroom, stop them, knock on the stall door and inform them, “Hey, I just want to let you know that I’m a transgender person - I have to pee - but, I’m going to ask for your permission to go over here into this stall, close the door, do my business and leave?” That’s what you want to set up? You don’t think that’s a privileged system?

Lawrence: I think that’s an equal system.

Me: You think that’s an equal system?

Lawrence: Yes.

According to Geographies of Privilege, privilege is, “a specific kind of power” over another that is, “often rendered invisible, at least to those who benefit from them.” Consider this as we review some of the speakers HTUSPC brought to the City Council meeting to condemn the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance:

Houston City Council Member Ellen Cohen: If I'm asking for service and my [Jewish] faith is something that troubles them, they have a right to refuse me service?

Pastor Becky Riggle of Grace Megachurch: Yes.

Cohen: So, you're saying yes, they do have a right to refuse me service because I am someone of the Jewish faith?

Pastor: Yes I am... Yes I am saying that.

Speaking before City Council, anti-equality activist Karina Alvarez said, "I feel [that] I have been discriminated against today!" The nature of the oppression she said she faced was that queer people weren't forced to give up their seat to her, a heterosexual cisgender woman. Having shown up late to the City Council proceedings, Alvarez had to stand because all of the seats were taken. Since some of the seats were occupied by LGBT supporters of the ordinance, Alvarez complained, "The [ordinance supporters] have seats and I had to stay standing and I see this as a very discriminatory situation!"

Imagine, a world in which a Jew was equal to a Christian and a queer person didn't have to surrender their seat to a cis/hetero person. For the forces of anti-equality, equality is unacceptable because it means surrendering their status as a members of a superior class. There's a reason that, while they claim to be concerned about trans people, they are targeting protections for every group they might have to engage as an equal by having the entire equality ordinance overturned.

Suggested citation

Cristan Williams. "Anti-LGBT bigot caught engaging in election fraud in Texas." TransAdvocate, June 30, 2014. https://www.transadvocate.com/anti-lgbt-bigot-caught-engaging-in-election-fraud-in-texas_n_13887.htm