

Nonbinary student dead following beating by group in Oklahoma high school bathroom

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A sophomore student, Nex Benedict, who identified as non-binary, died this month following a severe beating by three older female students in a Owasso, Oklahoma, high school bathroom.

According to Nex's mother Sue Benedict, who spoke to the *Independent*, on February 7 Nex was in a fight along with a transgender student against three older girls in a girls bathroom during which Nex was knocked to the ground, hitting their head. Nex suffered severe head injuries from the altercation. According to the police the fight was "broken up by other students who were present in the restroom and a school staff member who was supervising outside of the restroom."

Nex had been bullied due to their gender identity since early 2023. Far-right Republican Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt signed an anti-transgender bathroom ban in early 2022 mandating students use restrooms that match their sex listed at birth.

In text messages released to local media posthumously by the family, Nex said that those who had "jumped" them "had been bullying me and my friends and I got tired of it so I poured some water on them and all 3 came after me. School did not report to the police and is probably getting sued." Nex also wrote that the school "lost the girls after they made me and my friends separate and one of my friends had to be escorted to his bus because they couldn't find them."

The *Independent* reported, "Ms Benedict said she was furious that the school had failed to call an ambulance or the police. She said the school then informed her Nex was being suspended for two weeks." Nex's mother described them as a straight-A student who liked the videogames Ark and Minecraft, was devoted to their cat Zeus, and was "going places."

Nex's sister Malia Pila, who is also LGBTQ, told the *Independent* that gender identity in the family "was not an issue nor anything that anybody cared about."

Nex's mother took them to Bailey Medical Center in Owasso for treatment. That night they fell asleep listening to music with a sore head. When they were both getting ready for an appointment in Tulsa the next morning Nex suddenly collapsed. EMT personnel found Nex was not breathing, and pronounced them dead that evening in the hospital.

Nex's family released the following statement: "While various investigations are still pending, the facts currently known by the family, some of which have been released to the public, are troubling at best. We urge those tasked with investigating and prosecuting all potentially liable parties to do so fully, fairly and

expediently. Notwithstanding, the family is independently interviewing witnesses and collecting all available evidence.'

The Owasso Police Department claims that "preliminary information from the medical examiner's office is that a complete autopsy was performed and indicated that the decedent did not die as a result of trauma."

As Judd Legum, a journalist for the newsletter Popular Information, pointed out on X, "If the police will not release the autopsy report, why are they releasing partial, paraphrased information?"

Nex's death comes amid a far-right campaign against public education and equality in Oklahoma and across the US led by the Republican Party and unopposed by the Democratic Party.

Oklahoma's Republican government has been particularly prominent in vilifying transgender and LGBTQ students and people more broadly, as many people on social media have pointed out, as well as LGBTQ advocacy groups and news articles. Oklahoma is one of nearly two dozen states which have banned gender-affirming healthcare for transgender minors, with a statewide ban coming into effect in 2023. According to the ACLU the state legislators have already proposed 54 anti-LGBTQ laws, more than any other state.

This reactionary campaign is shown most starkly in the recent appointment of Chaya Raichik to the Oklahoma Department of Education's Library Media Advisory Committee by the fascistic superintendent of the state Education Department, Ryan Walters.

Raichik previously targeted the Owasso school district through her "Libs of Tik Tok" X account, with her witch-hunt causing a pro-LGBTQ teacher who Nex admired to be fired from their high school, according to Nex's mother, who said, "Nex was very angry about it." Raichik has called the LGBTQ community a "cult" whose leaders "brainwash" others to join, "groom kids" and are "extremely poisonous."

In response to outrage from many users on X, Raichik denied her role in Nex's death and claimed that "trans activists" were attempting to have her targeted for violence.

Raichik has also denied inspiring the neo-Nazi who carried out a mass shooting at an Allen, Texas mall. The shooter, 33-year-old Mauricio Garcia, posted on the social media website OK.ru before the shooting about his flaunting of his adulation of Hitler before "woke" teachers. He started out the posting stating, "This post was inspired by Libs of TikTok."

