

Houston GLBT Political Caucus throws trans people under the bus

By Cristan Williams

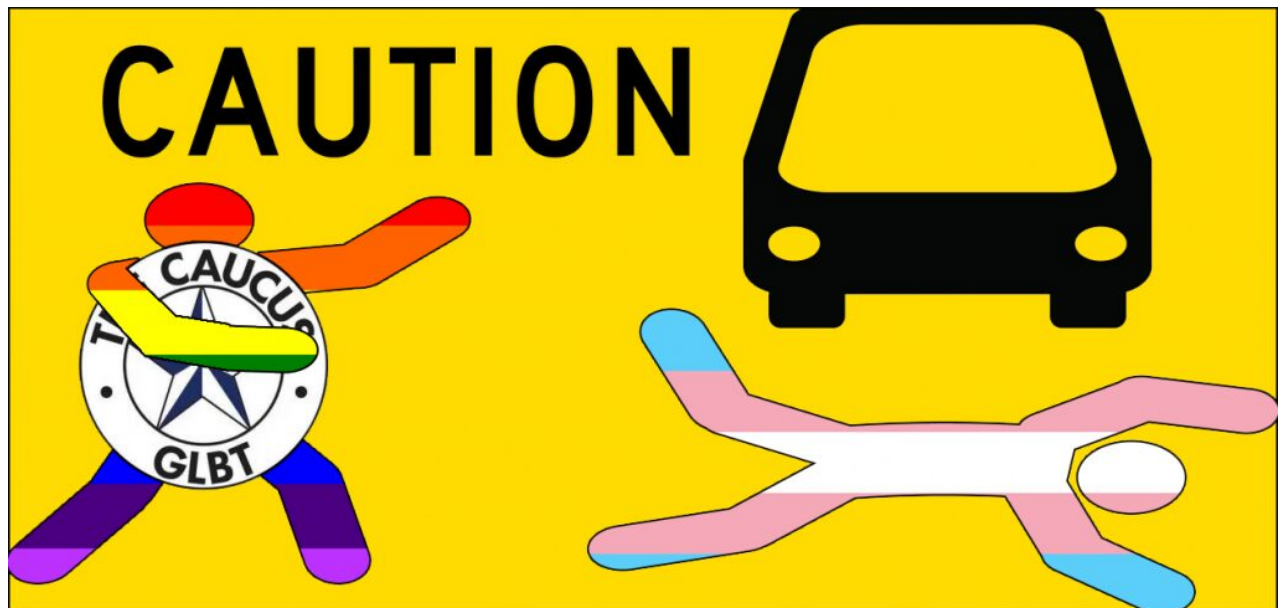
Published March 16, 2018 | Updated March 31, 2026

https://www.transadvocate.com/houston-glb-political-caucus-throws-trans-people-under-the-bus_n_22136.htm

Abstract

Unfortunately, it appears that the Houston GLBT Political Caucus, like HRC before them, is throwing the transgender community under the bus. Members of the Caucus Board encouraged candidates in the current election to support and seek the endorsement of the anti-transgender group, the Baptist Ministers of Houston Area and Vicinity (there are several variations of [...])

Article



Unfortunately, it appears that the Houston GLBT Political Caucus, like HRC before them, is throwing the transgender community under the bus. Members of the Caucus Board encouraged candidates in the current election to support and seek the endorsement of the anti-transgender group, the Baptist Ministers of Houston Area and Vicinity (there are several variations of their name). The Baptist Ministers of Houston Area and Vicinity (HBVHAV) ran false anti-transgender advertising during the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO) fight, falsified petitions to force HERO onto the ballot, and have continued anti-transgender activities into 2017.

In response to questions from candidates based on rumors they were hearing, Caucus President Mike Webb sent a message to screening chairs in late January of 2018¹. In the message, Webb confirmed

that while the Caucus considered HBVHAV to be an anti-LGBT organization but, Webb left it an open question as to whether candidates should accept their endorsement. At about the same time, Caucus Board member and Election Committee chair, John Humphries, was contacting candidates, facilitating their meeting with HBVHAV, and requesting that the candidate support and seek the endorsement of HBVHAV.

Humphries claimed that he was doing this at the request of the Caucus President, that he was officially representing the Caucus and, according to several concerned political candidates, wore his Caucus logo shirt while facilitating HBVHAV endorsements. Due to this misrepresentation, several candidates did accept an HBVHAV endorsement solely based on the request from the Caucus that was delivered by Humphries². Other Caucus board members were not aware of what Humphries and Webb were doing, and the Caucus general membership was not told about these activities.

