

Spectrum WT, et al., v. Wendler, et al.

Exhibit A
to Verified Complaint for
Civil Rights Violations

From: President Walter V. Wendler
Sent: Monday, March 20, 2023 4:47 PM
To: CURRENT_STUDENT@LISTS.WTAMU.EDU
Subject: Message from President Wendler: A Harmless Drag Show? No Such Thing.



Office of the President

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To: Students, Faculty and Staff
From: Walter V. Wendler, President
Date: March 20, 2023
RE: A Harmless Drag Show? No Such Thing.

West Texas A&M University will not host a drag show on campus. It was advertised for March 31, 2023, as an effort to raise money for [The Trevor Project](#). The nonprofit organization focuses on suicide prevention—a noble cause—in the LGBTQ community. Any person considering self-harm for any reason is tragic.

I believe every human being is created in the image of God and, therefore, a person of [dignity](#). Being created in [God's image](#) is the basis of Natural Law. James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, prisoners of the culture of their time as are we, declared the Creator's origin as the [foundational fiber](#) in the fabric of our nation as they breathed life into it.

Does a drag show preserve a single thread of human dignity? I think not. As a performance exaggerating aspects of womanhood (sexuality, femininity, gender), drag shows stereotype women in cartoon-like extremes for the amusement of others and discriminate against womanhood. Any event which diminishes an individual or group through such representation is wrong. I registered a similar concern on campus when individuals [debased Latinas](#)

regarding a quinceañera celebration. Should I let rest misogynistic behavior portraying women as objects? While I am not a woman, my best friend I have been married to for over a half-century is. I am also blessed to have daughters-in-law and granddaughters. Demeaning any demeans all. This is not an intellectual abstraction but a stark reality.

WT endeavors to treat all [people equally](#). Drag shows are derisive, divisive and demoralizing misogyny, no matter the stated intent. Such conduct runs counter to the purpose of WT. A person or group should not attempt to elevate itself or a cause by mocking another person or group. As a university president, I would not support "[blackface](#)" performances on our campus, even if told the performance is a form of free speech or intended as humor. It is wrong. I do not support any show, performance or artistic expression which denigrates others—in this case, women—for any reason. WT intends to provide fair opportunities to all based on academic performance. [Ideas, not ideology](#), are the coin of our realm. A university campus, [charged by the state](#) of Texas to treat each individual fairly, should elevate students based on achievement and capability, performance in a word, without regard to group membership—an implacable and exacting standard based on educational mission and service to all, sanctioned by the legislature, the governor and numerous elected and appointed officials.

The WT community should live by the Golden Rule. As a Christian, I personally learned this in the book of [Matthew](#), "*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*" Buddhism expresses it this way: "Hurt not others with that which pains yourself." Judaism states, "What you yourself hate, do to no man." The law of reciprocity is at work in every known religion and society on the planet. Colloquially speaking, it is a manifestation of [Newton's](#) Third Law of Motion, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction."

Mocking or objectifying in any way members of any group based on appearance, bias or predisposition is unacceptable. Forward-thinking women and men have worked together for nearly two centuries to eliminate [sexism](#). Women have fought valiantly, seeking equality in the voting booth, marketplace and court of public opinion. No one should claim a right to contribute to women's suffering via a slapstick sideshow that erodes the worth of women.

When humor becomes harassment, it has gone too far. Any reading of the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's](#) purpose, coupled with common

sense, affirms that acts of prejudice in the workplace and our campus is a workplace, even when not criminal, are harmful and wholly inappropriate. No amount of fancy rhetorical footwork or legal wordsmithing eludes the fact that drag shows denigrate and demean women—noble goals notwithstanding.

A harmless drag show? Not possible. I will not appear to condone the diminishment of any group at the expense of impertinent gestures toward another group for any reason, even when the law of the land appears to require it. Supporting The Trevor Project is a good idea. My recommendation is to skip the show and send the dough.

Offering respect, not ridicule, is the order of the day for fair play and is the WT way. And equally important, it is the West Texas way.

Walter V. Wendler

President

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