A November 2, 2023, *USA Today* article headlined, "When Libs

of TikTok tweets, threats increasingly follow,” detailed Raichik’s “stochastic terrorist” methods which are aimed at demonizing a section of society so as to inspire violent actions against them. (The word “stochastic” refers to random distributions, indicating that the terrorist actions could not be directly linked to Raichik’s diatribes, allowing her to escape criminal liability.)

Raichik celebrated this tribute by changing her bio to describe herself as a “stochastic terrorist” (she has since removed this wording), posting a smiling picture on her X account with the article in hand, and by changing the background of her X page to feature a bomb-themed logo.

Raichik has been made a prominent Republican Party figure precisely for her hateful incitement. She was a featured speaker at the 2023 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) which also featured Trump and neo-Nazi Jack Posobiec, meeting with Trump at his resort in Mar-a-Lago, and appearing on Tucker Carlson’s show. Raichik has had her QAnon conspiracy theory posts endorsed by billionaire Elon Musk as part of his systematic promotion of anti-immigrant, racist and antisemitic propaganda on his platform X.

Ryan Walters has been at the forefront of the campaign to destroy public education and attack public school educators. He has worked to further destroy the separation of church and state by introducing Christianity into public schools and expanding school vouchers that funnel public funds to religious institutions.

His vicious attacks against LGBTQ people, particularly trans and non-binary youth, is part and parcel of his attacks on public education. Walters has claimed that “the most radical concept we’ve ever come across in K-12 education, [is] that you can be gender fluid (or) change your gender constantly.” He forced Oklahoma school principal Shane Murnan to resign for performing as a drag queen in his personal time saying “you have no place in the classroom.”

Walters is supported by various far-right groups including the 1776 Project PAC, Americans for Prosperity and Moms for Liberty. The latter has pledged to back similar candidates and uses the phony “parental rights” campaign, as we have previously written, “to assault social equality, culture, and the conditions and democratic rights of educators and students.” The point of this, as well as the bipartisan attack on public education, is the “subordination of all social rights and the allocation of public funds to the priorities of the ruling elite—first and foremost, war and the preparation of future wars for American hegemony—but also including intensified exploitation of the working class and reprisals against critical thinking, culture, internationalism and socialism.”

Notably, Walters has issued no press release on Nex’s death as of this writing. Biden’s Department of Education secretary Miguel Cardona released a terse statement claiming he was “devastated” by the news of Nex’s passing, but made no call for an investigation into the killing, let alone for those who are politically responsible for the violence in the Republican Party to be held accountable.

Any legitimate investigation would necessarily indict not just the ghouls in the Oklahoma Republican Party but the highest levels of the party as well as Trump, who espouse the very same politics as

Ryan, in addition to lauding bigots like Raichik.

As is the case with the US-Mexico border, where the Biden administration has embraced far-right anti-immigrant policies in order to get funding for the genocide in Gaza and war with Russia in Ukraine, the Democratic Party is hostile to any real defense of the democratic rights of trans and other minorities as this would interfere with their push to acquire more funds for war and genocide as well as their war on workers at home as was seen in the bipartisan vote to shut down a rail workers strike in 2022.

As the WSWS wrote over 25 years ago in 1998 on the anti-gay lynching of 22-year old Matthew Shepard in Wyoming:

Taking advantage of the prevailing political confusion, the extreme right wing seeks to build up support by playing on existing economic and social anxiety ... The aim of the fundamentalists and their Republican allies is to identify in the popular mind a golden age when economic security and “Christian values” predominated. Playing on sexual insecurity and backwardness, particularly among the most psychologically vulnerable layers of semi-lumpen youth, is a perennial element of any reactionary social movement.

In responding to these dangers, not the slightest confidence can be placed in the passage of hate crimes bills, in the courts, or in the Democratic Party ...

The defense of the rights of gays and all minorities under attack is linked with the broader question of building a mass-based socialist movement in the working class and creating a political culture inoculated against the toxins of racism, anti-Semitism, chauvinism and anti-gay bigotry.



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