This situation came to light when Jason Westin, a candidate for the Texas Congressional District 07, claimed that the Caucus asked him to accept an HBVHAV endorsement. While Westin had been approached by HBVHAV in early February, he declined their endorsement after speaking with a transgender Caucus member familiar with HBVHAV's rabidly anti-trans propaganda campaigns. However, when Caucus screener Alexis Melvin met with Westin later in the month, Westin disclosed that he had accepted the HBVHAV endorsement at the request of the Caucus. Specifically, Westin said that Humphries had approached him, at the request of Webb, to encourage him to accept the HBVHAV endorsement. Westin claimed that Humphries arranged a meeting with HBVHAV for him and Beau Miller, where he explained that the Caucus was on good terms with HBVHAV. According to Westin, Humphries claimed to be acting under Webb's direction and representing the Caucus.

After Westin's experience became known, Melvin sent Webb a message² asking about the situation. Webb responded that Westin's claims were inaccurate, but gave no specifics. Further investigation showed that Westin's account of how he came to accept an HBVHAV endorsement was substantially accurate. Shortly after that, Webb claimed that Humphries "had gone rogue," but indicated to candidates that Humphries was, in fact, representing the Caucus.

Corroborating Westin's accusations is another candidate who related virtually identical experiences and yet others who saw Humphries at an HBVHAV meetings wearing his Caucus shirt and assumed that HBVHAV and the Caucus had a working relationship. When they asked about HBVHAV endorsements, they too were told they should treat the endorsement like any other. While Caucus President Webb has known about this issue for over a month, Webb has taken no action. Most worrisome, is Humphries assertion that the transgender community has no place at the table when discussing this issue, even though it was the transgender community that was directly and maliciously attacked by HBVHAV during the fight to protect HERO. The Caucus mission statement reads:

Founded in 1975, the Houston GLBT Political Caucus is dedicated to eliminating prejudice, violence, and injustice against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people through education, activism, and political advocacy. Our goal is to create a world where all human beings are guaranteed freedom, equality, and opportunity.

In support of this mission, transgender Caucus members are encouraging community members to let the Caucus Board know how you feel about Caucus Board members urging political candidates to accept

endorsements from an anti-LGBT -and vehemently anti-trans- group at: board@thecaucus.org.

History & Context

In 2015 HBVHAV joined with groups headed, or financially supported by Steven Hotze, Jared Woodfill, and Davis Welch to mount a petition campaign to require that HERO be placed on the ballot rather than be enacted by the City Council. Even though HERO protected citizens from many kinds of discrimination, the ministers concentrated their efforts on attacking trans women by claiming this ordinance would allow men to enter women's restrooms and then asserted that this would place women and children at significant risk of sexual attack.

The ministers produced and distributed advertisement that showed men entering a women's restroom and implying that they were there to rape children. The ministers spread false information claiming that such attacks had happened six times recently (the time frame they stated varied from six months to a year) when, in fact, no such attacks had occurred. The ministers actively promoted propaganda campaigns by other anti-LGBT groups attacking HERO. The facts are that this ordinance did not address restroom use in any way and Houston already had a bathroom ordinance in place protecting Houstonians from harm.

In 2016, several candidates endorsed by the Houston GLBT Political Caucus PAC (the Caucus) also accepted the endorsement of HBVHAV. In screening for the Caucus endorsement, these candidates had agreed that they would not accept endorsements from any anti-LGBT group and were informed that the Caucus considered the ministers to be an anti-LGBT group. An emergency Caucus board meeting was called for Labor Day 2016 with several others invited to discuss whether the Caucus would withdraw its endorsement of these candidates.

This issue was then discussed extensively at the next regular Caucus meeting which was on, or around, September 7, 2016. In both of these meetings, it was reaffirmed that the Caucus considered HBVHAV to be an anti-LGBT group. At the general meeting, three of the leaders of the HBVHAV attended. After this meeting, there was a suggestion that it might be productive to start a discussion with the ministers to see if HBVHAV would stop their false attacks on the transgender community. The Caucus Board assigned Brandon Mack the task of trying to contact the ministers about starting this discussion. Alexis Melvin expressed concern that Brandon did not represent the groups that were attacked and was assured that the transgender community would be included long before anything substantive was discussed.

In 2017 HBVHAV continued their anti-transgender activities with their support for Steven Hotze's movie, *How we defeated HERO* which was touted as a blueprint for the defeat of equality ordinances across the country. It reportedly features the "No Men in Women's Restrooms" fear mongering as a primary tactic¹. In fact, this pernicious and transphobic tactic was deployed throughout the country, affecting numerous other transgender communities throughout the nation.



