

BUILDING JUSTICE PODCAST



CRISJ Building Justice Podcast

Season 3, Episode 17: Advocating for trans communities: an interview with Assembly Candidate Evan Minton

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Guest: Evan Minton, Candidate for Assembly District 6

Please note: This transcript may be imperfect. Please contact Tristan Josephson (tristan.josephson@csus.edu) directly should you have questions.

Music lyrics: Company under construction, the function, justice for the human family we demand it. Justice, true freedom, equality is a must. Thus, decolonization of the planet. So bust this. People be the power now we're Building Justice. Pulling out divinations, now we're Building Justice. Welcome the planet to the Podcast, "Building Justice," "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Building is to add on, or to do away with.

Tristan Josephson (he/him): Welcome to Building Justice, a podcast by Sacramento State's Center on Race, Immigration and Social Justice (CRISJ). We explore critical issues affecting our communities with the hopes of creating a healthier and more just world.

I'm Tristan Josephson, associate professor of Women's & Gender Studies at Sacramento State. And I'm here with Evan Minton, candidate for Assembly District 6.

Today we'll be talking about Evan's campaign, topics related to trans political representation, healthcare access, and anti-trans legislation, as well as how trans social justice visions can make connections across a range of progressive social and political issues. Thanks for joining me, Evan. How are you doing today?

Evan Minton (he/they): I mean, wonderful. I appreciate being here. I appreciate being in this space with you. Thank you so much for having me on your podcast.

Tristan: Okay, great. So let's just jump into the questions, so we can hear more about these issues. So the first question I have for you is, why is it important that you're running as the first openly trans candidate for the California State Assembly, and then relatedly, what is the role of political representation in trans social justice movements?

Evan: Yeah, no, thank you so much. (1:57) I think that one of the things that is so important is that when we don't have a seat at the table, we are never going to be the priorities that we need to be. And we lose that representation. And right now, in our entire California State history, we've never had an openly transgender legislator. And in my experience I've been able to get good policy passed for the trans community at the local, the state, and the national levels. (2:35) But in the age of 2023, it's a banner year in – not a positive way – for attacks, political and legislative attacks on the trans community. You know, I can no longer abide by pulling on the shirt sleeves of my friends in office and asking them to do things for us. We simply have to be there ourselves.

I've come to understand that in the worst of times, when we're not at the table, we're on the menu, and in the best of times, we're afterthoughts. And we can't afford to be either one of those things. We truly need to be there with our own voices, with our own lived experiences, representing our own selves, our own lives and our own communities. And everyone deserves to have a voice at the table, and everyone deserves representation. And the trans community is no different. So I'm really excited to, you know, be running a race, you know, where I'm one of the front runners in it. And I think that we can do this. But I'm also really excited to show others what's possible.

Tristan: I'd love to hear also how you're kind of defining and imagining the trans community or trans communities, and what that means, like your own positionality in those communities and who you're bringing together?

Evan: Yeah, everyone, I'm bringing everyone. Ah, for me, I, you know, my pronouns are he and they. But you know what I do, and you know I've done this work before, I don't look at who needs the least, I look at who needs the most. And I center those individuals and those communities in my work. And so when I talk about that, I talk about intersections, and I mean the intersections when it comes to race and ethnicity in our trans community. Or when I talk about, you know, trans youth or trans seniors. I'm looking at, you know, our community as a whole, because we need better health care. We need, you know, better accommodations. We need protections. Trans students are the epicenter of this right now. But I'm also looking at particular portions of the trans community, and how I can best reach those portions of our trans community.

And by way of doing that, it's addition, not subtraction. It's making sure that we have more and more voices at the table. (5:31) And I'm thinking about, like, Shirley Chisholm. And it's like, if you don't have a space at the table, you bring your own folding chair. It's about making sure that there's enough folding chairs and you know, just enough comfortable chairs around the table. Make sure that everybody has a seat there, and a voice there. (5:50) And I'm a very big believer in those that are closest to the pain, are closest to the solutions. We're experts on our own lives. And so ensuring that people who are experts on their own lives have that seat at my table, that I'm expanding as we continue in this movement.

Tristan: Okay, yeah, thank you. Yeah. I mean, that tracks a lot with, I teach, you know, a feminist social movements class. And we often talk in that class about, yeah, the folks who are experiencing the brunt of oppressive systems, right, really understand how those systems work and what, how they need to change right and how they need to be transformed. And so that kind of lived expertise, right, and lived experiences, informs that.

Evan: You know the majority of those who are being killed for their own identity are Black trans women. And so it's like, we can't have this kind of discussion without uplifting those who are being

most marginalized and most targeted. And the resilience thereof. So just honoring, you know, amazing Black trans women who are doing the work, and also so highly impacted as well.

Tristan: Yeah. And I think that that recognition allows us to recognize the way that, um, like anti-Blackness and white supremacist ideologies are grounded in gender normativity right? And the idea of a sex/gender binary. And also, you know, one of the other things I was thinking about while you were talking is, the way that trans folks who have more privileges, how do we mobilize those privileges, right? Like you were saying, to bring in more people to the conversation, right, to force space and allow folks to have their voices heard, right?

