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# Collin County Mayor Becomes Texas' First Transgender Elected Official

*Jess Herbst, who became mayor of tiny New Hope last May, came out in an open letter to the town's residents.*

*Facebook*

New Hope Mayor Jess Herbst

The mayor of a small Collin County town has become the first known openly transgender elected official in Texas history.

Jess Herbst, who became mayor of New Hope last May, came out as trans in an open letter to residents on the town's website (<http://newhopetx.gov/important-message-from-the-mayor>). Herbst had been elected to the Town Council as an alderman and was appointed mayor after the previous mayor died.

“As your Mayor I must tell you about something that has been with me since my earliest memories. I am Transgender,” Herbst wrote, adding that two years ago, she began hormone replacement therapy. “At the time, I did not imagine I would hold the Mayor's position, but here I am.”

Herbst couldn't immediately be reached for further comment. New Hope is a suburb of McKinney with a population of 670, according to the 2010 census. And Collin County is considered one of the most conservative suburban areas in Texas, with President Donald Trump winning by 17 percentage points in the general election.

Herbst's open letter comes as transgender rights have been thrust into the state and national spotlight thanks to a slew of so-called bathroom bills, including Texas' Senate Bill 6 (<http://www.legis.state.tx.us/tlodocs/85R/billtext/pdf/SB00006I.pdf>), by Lois Kolkhorst, R-Brenham. In early January, Herbst took to Facebook to criticize Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick for pushing SB 6, which he's made one of his top priorities for the 2017 session.

"Mr. Patrick: Let me get this straight, are you saying that right now, without your bill being passed, anyone can assault someone in the bathroom without breaking the law?" Herbst wrote. "That [sic] some some kind of weird screwed-up loophole if so."

*Google*

New Hope, Texas

Herbst also railed against "transphobic" bathroom bills (<http://jessherbst.com/jessherbst-blog/2016/4/15/let-the-bathroom-wars-begin-1>) in a post on her personal website last year.

Although gay and lesbian elected officials have held public office across Texas for decades, no transgender person has done so. In 2010, Houston's Phyllis Frye became the nation's first transgender judge (<http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Storied-career-takes-transgender-attorney-to-1696870.php>), after being appointed to the position by then-Mayor Annise Parker. Last year, Houston's Jenifer Poole became the

first transgender candidate (<https://www.texasobserver.org/jenifer-rene-pool-harris-county/>) to win a party primary in Texas, but she was defeated in the general election.

Nell Gaither, president of Trans Pride initiative, a Dallas nonprofit, said she doesn't know Herbst personally but was proud of her decision.

"I'm happy that our society is progressing to the point that she can feel empowered to come out and be her true self in public office, knowing that she will continue to be welcomed and valued for her skills and capabilities," Gaither said.

In her open letter, Herbst said she has lived in New Hope with her wife and two daughters since 1999 and previously served as alderman, road commissioner and mayor pro-tem.

Herbst noted that trans people "have made great strides in the last few years," adding that thanks to celebrities like Caitlyn Jenner and Laverne Cox, "society finally has a chance to see and learn about who we are."

"It is gender identity not sexual preference that applies to me," she wrote. "I love my wife, and she loves me, we have no intention of change. My daughters have been adamant supporters of me and are proud to tell people their father is transgender."

Herbst invited residents to email her, visit her website (<http://jessherbst.com>), or speak at a Town Council meeting if they have concerns. The council was scheduled to meet at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, and meets on the last Tuesday of every month.

*Correction: The story originally stated that Herbst was elected mayor last May. Herbst, who had served as mayor pro tem, was elected alderman and appointed mayor after the previous mayor died. The Observer regrets the*

error.

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