

Laura Bonar - Notes regarding sexual harassment by Representative Carl Trujillo

Before the 2013 legislative session began, I worked with my boss Elisabeth (Lisa) Jennings on behalf of Animal Protection Voters (APV) to meet with many New Mexicans regarding different types of legislation that would help animals, including the Doña Ana County Humane Society regarding their desire to see the animal cruelty statute strengthened following a number of disturbing acts of animal cruelty in southern New Mexico. Senator Richard Martinez and Representative Al Park each sponsored legislation in long sessions prior to 2013 to strengthen the animal cruelty statute, and these bills advanced through committees though they did not ultimately pass. We were hopeful legislation to strengthen the animal cruelty statute would pass and be signed in 2013, building on progress made in previous years.

Senator Martinez again agreed to introduce a bill to strengthen the animal cruelty statute and Senate Bill 83 (SB83) was introduced on January 16, 2013. On January 23, 2013, APV learned that freshman legislator Representative Carl Trujillo had also introduced a bill to strengthen the animal cruelty statute, House Bill 224 (HB224). APV reviewed the language to see that HB224 was very similar to but not exactly the same as SB83. APV met with Rep. Trujillo and, after he described how he wanted to help animals and wanted to work hard to see the animal cruelty statute strengthened, we supported HB224 in addition to SB83. APV worked with legislators and stakeholders to try to get language in both bills to match and worked to provide facts to counter incorrect information that some people were sharing about the legislation. I accompanied Lisa to many but not all of the meetings APV had with Rep. Trujillo during this time.

During the 2013 legislative session, the Attorney General's office was supporting strengthening the animal cruelty statute, and General Counsel Dave Pederson served as an expert witness for HB224 and SB83. Mr. Pederson was familiar with the existing animal cruelty statute, having sponsored the bill that first created the law when he served in the House of Representatives. Lisa also served as an expert witness in hearings. I was never an expert witness for HB224 or SB83. I attended most but not all of the hearings for these bills. I supported the legislation by helping to contact potential testifiers, taking notes regarding concerns with the legislation at meetings and hearings, etc.

On March 4, 2013, I took notes during the House Judiciary Committee hearing on HB224 while I was seated near the back of the room. Rep. Trujillo sat in front of the committee to present the bill, Mr. Pederson and Lisa Jennings were seated at the table as well. HB224 was eventually passed out of this committee.

On March 7, 2013, APV was preparing for the House floor debate and vote on HB224, which we thought might happen the following day. Lisa was focused on updating a frequently asked questions sheet regarding HB224 and SB83 and compiling a list of amendments considered unfriendly that other legislators had introduced previously but which had not passed. In the late afternoon of March 7, APV learned that the *Ruidoso News* had published an editorial in support of a stronger animal cruelty law.

On the morning of March 8, 2013, I was to distribute supporting materials for HB224 to Rep. Trujillo. HB224 was on the House floor calendar for debate. I understood Mr. Pederson would serve as the expert on the floor with Rep. Trujillo.

Before the House was called to order, I found and stood across from Rep. Trujillo on the House floor, a row of desks between us, and passed along the materials APV had prepared for him. I was focused on HB224 passing the House and attentive to other individuals, as there appeared to be lobbyists working in opposition to the bill coming onto the House floor to speak to other Representatives.

Rep. Trujillo asked me whether I stayed in Santa Fe during the session and I responded that I often stayed in Santa Fe. He smiled at me, said he didn't know that, and said softly, "We should have dinner sometime."

This moment made me feel sick to my stomach.

I thought to myself, "What's going on - is he asking me out right now? He's married, obviously. Surely, he's not asking me to dinner in a romantic or sexual way. What does he mean then? It seems presumptuous and even dangerous to try to clarify, I need to get out of here."

Outwardly, I gave a non-committal response and left the House floor.

Later that day, the House passed HB224 following a debate in which Rep. Trujillo stood up to a number of questions seemed designed to distract from the real and serious issue of animal cruelty, the lack of accountability for perpetrators, and the link between animal cruelty and violence against people. I watched the debate from the gallery with colleagues. We were happy when the bill finally passed and quickly departed as lobbyists who opposed the bill sitting nearby were obviously upset.

I tried to ignore the earlier uncomfortable moment with Rep. Trujillo.

