

LISTEN: Glenn interviews pastor being targeted by the city of Houston

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Below is a rough transcript of the segment:

GLENN: I want to tell you something about — that is more concerning to me than Ebola to me in Texas. More concerning than anything that is happening in our country today. And that is the out, the outward attack and hostility and hatred of people of faith. People of faith are under attack. Our churches and our institutions, our pastors, our preachers, our priests, our rabbis are under attack. God forbid you say this mosque has radical Islamic imams preaching hatred. You have a bag of bricks fall on your head. And they immediately shut down everyone from even saying, wait a minute. The bombers came from that mosque. What are they being taught inside that mosque? God forbid the president immediately sends a team of delegates to apologize to that mosque as it happened in Oklahoma.

However, in Texas, in Houston, Texas, there is an ordinance that has been passed by the city, and in this ordinance, it is the most radical thing that you could imagine. And it says: If you are somebody who is even questioning your sexuality. You're a male, but you're not in transition to become a female, you're questioning your maleness. I might be a female. Might be neither. You can use anybody's bathroom. This is madness. Madness.

So here's what's happened: The city has gone hostile on churches because churches tried to overturn an ordinance, and I'm going to let somebody who knows all about tell you in a second. Tried to overturn it. They gathered 55,000 signatures. They only needed 17,000. They gathered 55,000 signatures. After the signatures were there going against the ordinance, they wanted it up on the ballot. They only needed 17,000. The city said, we can't. We can't read all of these. So the ones that weren't legible, they threw out. That brought them down to 31,000 signatures.

Well, this has ended up now in the court because they weren't allowed to have the signatures count to be on the ballot. So now it's ended up in court. What happened? Now, the city is saying, we want all of your sermons, we want the sermons for all of — everything that was preached, we want anything that was passed out. We want anything that was presented. We want anything that you approved or even saw. This goes against the Constitution. You do not have a right to go into a house of worship and ask them for their policies. For their — their sermons. They have a right to speak out their mind, unless they are preaching hatred and violence towards others.

Now, that's where they're get you. Because you're against diversity. Steven Riggle, he is the Grace Community church pastor in Houston, Texas. He is one of the guys — he is one of the main guys leading this, and I'm sorry to say, pastor. I have not been up on this ordinance at all.

We haven't paying attention. Nobody has. Tell me exactly the ordinance, and what happened, and now what the city is saying.

RIGGLE: Well, it's an equal rights ordinance from our mayor, who is the openly lesbian of the largest — she's a lesbian mayor. Of one of the largest cities in the country. This is her final term, so she — this is her crowning legislation to get this through. We opposed it basically on, first, three terms. Gender identity, gender expression, and public accommodations. Public accommodation means that whether it's a public or private business, if the public is allowed to go there, then that's — it's defined as that. Secondly, gender expression and gender identity have to do not with how you were born biologically, but whatever you think you are and express yourself to be. So a person could actually — a man could go into a restaurant. Say, I'm going to go into a lady's restroom. And if he was stopped and said, you can't go in there. He can say, I may look like a man, but I express myself as a woman. He can go in there.

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GLENN: He could be a predator, and you can't say anything to him as long as he expresses that he now feels like a woman.

RIGGLE: Exactly right. So we opposed it on that. We also opposed it on the idea that it was an unequal rights ordinance because what it was giving was granting a certain group of people rights that no one else had or giving them rights only because of their lifestyle choice. We are for equal rights. But the — gay community already has all the rights the rest of us have. We opposed it on that basis. And the mayor already had the city council lined up to vote for it. We had a polling company do a poll in the city. 82 percent came back and said they were opposed to this ordinance. We gave it back to the mayor. Gave it to the council members. They voted it in anyway.

So we did a referendum. We gathered — we knew we had 31,000. Right? And the city secretary, who is the only one charged by the city charter with verifying signatures, stopped counting at 19,000 because we already passed the threshold way a 93 pass rate. And then the city attorney inserted himself, the city secretary was called to the mayor's office with a meeting with the mayor and the city attorney, and she was asked to attach a paragraph that they had written to her report. Which she did.

And basically the city attorney had inserted himself, which has never happened in the history of the city before, and disqualified more than half of the petition signatures.

GLENN: Why? On what basis?

RIGGLE: Well, on basis like you can't read them. They weren't done right. Blah, blah, blah. One sitting city council member's petition was thrown out. My daughter's petition was thrown out, and a third grader could read her signature. This is over and over and over again.

For people who are listening who think somehow this might be some kind of personal spat with the mayor, absolutely not. What you have here is you have the violation of our first amendment

rights. You have the violation of our religious liberty. And, thirdly, you have two people, the mayor and the city attorney, who have single-handedly taken away the voting rights of the fourth largest city in the country.

