

Materials submitted by Carissa Bonham for  
**House Special Committee On Conduct**  
12/18/2019 3:00 PM, HR E

Regarding complaint against Rep Brad Witt

Contents:

- Testimony from Carissa Bonham
- Email sent to Rep Nathanson from Carissa Bonham on May 20, 2019

These documents have also been emailed to:  
[hcond.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:hcond.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov)

My name is Carissa Bonham. I am a resident of North Plains and I am not a legislative branch employee. This is my testimony regarding three incidents which I believe qualify as harassment by Representative Witt and which occurred while he was conducting business as a legislator.

**Legislative Branch Personnel Rule 27(1a) states that:**

"Members of the Legislative Assembly and all Legislative Branch employees are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is *free of harassment and to discourage all harassment in the workplace and at events, professional meetings, seminars or any events at which legislative business is conducted*" (emphasis mine).

I have grave concerns about Rep Witt's conduct as I have seen him engage in harassment of citizens in the workplace in both the state capitol building as well as in professional meetings such as community townhall meetings.

**First incident:**

During the house floor session for HB3063, which occurred on May 6, 2019, and which I was a witness to, Rep Witt made a disparaging reference to "Russian bots" as one of the driving forces behind the opposition of HB3063.

While using the term "Russian bots" might not initially seem like a harassing statement, there are some key pieces of context that this comment took place in that I believe elevates it to the level of harassment on the basis of national origin.

1. Some of the most vocal and consistent advocates against HB3063 on religious grounds were Oregonians of Russian descent.
2. Many Russian Oregonians speak English with a distinctly Russian accent, which makes them easy to distinguish from non-Russian Oregonians when speaking with them. In speaking with them, Rep Witt would have known many of the people opposing HB3063 were of Russian descent.
3. Some Russian Oregonians such as members of the Old Believers community dress in a distinct way which makes it easy to identify them from a distance in public.
4. During the hearing a large group of distinctively dressed Russian Oregonians from the Old Believers community were present in the gallery to oppose HB3063. This group was visible to Rep Witt when he made his remark about Russian bots.

If Rep Witt were concerned about internet algorithm based robots ("bots") spreading misinformation online, he simply could have called them "bots" or "internet bots." Instead, the qualifier "Russian" was added to "bots," during a floor session about a law that concerned many Russian Oregonians and where many Russian Oregonians were present.

At best, this was extremely poor judgement on the part of Rep Witt to use a disparaging reference about a large group of people of the same national origin that he knew opposed the bill and could see was present in the gallery that day.

At worst, it is harassing speech designed to target and disparage a politically active group of citizens of the same national origin with whom he disagreed.

**Second incident:**

Following the house floor session and before the Slavic Day of Action which happened on May 9, 2019, I had several discussions with members of the Slavic community who were upset and offended by Rep Witt's comments about Russian bots.

Several people shared with me they felt he was calling *them* Russian bots and trying to diminish their humanity and the validity of their opinions by referring to them as such.

Several women asked me if I thought they could ask for an apology from him.

I told them yes - because even if Rep Witt did not mean to intentionally disparage and demean members of the Russian community, I know that Rep Witt is a democrat.

As a democrat myself, I know that the Democratic Party of Oregon's platform includes statements like "We value our nation's diversity and recognize the...cultural contributions immigrants make to our society." We as democrats oppose profiling and we believe immigrants deserve dignity. I believed that if he had offended them unintentionally, that based on these supposed shared values that he would want to make it right.

I was hopeful that the harassing comments made on the house floor were made out of ignorance and a lack of understanding of their impact on the immigrant families in our midst. I was also hopeful that coming to him in a peaceful way to explain the offensive nature of his comments would help them get an apology from him for using words which are considered by this community to be a slur.

I practiced with Juliya and other women how to say what they wanted to say to Rep Witt so it would not come off as an attack and would have the best likelihood of achieving some kind of understanding and hopefully an apology from Rep Witt.

I was not present with the group when they went to Rep Witt's office but I spoke on the phone with Juliya Gudev, Jordan Ohrt and other witnesses who told me what happened from their individual perspectives following the encounter in Rep Witt's office. Juliya and two others submitted statements to me in writing which I forwarded to Rep Nathanson's office.

The verbal and written accounts all match and I believe them to be true. Someone shared a brief video recording of part of the incident with me as well, which also corroborated their accounts.

The summary of which is that when they approached Rep Witt calmly to let him know they had been hurt by his speech on May 6, in response he had them stand there and listen to him read the offensive speech again in their presence. He also shouted at them, pointed his finger and in an angry voice shouted that he was offended that they were in his office saying that they were offended.

That this was his response to a sincere, kind, thoughtful group of women is deeply concerning to me as both a woman and a democrat. It calls into question whether or not he really did use a cultural slur on accident or if his intent was to harass this community.