APV worked to get legislation to help animals through the entire process for the remainder of the 2013 session. SB83 was never brought to the Senate floor for a vote and HB224 was never scheduled for a hearing on the Senate side. I have no reason to attribute the death of the legislation to Rep. Trujillo. I don't recall being in another one-on-one conversation with Rep. Trujillo for the rest of 2013.

In 2014, I was assigned to lobby and serve as the expert witness for HB20, legislation to provide funding for dog and cat spay and neuter surgeries in needy communities across New Mexico. Rep. Trujillo had prefiled the legislation in 2013.

In the lead up to the bill's first hearing, I worked with APV colleagues to make sure we had strong materials in support of the bill, to ensure our supporters contacted members of the

committee to ask them to vote in favor of HB20, I lobbied members of the committee on behalf of APV, and I wrote the bill introduction for Rep. Trujillo to include talking points he asked for and worked with Lisa on edits for clarity.

On January 28, 2014, I attended the House Consumer and Public Affairs Committee hearing where HB20 was scheduled to be heard. I was carrying notes about the bill and tried to make sure anyone present to support the bill found a seat in the room. As the hearing was about to begin, I went to sit in the front row, next to Rep. Trujillo.

As I sat down, I asked, “May I sit next to you, Mr. Representative?”

Rep. Trujillo leaned very close to me and said smoothly and quietly, “You can sit next to me any time, Laura. At dinner. By the fire. In the pool.” He touched my leg and I could feel his breath on my neck.

I was shocked. Hearing him say these things, suggesting a sexual encounter, being so physically close and seeming to try to caress me, was shocking, especially in that environment. I felt like I was in a fog as the Chair called for HB20 and Rep. Trujillo got up to sit in front of the committee. I went to sit next to him.

I focused my energy on my notes and on questions and comments from the Committee members. The work was a welcome relief to distract myself from Rep. Trujillo’s shameless conduct that had occurred moments earlier. The Committee gave the bill a unanimous do pass and Rep. Trujillo left.

After the committee hearing was adjourned, I called Lisa to tell her about the positive outcome for the bill. There was a lot of work yet to be done to ensure the bill passed, and I knew if the legislation was successful, it would benefit many individuals all over New Mexico.

But underneath this focus on the work, I was hurting – Rep. Trujillo hurt my dignity. I didn’t know what I could do about the unacceptable and demeaning way he had treated me.

I realized that Rep. Trujillo was likely to continue to escalate his behavior and I tried to avoid him. I stayed out of the Roundhouse as much as possible. I practiced a quick response about having a boyfriend, so I would not be shocked silent if he tried anything else. I included in my rehearsed line that there was sick family I needed to take care of, in an effort to not make Rep. Trujillo feel bad, as I understood he was in a higher position of power.

Despite my precautions, not long after the House Consumer and Public Affairs hearing for HB20, I had to be in the Roundhouse for another bill. I was walking through the curved corridor in the lower level of the building, outside the floor. There were other people in the hallway. I saw Rep. Trujillo walking toward me. I was determined to continue walking purposefully and swiftly toward my destination and not engage with him at all, and I fixed my gaze ahead.

As he passed me, Rep. Trujillo quickly grabbed my arm and pulled me close to him. I was suddenly pressed against the wall.

Rep. Trujillo said abruptly, "When are we meeting?" His tone was no-nonsense. It sounded and felt like a demand, not a request, for a sexual encounter.

I tried to appear calm and responded with my rehearsed line about having a boyfriend and sick family to care for. Rep. Trujillo let go of me and I stepped away from him. He didn't say anything else, but his face looked angrier than I had ever seen him look, and he turned and stormed away.

I don't remember what I did right after this. I might have attended to whatever business I originally needed to take care of in the Roundhouse. But I felt horrible.

Later, I told APV's contract lobbyist Deborah Torza that I couldn't work with Rep. Trujillo, that he had been making sexual advances toward me and was getting worse. I was trying to stop myself from crying during this conversation, and I ended the conversation as quickly as possible.

I went home to my boyfriend and tried to tell him about what had happened. I felt afraid. I was wounded and felt like I didn't have the ability to deal with what was going on. I felt like it was somehow my fault, even though Rep. Trujillo had taken advantage of his position to act out his harassing behavior on me.

