

# Pastors Trade the Pulpit for Politics as They Stand Against Immorality

The Texas lieutenant governor said on Monday he has enlisted Christian pastors statewide to help him win approval for legislation heading to a state Senate committee this week that limits access to public restrooms for transgender people.

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, a Republican and conservative Christian who guides the legislative agenda in the Republican-controlled Senate, told a news conference at the Capitol the Texas Privacy Act is a common-sense measure to keep sexual predators out of bathrooms.

Critics contend the bill infringes on the civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. Business groups say it will cause economic damage, pointing to a similar measure North Carolina enacted into law last year that led to travel and commercial boycotts.

Allowing transgender people to use public bathrooms corresponding to their gender identity rather than their birth gender has become the latest flashpoint in the long U.S. battle over LGBT rights.

Patrick announced the start of a "one million voices" campaign, with pastors enlisted to win support from their congregations for the legislation. Committee debate starts on Tuesday.

"North Carolina was the tip of the spear. We will be next to pass a bill that focuses on privacy, a person's privacy, and public safety," Patrick said, adding that there will be no economic harm if it is enacted.

Seeking help from one religious group in the campaign appears to violate the spirit of the Texas Constitution, which states “no preference shall ever be given by law to any religious society or mode of worship,” according to Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, which promotes the separation of church and state.

Before Patrick spoke, the U.S. Supreme Court scrapped plans to hear a transgender rights case and threw out a lower court’s ruling in favor of a transgender Virginia student after President Donald Trump rescinded a policy protecting such youths under federal law.

A business group sent a letter to Patrick this month saying the bill is “discriminatory legislation that jeopardizes the positive environment for our Texas business operations.”

Patrick may push the bill through the state Senate, but analysts do not expect it to make it through the House, where Republican Speaker Joe Straus has said the legislation is not a priority.

“It will be dead on arrival in the House,” said Mark Jones, a political science professor at Rice University in Houston.  
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