

Texas Muslim Day at the Capitol

*...who is standing with who
in Texas...*

by Kat Rowoldt

Two years ago, I, like most of the legislators, made sure I was *not* at the Capitol on Muslim Day. What a difference two years and a totally different journey in my life has made. I believe Texas Muslim Capitol Day was scheduled on a Friday last session, and the House adjourned on Thursday, to resume on the following Monday. This year, I found it interesting, and probably *not* a coincidence, they scheduled their day when our governor would be giving his State of the State address, which would have both wings at the Capitol in attendance, plus a full press corps.

Making the decision to cover Muslim Day, with plans to try to interview a few of the attendees, wasn't simple. Unlike other events, this one presented unique problems, maybe even danger. If something were going to go wrong, if someone wanted to make a statement with the media at hand to record it, this would be their opportunity.

I asked two of my team to travel with me to Austin. We'd have security with us at the Capitol if we got into trouble. They recognized the risk, believed this was worth it, and accepted the challenge. As the time approached, we thought a lot about past events, when people had been torched, had had acid thrown on them, etc. These were not pleasant breakfast thoughts. We decided we'd take a moment to pray before we headed to the Capitol. Amazingly, in our rush, we forgot. There was no time like the present, so we prayed while driving to the Capitol. We were ready.

Now to park. Oh, my gosh, we hit a real snag. The visitors' parking garage sign flipped over to FULL as we drove up. The streets were lined and it wasn't



The faces who seek to change the leadership in Texas and our country. Mustafaa Carroll, Executive Director CAIR Houston; Shayk Mufti Mohamed-Umer Esmail, Imam of Nueces Mosque in Austin; and Sarwat Husain, President CAIR San Antonio. Consider how different this looks on our Capitol steps, as they declare this is what Texas looks like today.

looking good. I prayed again. Honestly, God led us to a perfect place to park on the street within about the same walking distance. We'd now be using the north entrance (closer) instead of the east one. God is so good.

We arrived early to coordinate with our security, but that too wasn't happening as planned. Stress levels were already rising. Texting to find one another inside the Capitol failed. Just like typos in URLs won't get you to the right website, neither will posting the wrong room number over and over. I finally decided this wasn't going to happen when the location given to me in the text was wrong and we needed to get in place to video the event on the steps. I sent a final text we were heading outside to the south steps.

This was the first trip to the Capitol that I'd seen the Department of Public Safety (DPS) troopers carrying AR-15s. Not all of them, but at least one at various key locations. Maybe I'd just missed that in the years before, but probably not. As I exited the south doors and stood atop the steps, I was surprised by the size of the crowd that had already assembled. We'd been told by the Capitol information staff to expect about 400 people, but the news reported that morning they were expecting many more because of the ban President Trump had just authorized. There were now a couple of thousand quickly gathering.

In front of the growing crowd was a human chain, two-three layers thick, that encircled the area where the speakers were going to be. They were apparently allowing the media in the middle of the circle to cover the event. Well . . . that's where we needed to go, too: into the center of this human chain.



With trepidation, we headed down the steps to the left, looking for the place to get through this wall of people. Shortly, I noticed someone getting through the chain and we headed to that spot. As I announced we were media, a man to my left glanced at my Capitol Press Credentials attached to my blouse and read my CRN name as "CNN." "Let her in, she's CNN. We need her in here." I was never so thrilled to be misidentified in my life. Thank You, Lord, for that odd "favor" we were given.

The sea of people parted immediately and we made our way into the lineup of press cameras. I got the spot I needed and we set up our things. We'd be doing some still shots while videoing this whole event. It was nice having the sea of humanity held back and this center open space for us to be in.

What an interesting group of people encircling us. Many of them had on a t-shirt that read, "I Stand With My Muslim Neighbors." They had their arms linked

together. They were so serious about not letting anyone through their arms. Our thought wrestled with our reality. We were standing in the midst of numerous jihadis, undetected, unknown to hundreds of people who lacked the knowledge. To most, they blended into the crowd, looking like everyone else. We were there to capture what was really happening in our state, our nation.

Finally, I spotted my security person coming out of the Capitol, looking for me. He called me on the phone. He needed to get in the circle with us in order to protect us if the need should arise. I walked up to the circle at the point where he was, but they wouldn't let him through. I told them he was part of my team and I needed him with me. They told us he'd have to go the point where I came through. That's the only point that would open.