After this incident, I asked Lisa if she could continue work on HB20. I legitimately had many other responsibilities during this time, including other bills and work outside the legislature. Lisa agreed.

As days passed, Lisa shared her frustration that despite multiple attempts, she couldn't get Rep. Trujillo to respond to help secure the spay-neuter funding that HB20 was designed to provide. I felt incredibly angry, guilty, ashamed, and powerless. He was retaliating against me for not giving into his demands.

Lisa eventually found another way to get some funding for spay-neuter, although it was not as much as the amount that Rep. Trujillo had asked for in HB20 and would not have as great of an impact.

After the session was over, Lisa asked me to consider an expansion of my job duties, to be the legislative director for APV. I was surprised that Lisa and the board still valued my work when I felt like such a failure. I asked Lisa for time to consider this opportunity which would help advance my career.

I really wanted to believe that I could continue working in this area, and I tried to tell myself I could endure bad behavior from other people if it meant a good outcome for animals. I had

heard that other women experienced similar, if not worse, circumstances when working at state legislatures. I knew some men experienced humiliating and degrading harassment, too.

But I had been deeply harmed in these encounters with Rep. Trujillo. My personal safety was in jeopardy and I felt like there was no way to remedy the situation except for trying to remove myself.

My home life had become increasingly tense following the 2014 legislative session. I knew that funding for APV's work comes from a variety of donors, and I was afraid that by turning down the opportunity to be APV's legislative director, I could be talking myself out of long-term employment in this field. But I felt certain that Rep. Trujillo would try to get me to capitulate to his demands, continue to retaliate against me by harming legislation APV cared about, or worse, if I was to take the promotion.

Eventually, I met with Lisa and told her how much I appreciated the offer and how important the work was to me personally. I told her I did not feel I was the right person for the position. I asked Lisa if I could be reassigned to work that did not take place at the New Mexico Legislature. I said I wanted to strongly support APV's efforts but did not want work in the New Mexico Legislature very much anymore, if at all. I told her it was hard on my relationship. I did not share all the details with her until very recently.

In late 2017 and early 2018, I began to see Rep. Trujillo's behavior toward me could likely be part of a pattern. I felt stuck between two difficult places. I realized Rep. Trujillo was likely to attack me and APV if I confronted him about his actions. But I also realized he was likely a risk to the safety of other individuals as well.

I realized I could not find a way to maintain my ethics and be effective in my role at work as long as Rep. Trujillo was in office.

I recognized how fortunate I am to have other work options, including a license to practice as a registered nurse. I knew there were no guarantees that I could find other work, but I realized the privilege I had was greater than the risks to me personally and professionally in speaking out about Rep. Trujillo's actions.

After the 2018 legislative session, I reached out separately to individuals with expertise in the field of providing help to sexual violence victims – namely, Karen Herman, PhD, Director of Sexual Assault Services with the New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs - to try to find help through the increasingly difficult time I was experiencing. Karen promised me confidentiality before I shared with her details of what I had experienced. She did not encourage me to take any particular action. Rather, she encouraged me to focus on my own needs for healing, justice, and safety. She also reached out for help and finding help, including from Levi Monagle with the Brad Hall Law Firm, who agreed to advocate for me in this matter pro bono, gave me the protection and support I needed as I pursued a course of action. I

wanted Rep. Trujillo to be out of office and for him to not inflict harassment on any other women at the New Mexico Legislature.

While I was unsure at the time of sending the open letter whether the new policy passed by the legislature would offer adequate or meaningful redress for victims, I decided to pursue this investigation to help bring long-overdue change for myself and others.

Year-by-year overview of my work at the New Mexico Legislature

- In 2011, I assisted executive director Lisa Jennings in lobbying for APV at the New Mexico Legislature.
- In 2012, I assisted in lobbying for APV at the New Mexico Legislature.
- In 2013, I assisted in lobbying for APV at the New Mexico Legislature.
- In 2014, I carried out lobbying for APV for the first part of the session and assisted in lobbying toward the end of the session.
- In 2015, I supported APV's efforts but did not regularly visit the New Mexico Legislature.
- In 2016, I supported APV's efforts and did not visit the New Mexico Legislature.
- In 2017, I supported APV's efforts and visited the New Mexico Legislature once.
- In 2018, I supported APV's efforts and did not visit the New Mexico Legislature.