



FLORIDA

Florida Republican apologizes after calling transgender people 'mutants'

Lawmakers seemed taken aback by his comments.



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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — A Florida Republican apologized Monday after he called transgender people “demons” and “mutants” during a hearing on a bill that would make it a misdemeanor offense for someone to use a bathroom that doesn’t align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

The comments by state Rep. Webster Barnaby (R-Deltona) were prompted by testimony from LGBTQ advocates and transgender people opposing the measure, one of several “bathroom bills” that are gaining traction in conservative-leaning states. Critics say the bill will be a “tool of harassment” while Republican lawmakers contend their intent is to protect children.

“We have people that live among us today on planet earth that are happy to display themselves as if they were mutants from another planet,” Barnaby said during Monday’s hearing in the House Commerce Committee. “This is the planet earth, where God created men male and women female.”

Named the “Safety in Private Spaces Act,” Republican leaders in Florida are moving on the legislation that would require people to use restrooms and changing facilities according to their sex assigned at birth at places like schools and restaurants.

After several speakers, some identifying as transgender, spoke out against the bill during public comment, Barnaby sounded off about the “evil, dysphoria, disfunction” he said is gripping society. His remarks embody the tense debate that has followed the culture war bills being pushed by Florida Republicans this year focused on how gender identity and sexual identity intersect with parental rights and education.

“The lord rebuke you, Satan, and all of your demons and all of your imps who come parade before us,” Barnaby said. “That’s right, I called you demons and imps, who come and parade before us and pretend that you are part of this world.”

Barnaby, 63, who identifies as Christian, was originally born in Birmingham, England and [moved to Florida in 1991](#). He was elected to the House in 2020.

Democratic and Republican lawmakers on the panel seemed taken aback by his comments, which came as they debated the bill ahead of advancing it to the House floor.

“I’m still a little bit thrown off from the last comments here,” state Rep. Kristen Arrington (D-Kissimmee) said after Barnaby’s address.

She then turned to opponents of the bill, saying: “[I] just really want to let you all know that there are many here who understand and support you.”

Some Republicans attempted to distance themselves from Barnaby’s remarks and thanked the audience for speaking.

“You’re not an evil being,” said state Rep. Chase Tramont (R-Port Orange), addressing speakers at the hearing. “I believe that you’re fearfully and wonderfully made, and I want you to live your life well.”

Minutes after Republicans advanced the bathroom bill, Barnaby apologized for his comments.

“I referred to trans people as demons,” Barnaby said. “I would like to apologize to the trans community for referring to you as demons.”

By advancing the proposal, FL H.B.1521 (23R), House Republicans put Florida on the cusp of joining state such as Iowa, Arkansas, Alabama, Oklahoma and Tennessee in passing bills addressing bathroom use.

Florida’s legislation would open the door for any person 18 years or older to be charged with a second-degree misdemeanor if they enter a restroom or changing facility designated for a person that isn’t the sex they are assigned at birth and refuse to “immediately depart” when asked by someone else. It also requires local school districts to craft code of conduct rules to discipline students who do the same.

These policies would be enforced at educational institutions, hurricane shelters, substance abuse providers, health care facilities and public accommodations, which by law include lodgings, restaurants, gasoline stations entertainment spaces and more.

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