He wasn't tagged as press like each of us were. I needed that favor again to get him into the circle with us. God was good. I shouted that he was part of my team and I needed him inside. The people parted and he came into the circle, along with a dear Jewish friend who was with him. They stood behind us, covering our backs.

I saw a group of young girls inside the circle with us, but behind us. They were all dressed in beautiful purple and white Islamic dress. I grabbed my cell phone for its camera and left my tripod behind. I broke away from my team and walked over to the girls. They were beautiful



young women. I caught the attention of one of them and asked if their dress had some type of significance. An adult male came over to me and informed me that they were students from the Muslim school. I complimented them on their beautiful attire, said that purple was my favorite color.



I rejoined my team. The press was filling in and it was getting tight. One of my team took a notepad and jotted down observations, while the other was shooting still shots. While I was away from our group, the Peace Observers had been told to treat the press nicely. Sweet! You could now see key people beginning to position themselves around the podium. There was a group of legislators, another group of spiritual leaders, and one of CAIR leaders and imams.

The sun was beaming down and I had forgotten my sunglasses in the car. There was no going back for them. My Jewish friend heard my comment about my

glasses and immediately removed her Ray Bans for me. I was blessed. She left sometime during the program without my knowledge, leaving me her beautiful Ray Bans. What a friend! I have returned them.

We stood and waited. It was about 9:45AM.

It's a rare thing for me to arrive late for an event. I prefer to come early, set up, then get my bearings. I like to scope out my surroundings. I want to know



This is from inside the circle looking away from the Capitol. You can see how large of a ring the "Peace Observers" created, leaving a nice opening in the middle.

who's there. Who's talking with whom. What's unusual happening in the background? So you arrive. Stand. Wait. Watch.

One of the *Dallas Morning News* guys to my left leaned into me to ask a question. He was new to the Capitol. I learned from him that he'd heard that the program wasn't going to start until close to 10:30. More waiting. On the right of us were two young ladies who apparently do a *live* segment on Facebook for the *Dallas Morning News*. They set up their tripod and placed their iPhone on it to livestream the event into Facebook.

We were keenly aware that we were the subject of many of the photographs being taken. This had happened to us the day before, during the Truth in Textbooks forum. A photographer from the *Washington Post* had captured each of us individually when we weren't looking, yet the slight flash toward our faces caught our attention. So now there were several people photographing us. These were Muslims based on their dress and presence. Interestingly, we didn't see them photographing any other media. Hmmm. . . .

About 10:20 they gave us the heads up that they were going to start. They needed to hurry, as they had reserved seating at the State of the State address with the governor. We were more than ready to get this event underway.

Mustafaa Carroll, Executive Director of CAIR Houston, emceed the event, opening it with his expression of joy at how many supporters were there for them. He declared, "This is what America looks like! This is what Texas looks like!" to the enthusiastic Peace Observers who had come to stand with them in unity. As one of my teammates observed, as she scanned the faces of the crowd, they looked at him like he had "rock star" status.

Carroll invited Shaykh Mufti Mohamed-Umer Esmail, imam of the Nueces Mosque in Austin, to open the event with prayer. He too expressed his great satisfaction in seeing more supporters than protestors "to spread the love." Esmail stated that the Qu'ran says, "Return evil with love." As he spoke, you could hear the protestors, who were being kept close to 11th Street, the street the Capitol faces and which is a good distance from the steps, shouting over him on a PA system. While he prayed, he thanked every sect of religion and organized groups that he could think of, including LGBTQ persons, women's organizations, and the Texas State Representatives who were participating in the event. In his long list of entities, naming Catholics, Jews, Buddhists, atheists, etc., interestingly he never mentioned Christians.

At the conclusion of Esmail's prayer, two women wearing the green "I Stand With My Muslim Neighbors" t-shirts came forward to lead everyone in the National Anthem. They both took a knee in order to sing, concluding their beautiful presentation with locked hands raised in solidarity. The crowd roared. Very few people in attendance sang the National Anthem and many did not place their hands over their heart.

Next, Sarwat Husain, the President of CAIR San Antonio and one of the organizers of the event, came forward to welcome everyone. In her brief statement, she stressed that "We are Americans; we are law abiding citizens." Husain pointed out they are supposed to be leaders, as well as work with the leaders; it is their duty.

The CAIR president pointed out how divided the country has become, but seeing everyone there that morning, "having all of you here, America is now coming together." She ended her remarks with stating that they are preparing Muslims to be the leaders of tomorrow. According to the applause, the crowd was agreement with her statements.

