

We've been here before: child molesters & the political right

By Gwen Smith

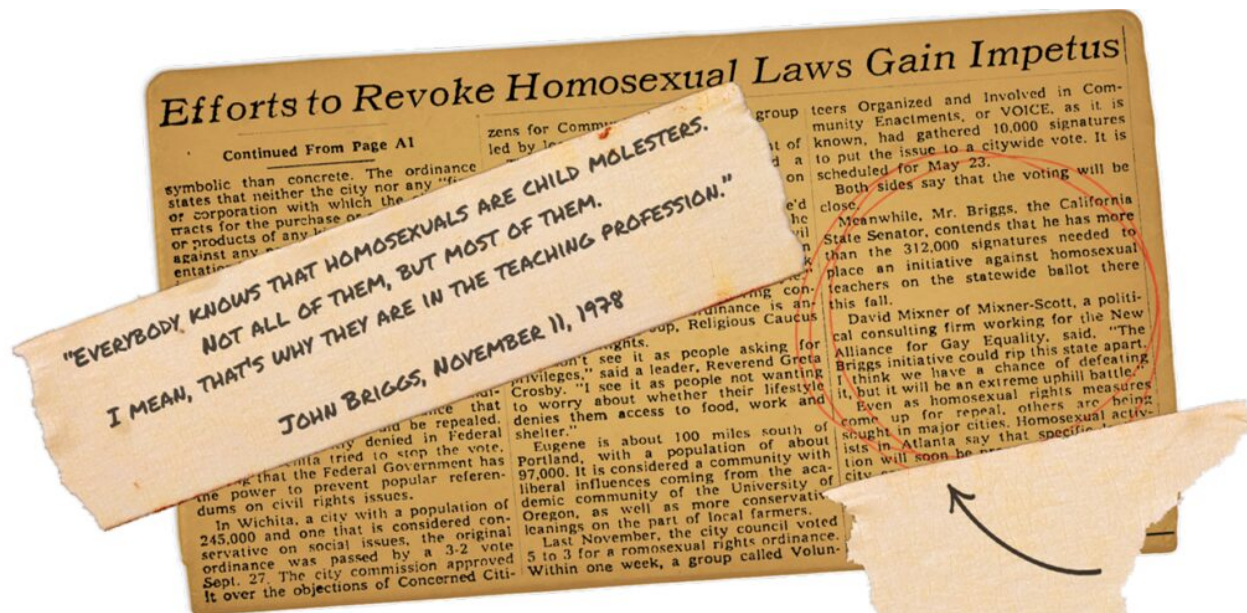
Published April 4, 2017 | Updated June 26, 2018

https://www.transadvocate.com/weve-been-here-before-child-molesters-the-political-right_n_20126.htm

Abstract

This was the era of Anita Bryant's crusade against lesbians and gays. "As a mother," Bryant said, "I know that homosexuals cannot biologically reproduce children; therefore, they must recruit our children." This was the predominant belief; this notion that gays and lesbians need to "recruit" people to grow in numbers, and therefore are grooming children. [...]

Article



This was the era of Anita Bryant's crusade against lesbians and gays. "As a mother," Bryant said, "I know that homosexuals cannot biologically reproduce children; therefore, they must recruit our children."

This was the predominant belief; this notion that gays and lesbians need to "recruit" people to grow in numbers, and therefore are grooming children. It was very effective, as it tapped into primal fears that one's own sons and daughters could be in peril from a menace that the parents could not legally control.

And yes, the notion of "recruiting" is itself a quaint euphemism for child molestation. The assumption is

that the only way one becomes gay is if they end up in a homosexual relationship, not due to any sort of natural human variance.

Groups like the Family Research Council still push these beliefs today, saying “Male homosexuals commit a disproportionate number of child sex abuse cases.” on their own website.

The argument is preposterous, of course.

As cited by the Child Molestation Research & Prevention Institute, 90% of child molesters prey on family or friends. Also, most cases are men married to women.

Proposition 6 was 40 years ago and was riding the wave of several other repeals and actions against the then-young gay rights movement. Aside from people like the FRC still trying to flog long-debunked notions about gay “recruitment,” the issue is long since settled in the eyes of many.

The rhetoric of Bryant and Briggs lives on, however.

Today’s fight is not one about gay teachers, but transgender bathroom rights. While there hasn’t been an “Anita Bryant” in this fight, yet, we’ve had plenty of Senator Briggs copycats, including Governor Dan Patrick of Texas, Pat McCrory of North Carolina, and, of course, former Colorado State representative, Gordon Klingenschmitt.

Klingenschmitt, in speaking on transgender bathroom rights, likely uses some of the more inflammatory language possible, and lays bare the heart of the argument against such access.

