

To What Lengths Will Paul Singer's Operatives Go to Advance the LGBT Agenda?

Delegates to the Republican National Convention accuse staffers and fellow delegates bankrolled by billionaire political activist Paul Singer of using duplicitous tactics in an attempt to force a floor vote on LGBT issues.

"It's one of the filthiest things I've ever seen in politics," Maryland delegate Ben Marci told The Daily Signal.

CNN first reported that delegates associated with Singer's American Unity Fund were circulating a petition that could lead to a debate on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues during next week's GOP convention.

The petition had the signatures of 37 delegates on the platform committee. But four of those delegates have told The Daily Signal they were lied to about what they were signing.

Now at least 18 of the 37 delegates plan to remove their names from the petition because it would allow a floor debate on the LGBT agenda, The Daily Signal has learned.

The delegates say they believed they were adding their names to a measure that was supplemental to the platform, a proposal drafted by Utah delegate Boyd Matheson that calls for writing shorter, more accessible platforms in the future.

"That's not at all what's being reported or what happened, though," Texas delegate David Barton told The Daily Signal.

Instead, members of American Unity Fund's LGBT advocacy coalition are accused of confusing delegates into signing what they thought was a minority report to force debate on replacing the platform with 17 core principles.

As the platform committee began to wrap up business Tuesday evening, many delegates signed on to the petition without reading it, Marci told The Daily Signal. He says he thought he was signing a petition to attach Matheson's statement of principles on the platform.

"After I went back and looked back at it a second time, I realized it wasn't," he said.

A minority report requires the support of a quarter of the delegates on the platform committee, about 28 signatures in total. If successful, the effort would trigger a floor debate on sensitive issues such as same-sex marriage and transgender bathrooms among the convention's 2,472 delegates.

The goal would be to cleanse the party platform of conservative perspectives on marriage and gender identity issues, an American Unity Fund source told CNN.

When The Daily Signal sought comment by email and phone, the group did not respond.

The tactics caught social conservatives off guard after the platform committee wrapped up Tuesday afternoon.

"We're in the thick of a mess now," Iowa delegate Ben Baringer said.

Baringer said he thought he signed a petition to include discussion on the official committee record, not wipe away the entire platform.

"That's all I was told. I signed the document," he told The Daily Signal. "I appear to have been lied to."

At an impromptu press event, Matheson said his original effort was "hijacked in its last stage by those who may use it for divisive purposes and for a specific agenda."

That effort comes after social conservatives successfully

fended off efforts to soften the Republican Party's stance on marriage and gender identity issues. Delegates Anne Dickerson of New York and Rachel Hoff of the District of Columbia led several efforts to do so, and each failed.

It's not clear if next week's attempt on the convention floor would be more successful. The minority report was not considered by the platform committee Tuesday because it was ruled out of order.

As of Wednesday morning over half of the delegates, Matheson told The Daily Signal, planned to remove their names from the minority report.

Without a quarter of the platform committee's support, the minority report will not advance when the committee's chairman, U.S. Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, presents the petition to the convention next Monday.

Barrasso told reporters Tuesday night that he expects the measure to fail.

With the financial backing of Singer, a hedge fund manager, philanthropist, and longtime LGBT advocate, American Unity Fund has been the most visible and active LGBT advocacy group in Cleveland.

"We are dedicated to advancing the cause of freedom for LGBT Americans by making the conservative case that freedom truly means freedom for everyone," the organization says on its website.

American Unity Fund coordinated with Dickerson, the New York delegate, to spearhead efforts to soften the Republican Party's official stance on social issues.

Next Wednesday, as the convention convenes, the group will host a lunch in Cleveland for former Olympian and current transgender advocate Caitlyn Jenner.

Jenner, a Republican, told The Daily Beast that the goal is “to persuade more Republicans to support freedom for millions of LGBT Americans.”

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