Next to speak was State Representative Celia Israel (D-Dist 50). This began a rotation of people who stood by the person speaking at the podium, changing with each new speaker. Israel commented that there were a couple of dozen representatives there with her on the steps. Most of her fellow Democrats are visible in the video footage.



A few of the spiritual leaders standing on the Steps of the Capitol.

The Mayor of Austin greeted everyone with the Islamic greeting, “*As-Salaam Alaikum*,” when he stepped forward. It was very noticeable how each speaker knew the customary greeting and were able to pronounce it correctly. The majority of the people in the crowd replied with the appropriate response.

He introduced his fellow council members standing with him, noting they did have a quorum. After his brief comments, he turned the microphone over to one of his council members, Greg Casar, who is known for having just recently presented and worked to pass the "anti-phobia resolution" [<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=264598>], which states in part: "*The City Council of Austin condemns all hateful speech and violent action directed at Muslims, those perceived to be Muslims, immigrants, and people of color. . . .*"

The audience was aware of the local law. Casar informed the listeners of how important the Muslims have been to our country since its foundation, then ended with the chant: No Ban—No Wall.

Both State Representative Ina Minjarez (D- Dist 124) and Victoria Neave (D- Dist 107) took a moment to greet the attendees as it was their turn at the podium. Minjarez let everyone know their offices were safe havens for them, that they are welcome at the Texas Capitol, while Neave emphasized the importance of speaking out for what is right.



Reverend Ron Lister of The International Center for Spiritual and Social Activism, reaffirmed what everyone was seeing around them is truly what America looks like, giving it the Reverend Martin Luther King tone of delivery. His ultimate statement was, "Let freedom ring until every Muslim feels the freedom of god."

He was upstaged by the young woman who followed, Hiba Siddiqi from St. Edwards College in Austin, president of the Muslim Student Association, who truly rallied the crowd with her powerful speech. Her closing comment was that you must "create change."

Another woman by the name of Courtney from Rep. Lloyd Doggett's office was next. She read a letter from Doggett expressing his regrets in not being able to attend, but "he was there in

spirit and solidarity." He urged people to stand against Trump's ban that had just occurred, quoted the Qu'ran in the midst of the message, and ended it with a Muslim blessing.

Alia Salem, DFW CAIR Director, ended the program by thanking everyone who had anything to do with making that day happen; it was a list with a twist to the finish: She said she felt she needed to also thank Representative Kyle Biedermann (R-Dist 73) and President Trump, for they were the real reason so many people had turned out that morning.

The event stopped as abruptly as it had started. My ears had been bombarded with propaganda in carefully crafted speeches to further their agenda, and our national history totally distorted and rewritten for my hearing. The values and principles that our country was founded on was absent that morning. These weren't the faces of our founding fathers, nor their descendants. These were people from other lands bringing their alien society over to mingle and rule over ours.



The people who were participating in the complete program that morning were instructed to make their way to the Methodist Church where they would meet next. Someone pointed in the direction they should begin moving.

It was at that moment that I turned and realized the crowd that had been kept at bay earlier had made its way up to us. There was the usual frantic commotion as reporters grabbed their things to move to the next point. I was shutting down my camera and tripod when I noticed that one of my team members had reached down and grabbed my cell phone. She wanted to take a quick picture of someone in the crowd.

She said she'd heard a man behind us to the left shout "Allahu Akbar" ("Allah is greater [than Yahweh]"), the cry generally heard just before horrific acts occur. Thank God, nothing happened. The crowd quickly disbursed and we made our way back into the Capitol. When listening to the footage we shot from that morning, she realized we had captured those words.

My thoughts as I walked back up the steps into the Capitol were about the various signs and sounds I'd learned, so I can now identify who's Sharia-

compliant, and therefore is a jihadi. It might be their attire, the way they wear their beard, certain words they use, the length of their pants, etc., that identified them to me. Who would have dreamed that this could happen on the steps of the Capitol of Texas? There were no good 'ole west Texas cowboys to be had that morning among the crowd.

THE FINAL PHASE: The Interviews

We made our way to the rotunda and decided to sit for a few minutes. Between the sun beating down on us and standing for an hour and a half, my age was telling on me. I was also very thirsty and I'd run out of water.

While we were catching our breath, our security man brought a woman over to us who was carrying a dog suit. She had apparently been outside with the protestors, wearing the dog suit and holding a sign with a picture of crucified dog on it. The news media didn't report this: That while no Muslims had been attacked at the Capitol, this activist had been. I was able to locate, through various connections, this woman and get her story.