“You know, there’s not just a demon of deception here or confusion or sexual immorality,” says Klingenschmitt, “But there is a demon of rape inside of this movement to violate your daughters.

See the echoes of the Proposition 6 arguments? This is an argument that, once again, is designed to tap into those primal fears that a person’s children will be violated, and there will be nothing they can do to stop it.

The aforementioned Family Research Council is a part of all this. Indeed, they consider the fight for transgender rights to be the “third wave” of an “assault on the sexes” that became with the “modern feminist movement” and continued with “the homosexual movement.”

The arguments remain just as ridiculous as they did when Briggs and Bryant fought against the Gay Rights movement.

The gay people of the 1970s were not out to “recruit” en masse. They were - are - gay. Were some potential predators of youth? Yes, but at no higher a percentage than amongst non-gay individuals.

What’s more, the argument itself served as a useful distraction. The fight for rights wasn’t ever about getting the legal right to assault children. It was about being seen as an equal in an intolerant society, and having the same inalienable rights afforded to all.

This, too, is what the transgender bathroom fight is about. It has never been about the right to assault women and children -- obviously -- but about having equal access. It is, again, to have equality in a society that does not see transgender people as equals.

The argument against trans access to restrooms always leaves out two important things, and both reveal the argument for the farce that it is.

First, no law that allows transgender people access to facilities that are appropriate to their gender identity or expression voids any other law against rape, sexual assault, or molestation. All existing laws that protect others from such crimes remain in place.

Proponents of laws against transgender bathroom access might counter that, ultimately, if laws against transgender bathroom access can stop “just one” assault, they’re worth it, but consider if this is true. If we already have laws against such crimes in place, then how is another -- one that threatens the rights of others -- truly going to increase safety?

Secondly, it is remarkably unlikely that a male is going to don a dress and a wig and hop into a women’s room with the express intent to commit assault. Sure, it is possible -- but why would someone? You don’t need to do that to gain access. Just wait for the right moment and sneak in. They’re already committing a crime, so what’s to stop them.

Or, of course, if they really feel the need for costume and subterfuge, I can assure you that a janitor’s jumpsuit is likely the better and more convincing “cover” for them. Should we, perhaps, have laws against maintenance staff?

The bathroom issue is simply a smoke screen, except for those for whom such a smokescreen causes harm.

In a 2013 survey in the *Journal of Public Management and Social Policy*, some 70% of transgender people have faced issues around restrooms. Many have been denied access, while others have faced harassment or even assault.

We can pretty safely assume that 0% of those trans people were attempting to attack anyone at the time: the specter of trans people molesting people in bathrooms -- or even non-transgender people using such laws as “cover” -- simply doesn’t bear itself out in the real world.

Transgender people have existed for a very long time. While we may count the transgender rights movement in mere decades, or even as far back as to when Christine Jorgensen stepped onto the tarmac in New York, transgender people themselves have existed from presumably as long as people have existed.

History is rife with tales of gender variance in culture far and wide, and it is a safe bet that all of these people once had to use the restroom. In the modern era of sex-segregated public facilities, I think we can also safely assume that transgender people used the facilities appropriate to their presentation. Everyone survived their encounters.

Oh, and as an aside, Roy Blick, an inspector from Washington, DC’s “Police Morals Division,” attempted to keep Christine Jorgensen from using the women’s room back in 1953. Even the fight for trans restroom access is decades long.

[Figure] Making ALL facilities coed? (Lockman, 1976)

I should note, too, that the Family Research Council’s “First Wave” of women’s rights also included arguments that the Equal Rights Amendment and other such laws would lead to gender-neutral restrooms

-- and a greater chance of sexual assaults in those facilities under the guise of gender equality.

Anita Bryant's crusade against gay rights stalled when Senator Briggs' Proposition 6 was defeated in California in 1978. While skirmishes remained in the years following the defeat, the trajectory has been towards more acceptances.

If North Carolina's House Bill 2 was the transgender community's Dade County ordinance, let's fight to see the "transgender Proposition 6" -- whatever it may be -- go down a similar path, and rights secured for all trans Americans.

Gwen Smith

Gwen Smith has been a transgender advocate for more than two decades. She is the writer of the Transmissions column for the Bay Area reporter, now in its 15th year. She is also the founder of the Transgender Day of Remembrance an early transgender Internet pioneer and the managing editor for genderfork.com.

Suggested citation

Gwen Smith. "We've been here before: child molesters & the political right." TransAdvocate, April 4, 2017.
https://www.transadvocate.com/weve-been-here-before-child-molesters-the-political-right_n_20126.htm