Regardless of his intent, my understanding from reading Legislative Branch Personnel Rule 27 is that intent is not really addressed here. It simply says ***Members of the Legislative Assembly...are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is free of harassment and to discourage all harassment.***

Again, I believe this behavior is clearly harassment.

### **Third incident:**

I attended Rep Witt's town hall meeting in the Bethany area on September 8, 2019.

At this meeting, what started as a calm discussion about why he voted yes on HB3063 and turned into a lecture on polio, he became aggressive and aggravated when a woman in attendance tried to politely ask if we could have a discussion about the question that was asked of him instead of lecturing a woman in her 30's about polio.

He continually said "excuse me. Excuse Me! EXCUSE. ME." in an increasingly more loud, aggressive manner until he eventually rose from his seat to tower over the small, frail, elderly woman who I would estimate to be in her late 80's.

A domestic abuse survivor myself, this was terrifying. The woman looked scared and intimidated. I was also concerned that my two young children who are 9 and 5 and attended the meeting with me were witnessing this kind of intimidating, aggressive behavior coming from one of our elected officials.

**This incident is a clear illustration of the kind of conduct described in Rule 27, 2C: "unwelcome conduct [that] has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with a person's job performance, or creates a work environment that a reasonable person would find intimidating, hostile or offensive."**

**In Summary:**

Based on the incidents that I have personally witnessed and am aware of via multiple firsthand testimonies, it seems clear to me that Rep Witt has a pattern of engaging in harassment in violation of Legislative Branch Personnel Rule 27(1a): "Members of the Legislative Assembly...are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is free of harassment and to discourage all harassment in the workplace and at events, professional meetings, seminars or any events at which legislative business is conducted."

This behavior appears to be pervasive across locations - occurring on the house floor, in his Capitol office and in his official community meetings.

I would like to ask the committee to please intervene in this matter. By their own rules, legislators should not be engaging in harassment (27.1a) or creating an environment "that a reasonable person would find intimidating, hostile or offensive." (27.2c)

If possible and enforceable by the committee, I think the Slavic community including Juliya Gudev is still owed an apology by Rep Witt for using a slur in reference to their national origin on May 6th and also for his subsequent response to him on May 9. If he refuses to cooperate with an apology, I think the House Democrat Caucus should censure him and consider issuing an apology on behalf of the democrat house reps in his stead.

Rep Witt needs to be held accountable for his actions. If he intends to continue in his position, I believe he needs supportive resources that will help him conduct business in a harassment free way. I would like to suggest that he would likely benefit from both an anger management class and an unconscious bias training to help him better serve the citizens of Oregon in a manner free of harassment and discriminatory speech.

**References**

- Legislative Branch Rule 27 appears on page 48-55:  
<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/201511/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/822223>
- Democratic Party of Oregon 2018 platform:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1D7kKA\\_5ITVqAnqZvtq1a6PDXqcPIY6j9/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1D7kKA_5ITVqAnqZvtq1a6PDXqcPIY6j9/view)

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## Conduct complaint against Rep Brad Witt

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Carissa Bonham <carissamarie@gmail.com>

Mon, May 20, 2019 at 12:03 AM

To: "rep.nancynathanson@oregonlegislature.gov" <rep.nancynathanson@oregonlegislature.gov>

Bcc: "Jgudev@gmail.com" <Jgudev@gmail.com>

Dear Representative Nathanson,

I would like to file a conduct complaint against representative Brad Witt. I have called your office a couple times and during my most recent phone call, your chief of staff asked me to submit the information in writing to better enable you to help me with this.

### Who I am and how I am involved

My name is Carissa Bonham and I am an Oregonian. I live in North Plains. I was in the capitol on Thursday, May 9th, to provide social media coverage for the Slavic day of action as a friend to the Slavic community. After I returned home, I heard about the despicable treatment Representative Brad Witt directed toward members of this community which visited his office. I spoke on the phone with one of the group organizers, Juliya Gudev, who bore the brunt of the attack and heard firsthand from her what happened.

While I did not witness the incident myself, as a Democrat and Oregonian I am appalled that an elected official treated anyone visiting their office this way.

I chose to get involved in advocating for them because some members of this group are extremely hesitant to be personally identified or to make noise about this themselves - but what happened is wrong and something needs to be done. I am serving as an advocate for them to help deliver their firsthand accounts and statements of what happened and to hopefully help facilitate a sincere apology. If Rep Witt refuses to apologize in a meaningful way, I believe he should resign. This is conduct unbecoming to a statesman and I hope you will agree it is unacceptable.

I am happy to discuss this further on the phone via 503-333-6443.

### Victim Statement

My name is Juliya Gudev and I was born in Russia. When I was a young girl my family fled the Soviet Union due to religious persecution. We settled in Oregon and have lived here ever since. Despite not knowing any English, I graduated with honors both from high school and PSU. I have been an American citizen for 21 years. I have always been a law-abiding, engaged participant in the society, my workplace, my community and my Slavic Christian church. But most importantly: I'm a mother.

