

Conservatives play transgender con game

by Bill McCann

The conservative con is on again.

This time it's about bathrooms. Actually, it's not really about bathrooms. It's about conservative extremists creating a fake crisis over transgender people using public bathrooms in order to pass laws to discriminate against citizens who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

It's another case of politicians creating a problem that doesn't exist. Sadly, the public keeps falling for it. Meanwhile, conservative columnists perpetuate the con by blaming everything on President Obama.

Remember when a bunch of states, including Texas, passed strict voter ID laws, claiming they were preventing voter fraud? There was virtually no voter fraud – one study found 31 cases in a billion votes cast. The fraud claim was a smokescreen by Republicans to keep low-income people, especially minorities, away from the polls by making it difficult for them to vote. That's because those folks typically don't vote Republican.

Now there is a new faux crisis – allegations that laws allowing people to use public bathrooms based on their gender identity will lead to male predators dressing up as women and assaulting women in bathrooms. The argument is bogus. Politifact, the respected fact-checking organization, could not find any case in the U.S. of anyone convicted of using transgender protections as cover.

One reason conservative extremists have grabbed onto this issue is that they lost big when the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage. Now they are trying other ways to discriminate against LGBT citizens by getting state laws changed. Some 20 states and many cities, including Austin, Dallas, and San Antonio, have laws with varying legal protections against discrimination based on a person's sexual orientation and gender identity.

Transgender became a hot-button word nationally when in March the North Carolina legislature passed a law requiring transgender persons to use public bathrooms based on the gender listed on their birth certificates rather than their gender identity. The law nullified an ordinance passed by the City of Charlotte that would have expanded protections for LGBT persons. But the new state law has done far more damage. It also prohibits North Carolina cities from passing their own anti-discrimination ordinances for all LGBT citizens.

Remember Chastity Bono, the cute little daughter of the singing duo Sonny and Cher? Because of her genetic makeup, Chastity thought of herself as a male as she grew up. She became Chaz Bono. Can you imagine Chaz having to use a woman's bathroom? That's how idiotic this law is.

The push to discriminate against LGBT persons is under way in a number of states. Most certainly the subject will be a rallying cry for conservatives when the Texas Legislature meets in January. Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who never misses an opportunity to grandstand, recently announced his support for a bathroom bill.

When the issue does come up at the Texas Legislature, you can bet there will be much more grandstanding to divert attention from real problems facing the state. And, as in North Carolina, when you dig into the details, the legislation likely will be about more than bathrooms. It will be about negating rules in those Texas cities that currently protect the rights of LGBT citizens.