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Nex Benedict's death must be a turning point in the fight for trans lives!

written by Coalition to Protect Trans Lives
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Nex Benedict

Nex Benedict, a 16-year-old transgender Choctaw student, was brutally beaten in an Owasso, Oklahoma, high school bathroom on Feb. 7 and died the next day. The school did not call an ambulance for Nex even though he couldn't get up after the assault. (Earlier Nex was widely reported as being nonbinary, but those close to him say that he preferred he/him pronouns.)

We stand in solidarity with Nex's family and community, with Owasso students who walked out of their classes in protest on Feb. 26, and with those who have come out to vigils across the country to demand "Justice For Nex."

The murder of Nex Benedict comes nearly a year after the Oklahoma state legislature passed a ban on trans students and teachers using restrooms that align with their gender. It's a completely predictable result of the statewide and nationwide legislative assault that demonizes trans people, including children.

Besides bathroom bans, state legislatures have passed bans on gender-affirming health care, participation in sports, book bans, drag bans, "don't say gay or trans" laws, and more. Nex's death also reflects the centuries-long war of the racist state and federal governments against Indigenous peoples, which often includes suppressing traditions with a more diverse view of gender and sexuality.



Students and community members walk out at Owasso High School, Feb. 26.

Since the story of Nex's death made national news, local police have attempted a

cover-up, implying that Nex's death was caused by drug use rather than the violence inflicted on him (exposed thanks to Nex's family and independent journalists). Oklahoma Republican state senators held a public forum where they labeled LGBTQ+ people "filth" and teachers "terrorists." Prominent corporate media outlets have given whitewashing interviews to bigoted Oklahoma Department of Education Superintendent Ryan Walters and social media terrorist Chaya Raichik ("Libs of TikTok"), who last year instigated bomb threats aimed at a trans teacher at Nex's school.

But Walters, Raichik, and the rest are mouthpieces for wealthy capitalists and big corporations – the real forces behind the anti-trans panic. Of the 47 sponsors of the Oklahoma bathroom bill:

- 35 took money from energy or oil/gas companies
- 28 took money from the finance industry
- 22 took money from the health care industry

Other major contributors include the agriculture and construction industries. Many others are "self-funded" through their own wealth – they're capitalists or executives themselves.

The deluge of anti-trans hate is meant to distract people from the deepening economic crisis, low wages, exorbitant rents, austerity measures, and genocidal wars that the politicians refuse to address. These industries profit off of the destruction of the environment, super-exploitation of workers, raising the prices for medicine and hospital visits, and the overall misery and fear of the people. They need a scapegoat for people's suffering, and they have chosen trans people as one of their primary targets. They know that if they make us hate each other, we cannot unite against them.

The Biden administration and the Democratic Party, most of whom are in the

pockets of war profiteers and oil companies, demand the votes of LGBTQ+ people. But Biden has done nothing to protect trans youth through the last three years of legal and extralegal attacks. In fact, while thousands were coming out to remember Nex Benedict, Biden's Department of Veterans Affairs ruled that trans veterans would not be eligible for gender-affirming surgeries.

Trans people can no longer accept the argument that we must support the "lesser evil" Democratic administration when, with its silence and inaction, it is facilitating the Republicans' deadly attacks on trans lives.

We call on all workers — transgender and cisgender — to stand against these attacks. We must not turn away from the killing of Nex Benedict. This must be the moment when we stand together in opposition and resistance.

We have seen for decades now how anti-trans bills end up hurting everyone, whether it is cis women harassed in bathrooms for not appearing feminine enough, cis children harassed for being better at sports, cis parents under threat of losing their trans children, or intersex people who are harmed by these laws. If we do not unite against these attacks, the violence against trans youth and all trans people will snowball, and the attack against all workers will escalate as well. The forces of hate and oppression will not stop with trans people — a unified movement is our only hope.

There is a direct line between the rise in anti-trans laws of the last decade and the escalation of violence against trans people. Last year saw more reported murders and violent deaths of trans people than ever; suicide rates among trans people, especially trans youth, are alarmingly high.

Last October, the [Coalition to Protect Trans Lives](https://www.coalitiontoprotecttranslives.org/) organized a National March to Protect Trans Youth in Orlando, Florida, and participants joined a lawsuit against Florida's bathroom ban. We are working to build an independent fight-back

movement nationwide, in the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement, the Stonewall Uprising, and 1980s AIDS activism, to link arms with Indigenous nations, Black and Palestinian people, migrants, and other communities resisting the far-right onslaught. As we prepare for bigger and bolder actions in 2024, we ask you to get involved.

The trans community doesn't need any more martyrs. We call on all who are outraged by the death of Nex Benedict to stand against the assault on trans lives across the U.S.

Rise up and organize for trans lives!