I was present at the House of Representative's hearing on Monday, May 6th, alongside a group of my Slavic community members.

I felt like Brad Witt's comment about "Russian trolls spreading misinformation..." was extremely offensive not only to me as a mother but also to me as someone from the Russian community.

On Thursday, May 9th, I, alongside a small group from my community were making our rounds around the representatives' offices when we stopped by Brad Witt's office to ask for an official apology for the statement made on the House floor regarding "Russian trolls". His aide was kind and said he was in a meeting but to come back in a little bit to try to catch him. We came back

about 10 minutes later and were invited into his office. He was clearly ready to receive us as he had his statement printed in his hand.

I started off by thanking the representative for giving us a chance to come in. To this he responded "ok". Then I proceeded to tell him that we felt offended about his floor speech when he mentioned "Russian trolls". I said that we are real moms concerned about our freedoms and our children's health and that his comment was highly offensive to us. I then asked for an official statement of apology.

To this he responded, "I'm offended at you for saying this." He then asked me if I was present during the House vote to which I responded "yes" and then he asked me if I wanted to say what he said or if I wanted him to read it. I gave him permission to read it. He started reading his statement and it seemed that with every sentence he became angrier and his voice louder.

While reading his statement, he pointed his finger at me several times to emphasize his point and looked at me and others in the room with eyes that portrayed anger. When he finished reading his statement I responded with, "We're not here to discuss vaccines but to tell you that we are real mothers concerned about freedoms and our children's health and that we were offended at your comment about "Russian trolls". To this, he again pointed his finger at me, eyes now furious, and responded with an extremely forceful, angry and projected voice: "I'm offended that you are here saying that you're offended." I responded with saying that we came here to tell him what we said and I believe I thanked him for letting us tell him and then we walked out of the office.

I had never in my life felt more belittled. Representative Brad Witt made me feel like my very presence in his room was a disgrace to his office. His conduct toward me made me feel like he hated me, hated my Russian community and by rereading his statement directly at me, made me feel like I was the reason for spreading faulty information and endangering others with my choices in regards to vaccinations.

My emotions ranged from hurt to anger. He doesn't know anything about me. He doesn't know my journey to becoming who I am today and all I've battled with and overcame to be able to have the boldness and courage to be able to speak to a person in his position. He doesn't know my accomplishments as an active member of my community, church, society and workplace. He doesn't know the kind of mother I am to my children. But yet, in that short period of time, he made me feel like I'm less of a human than he is and that my concerns were not only invalid but offensive to him.

### **Witness Statement 1**

*I have the name of this person but left it out to protect her privacy as she did not include a "my name is" statement in her statement. She wrote this statement in English, although please read it with the understanding that English is not her first language and I have not corrected her spelling or sentence structure.*

It was my first visit to the Oregon State Capital. This place is absolutely accessible to all people who want to be heard.

One of the most stonger politicians of America said one:  
"that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth".  
When he says that government is for the people, he means that government is created in order to protect the rights of the people.

The goal of visit was give to our opinions. Say no HB3063. Because this bill directly concerns the freedom, life and health of our children.

Unfortunately, on the same day I had to deal with the exception to the rule. One of our representatives he opened his doors for us, but not to have a conversation.

Several women from our group came to the representative's office. What was my surprise when I heard his screams behind this door. It was sad and embarrassing. Standing in this beautiful building and listening to the anger of the representative say. That person has elected by the people who put their trust and confidence on him. I'm deeply convinced that ordinary people should not leave the building of the White House with an embarrassing feeling. I'm absolutely grateful to other senators and secretaries who, despite their personal opinions, were friendly and desired to hear us.

### **Witness Statement 2**

My name is Yulia Shipulina. I am originally from Russia. I came to the Capitol in Salem to support Slavic community initiative. Our group of Slavic activists came to Brad Witt office to ask for official apology. He raised voiced up and reread the line from his speech, when he mentioned the social media and Russian trolls. Then he said that he is offended by us coming and that he was offended by us." After that we just left the office. I felt uncomfortable, under pressure. I think, representative must communicate with taxpayer.

### **Notes from Carlissa**

Thank you for anything you can do to help seek an apology and appropriate response from Witt or the House Democrats generally on this issue. As a Democrat myself, I was extremely embarrassed to hear about the way he treated this kind and soft spoken group of women. There are additional witnesses who may be willing to speak on the phone if you feel their statements will be helpful and I am happy to help facilitate these phone calls if that would be helpful.

Please reach out to me via email at [carissamarie@gmail.com](mailto:carissamarie@gmail.com) or 503-333-6443 if I can answer more questions or facilitate you getting in direct contact with the victim or the witnesses.

Sincerely,

Carissa Bonham  
North Plains, OR

Carissa Bonham  
Creative Green Living  
[www.creativegreenliving.com](http://www.creativegreenliving.com)

(Sent from my mobile device)