Liz Theiss, whose website is www.stophemagnet.com (visit for her whole story) out of Houston, was wearing the dog outfit. In speaking on the phone, she described being encircled by a group of people, that groping had commenced, and before things went to a potentially dangerous level, our State Troopers had been summoned to help her by breaking up the taunting mob. She had chosen the dog outfit to get attention. It seemed to her that the plight of Christians being slaughtered, the truth itself, wasn't getting people to wake up to what was happening. Muslims do not like dogs, because Mohammad didn't like dogs. She thought she would seek out dog lovers and try to get their attention that way. She got unexpected attention in the middle of a crowd at the Capitol.



Liz experienced what could have ended very badly. Being encircled by the Peace Observers (she believes), is the same act known as *tahharush* used in Europe by Muslim men to entrap women to rape, murder, or intimidate them. Our wonderful DPS troopers saved the day!

Now it was time for me to decide how to approach a few of these Muslims and try to get an interview. I had been told that at best I probably would only get a quick answer to one question and that I wouldn't be able to carry on a

conversation. I sat there and watched them make their way through the grand, domed area. I didn't feel inspired to approach any of them. I was tired.

As I considered my options, I ruled out speaking to women who had a male with them. My goal was to hear a woman's perspective on this event. I'd jotted down a few questions I'd ask if I got the opportunity. I don't usually prepare questions in advance, but felt I should this time so I wouldn't just draw a blank.

This was a different kind of turf I was on now.

After a bit, I noticed a group of three younger ladies walking into the rotunda. I alerted my cameraman that I was going to approach them, "Follow me." I was successful in interviewing Talat Rashid, from Pakistan, now a naturalized citizen. Her two friends stepped back and my third teammate pulled them aside and chatted with them while I interviewed Rashid. The noise in the rotunda made it almost impossible to hear, plus when Muslim men saw a woman being interviewed, they'd move in close to hear what was being said and talk loudly to cause a distraction.

Next, I interviewed Huma Rashid, who was walking with a friend. We were able to better position us so I could hear and the camera could pick up what she said. It became obvious they were all trained to say virtually the same thing. Their talking point was their anger toward President Trump for his *ban on Muslims*. When I asked them how they felt about Trump's moratorium on people from just the seven countries, they totally lost their train of thought and each had to regroup and start over with her talking points about the *ban*.

I was alerted that Sarwat Husain, the President of CAIR San Antonio and one of the organizers of the event, was coming my way. I suddenly really wanted to interview her. Another reporter had snagged her and pulled her over to the side to do a video interview. I positioned myself to step up when they finished so I could get my turn.

She acknowledged I was there waiting and graciously allowed me to interview her. We heard virtually the same words for the third time from her. It's the *ban*! When I asked my question about it just being a 90-day moratorium on refugees from seven countries, even she lost her train of thought. Once she regained her footing, she began spouting out her anger against President Trump.

I decided to change the focus of the interview and mentioned the large group of people who had attended this morning, that she must be pleased. Immediately, her whole countenance changed from anger to tremendous satisfaction. It was so noticeable, I actually commented back to her what I had just seen come over her face. She was well pleased with the attendance that morning. Yes—she

surely should have been. There were more supporters than Muslims there, probably 3 or 4-to-1.

Having successfully interviewed someone way above the level I thought I'd approach, I was more than ready to exit the Capitol and grab some food. As my awesome cohorts walked with me out of the Capitol we talked about what we'd seen and felt. My first comment was the fact that I hadn't experienced any fear, but felt peace the whole time we were there. I was so thankful for the prayers from so many people. They agreed.

My greatest concern leaving that day was the number of citizens who were standing with the Muslims, who truly did not understand the ramifications of what they were doing. Or maybe they do! That's even more alarming.

The following morning, I kept seeing the spiritual leaders on the steps. In my heart I heard the Scripture, "My people perish for lack of knowledge." Hosea 4:6, with a strong emphasis on the word *My*. I understood that Scripture in a whole new light now. These spiritual leaders are misleading His people, their congregations. It's His people who end up perishing because they lack the knowledge of what is really happening around them.

God have mercy! Wake up, America! If the Muslim invasion continues, changing our country into what they want it to be, "freedom" will become a historical talking point. PC America must end! We must regain control of our nation and put common sense, God, and respect for our fellow Americans back into our culture. Lord help us!

Until next time

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