Figure 1. TransAdvocates protesting the 2017 HBVHAV-supported anti-trans event

Notes:

Note 1: On January 25, Webb sent the following to the screening chair:

Dear Candidates,

I appreciate everyone's commitment to ensure they are following the Caucus' screening and endorsement policies. To provide clarification, a list of known anti-LGBTQ+ organizations are included at the end of this e-mail and we will make sure to include this list on all screening questionnaires going forward to eliminate any confusion.

The Caucus does not ban anyone from accepting an endorsement from any other organization or individual. Our questionnaire does ask if you would accept an endorsement from a known anti-LGBTQ+ organization or person and we recommend that you answer honestly. The few times we have witnessed a candidates' endorsement come into question is when our members feel they were misled during our screening process.

As you will see the Caucus currently includes the organization most have questions about, the Baptist Ministers Association of Houston & Vicinity PAC (Vicinity), as an anti-LGBTQ+ organization primarily due to their campaign against the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO). Due to a current dialogue the Caucus is having with Vicinity, this may very well change in the future, but as of now if you seek any endorsement from the list below, we recommend being honest with our members and be prepared to answer

their questions on why you sought that endorsement. Just to add context, we are aware of Caucus members and even a previous Caucus president that has received the endorsement of Vicinity and the Caucus simultaneously in the past, which should be evidence that if you demonstrate your commitment to LGBTQ+ equality you will receive a fair chance.

Do not hesitate to contact me directly if you have any additional questions (Mike.Webb@thecaucus.org or 713.443.xxxx - it's okay to text). Please see the list below:

U.S. Pastors Council
Texas Pastors Council
Houston Area Pastors' Council
COGIC PAC
Texas Values
The Conservative Republicans of Texas
Jared Woodfill
Dr. Steven Hotze
Dave Welch
Baptist Ministers Association of Houston & Vicinity PAC

Note 2:

The information presented to you is inaccurate.

Most appreciative,

Mike

Mike Webb

President

Houston GLBT Political Caucus

> -----Original Message-----

> From: Alexis Melvin

> To: mike.webb@thecaucus.org

> Subject: Non-Caucus Endorsements

> Sent: Feb 27 '18 8:10am

>

> Late last week I was told that John Humphries at your direction arranged

> for some candidates to meet with representatives of the Baptist

> Ministers Association of Houston and Vicinity and encouraged them, on

> behalf of The Caucus, to accept the endorsement of the Baptist Ministers

> Association of Houston and Vicinity.

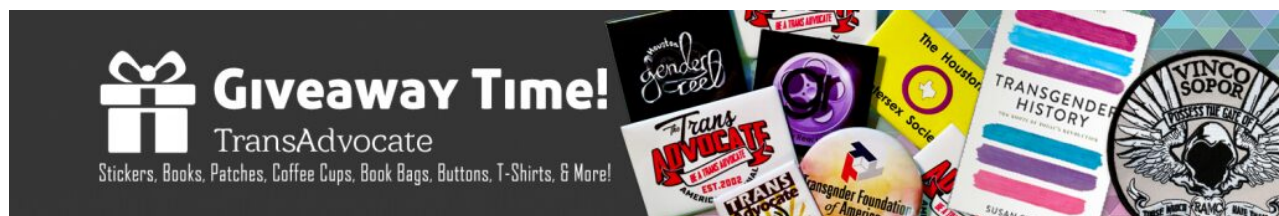
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> I was aware that Brandon Mack was working to start discussions with this

> group last fall and I supported that effort. However I did express

> concern that there were no transgender individuals involved in these

- > discussions since the transgender community was the target of the lies
- > propagated by this group.
- >
- > This group and their current leader Max Miller, Jr. are known to have
- > made anti-transgender attacks in 2015, 2016, and 2017 so it is difficult
- > for me to understand how The Caucus could find their endorsement
- > acceptable and even encourage candidates to accept their endorsement.
- >
- > What actions, if any, taken by the Baptist Ministers Association of
- > Houston and Vicinity indicated to The Caucus leadership that this group
- > was suddenly acceptable to The Caucus in spite of their history of lies
- > and attacks against the transgender community. Was this change in how
- > this group was viewed brought before the membership for a vote ... or at
- > least the board?
- >
- > I am hoping that what I was told is not accurate, but it did come from
- > multiple sources.
- >
- >
- > Alexis Melvin
- > President
- > Transgender Foundation of America
- >



Suggested citation

Cristan Williams. "Houston GLBT Political Caucus throws trans people under the bus." TransAdvocate, March 16, 2018.

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