GLENN: So now they've come to you and they've said, not only you, but everyone, everyone who is in favor of this — favor the repeal of this ordinance, they're asking for what exactly? Your sermons, but what else?

RIGGLE: Here's what happened. A couple of community people and a couple of pastors together filed a lawsuit against the city to force them to put this on the ballot. The five pastors were issued subpoenas by the city. None of the five of us were party to the lawsuit. And in the original subpoena, they asked for 17 different kinds of — of — 17 different areas of communication, including sermons, any emails, text messages, correspondence, anything we communicated to the congregation and included in the subpoena was about the ordinance, about the referendum and about the mayor personally. Anything that had been said about the mayor. So it was very, very broad.

And the mayor and city attorney when challenged on this said, we didn't even know that subpoena was going out. Which, if anyone knows the mayor and the city attorney, they would know — there's no way that the mayor and the city attorney didn't know that was going out. They just got caught. So the five of us said no way. So we, alliance freedom attorneys came in to defend us, and we have said to the mayor, we don't have any problem with you having all of our sermons. In fact, I've said publicly, if the mayor and the city attorney will agree to listen to all of my sermons, I'll give them 31 years' worth. That's how long I've been in this city. They can have them all. As a matter of fact, they're already on the website. They can go there and get them any day of the week. But what we are opposed to is the state telling us that we have to turn those things over for their inspection.

GLENN: Have you ever seen anything like this?

RIGGLE: Well, I've never seen anything like it, but more than that is that Eric Stanley, the lead counsel with the alliance defending freedom, he was asked that same question, and he said — and, you know, they do this constitutional law stuff all over the country and religious liberty cases. He said, I've never seen anything remotely like this at all.

GLENN: This is the most dangerous thing I've seen. This is more dangerous to the republic of Texas than Ebola is. This is more dangerous than anything I've ever seen. Everybody who said — Stu, did you pull up those phrases? I asked Stu about an hour ago. Go find the phrases of people when we said, the next thing we know, if you say yes, this is not about equal rights. It's never about equal rights. This is about shutting people down. As Jeffy said, diversity is great unless it disagrees with my opinion. That's what this has been about. Shutting down the churches and shutting down the people of faith and everyone said, that would never ever happen.

STU: Yeah. Slate. Will churches be forced to conduct gay weddings? Not a chance. That's just a scare tactic conservative groups use to scare voters.

GLENN: It's happening right now. It's happening in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, right now. Two ministers are being threatened with seven years in jail unless they perform a gay wedding. So Slate magazine, liar.

STU: Washington Post. They do allow for outliers here. But they say:

We've been warned nationwide same-sex marriage would bring an unprecedented wave of conflicts between married and same-sex couples and religious traditionalists, who would refuse to provide services in any other way to facilitate the marriages, thus we would finally see clear examples of the harm created by same-sex marriage. These fears have been largely unrealized so far.

GLENN: Have they? How about the people who won't make wedding cakes?

STU: Yeah, and they do say there have been a few celebrated conflicts that they allow for.

GLENN: This is — a few celebrated? Only because it's the beginning. Only because it's the beginning.

Here's what I would like to do. I'm going to give you the address of the mayor.

Mayor Annise Parker.
Houston City Hall.
901 Bagby Street.
Houston, TX 77002.

I would like to ask all preachers, all pastors, all rabbis, to send her your sermons. In fact, if you're not a preacher, pastor or rabbi, I would like to ask you to do your own homework. Go look some things up from George Whitfield. The first evangelical in America. Go look him up. Go find some of his speeches and some of his sermons on religious liberty. Go find the best sermons you can find on religious liberty and send them to city hall in Houston.

America, we have — there are not a lot of chances left. We've got to wake up. Our churches must wake up. If you're a pastor, a priest, a rabbi, if you have any — any flock that you are supposed to be shepherding. You better get your staff out and start leading your flock. Or you'll lose your staff, your flock, and your position. This is the most dangerous thing I've seen. And we are becoming openly hostile to God. It doesn't end well when a nation like ours does that.

Pastor, anything else you want to add to this?

RIGGLE: Just one thing, that the city attorney at a press conference last week just made this comment regarding the outrage that is now happening all over the country. We're getting inundated with people calling and emailing and saying how outraged they are over this. Now, remember this is about first amendment. It's about religious liberty. And it's about voting. The city attorney about all the outrage. I quote his words.

It's ridiculous.

That's a quote. So people better be outraged. And they better lift their voices and they better start screaming.

GLENN: Steve, anything I can do for you, you please contact us. We're in this fight with you. I'll stand with you shoulder to shoulder. And millions of Americans, I hope, will do the same, but anything you need. Thank you so much. God bless. Steve Riggles, the founding senior pastor.