Okay, so the next question I have for you, Evan, is about healthcare access, and I was wondering if you could please talk about your own experiences accessing gender-affirming health care and how that has informed your work to expand health care access for trans people and others?

Evan: (8:11) When I was denied healthcare, my transition-related care, by my neighborhood hospital simply because of who I am, a trans person. It was time-sensitive healthcare, and it wasn't something that I was going to particularly make public. It was private, a private health care decision between me and my doctor. But then, when the hospital refused to serve me and they weren't responding to private pressure, we knew we had to go to the media, something I was really not planning on doing, of course. I mean, who thinks that they're going to go to the media to fight for their own healthcare? But after I was able to get my healthcare at a different hospital, the ACLU approached me, and they asked me if I would be willing to make this a court case. And I didn't know what that meant. I had never been involved in the legal system before, but I felt a deep sense of responsibility to my community because of my status within it.

And so I decided. You know, I don't know what this is going to be like, a court case. I don't know, if I'm strong enough. But I know that I'm strong enough to take the first step, and I know that I owe my community. You know, that I feel a sense of responsibility to my community, and you know, fast forward, as you know, Tristan, the court case reached United States Supreme Court. I was targeted by the Trump administration during it. It was a long, long, long struggle, with a lot of sleepless nights and some tears thrown in. And a lot of surprises. But, I mean, we've created statewide precedence, that it's illegal discrimination to turn someone away from a hospital simply because they're transgender. And so these are the ways that I, you know, see using our, the power that we have to open up spaces to, for our whole community to benefit.

Tristan: Thank you. I appreciate you talking about your own experiences, and how that's informed your work to expand healthcare access for trans folks. When I started teaching almost 10 years ago, I wasn't coming out as trans to my students. I was happy to come out as queer, but the trans stuff felt more private and personal. And I think it took me some years, and then also took this sort of shifting climate, right, in the U.S., for me to realize what a privilege I had, particularly as a masculine-presenting, rather gender-normative white trans person, right, to not be visibly trans. And I really realized, yeah, that I was enjoying that privilege and that safety that I felt, right, because I hadn't felt that in previous points of my life. But that that's actually highly problematic for a variety of reasons, right? And like that, I actually have very little to risk, right? I had a job, I was protected by my racial and class status in a lot of ways. And that actually it would be really important to let queer and trans students at Sac State know like, hey, there are trans faculty who work here, there's trans staff people who work here, and what does that mean.

So I appreciate that, I think you sharing that, and that sort of toggling between like what, what should be – and is – like very private decisions that folks make around their gender and their health, right? But that oftentimes that becomes really public and visible, and how do folks navigate that. And for whom? Which groups of folks have the ability to have some choices around that, right, and other folks don't, because they're always gonna be hypervisible as trans, right?

That kind of leads to the sort of follow-up question I have, which is, when I'm talking in my classes about trans issues, I'm often saying, you know, trans issues often get kind of exceptionalized, as like, oh, this is an issue that applies only to a small group of people. Right? And you know, and one of the arguments I always makes my students is similar to your points earlier, that if we look at what a really minoritized group of people are experiencing in a healthcare industry, for example, like that helps us understand how the system is not working for many, many people. And so the kind of question I wanted to ask is, you know, how do you understand, then, healthcare access as being, like, the need to expand it, to meet the needs of trans folks in particular, but also, how is that not just a quote “trans issue”?

Evan: (13:03) Yeah, I was able to testify as an expert witness in front of the United States House Oversight Committee on this. And it's something that, you know, I've just gained more and more knowledge in after my own brutal, like incredibly brutal, experiences within our healthcare system. I've been leading on it ever since. It's uncomfortable to, like, talk about oneself like that. But I mean, really, I have. More people need to be aware of this statistic, that one in 6 hospital beds in our state, on average, that's one in *six*, restrict care based on reproductive health care. So that's anything like the morning after pill, to a survivor of sexual assault, to abortion, to IVF treatment, anything like that, and transition-related care.

So, I mean, that is a startling statistic, and it's due to the conservative takeover of our hospitals, and also the private equity. When our, you know, when private equity firms take up our hospitals as well, it's through the consolidations, the mergers, and the acquisitions. (14:30) And part of that is due to a philosophical belief system in which folks are saying, you know, or folks don't agree with us getting the care that we need based on bodily autonomy, no matter who you are. And then part of it is due to, you know, this is not profitable. And so we're gonna, we're gonna quit, you know, having a maternity ward here. Maternity wards are just being closed in this last decade, enormously. The trans community has so many intersections. That's just one example in healthcare, in which we need to, to fight back, and we can do that. We can do that through giving the Attorney General more power of oversight over, you know, the mergers, acquisitions, and consolidations of hospitals and making sure that, that kind of care remains in the community. That right now the Attorney General has oversight over certain hospitals, being able to do that, but not others. We need to give the Attorney General more oversight over all of that.

(15:40) But, you know, in terms of the trans community, like, so many of my trans friends have an enormous interest in environmental justice, as do I. And it's because the trans community disproportionately lives in poverty. And if you look at the CalEnviroScreen map where, you know, the highest pollution spots are in California, and you take a map of where the low-income areas are in California, you don't need two maps. You just need one. Because polluted areas are mostly in, you know, predominantly, you know, like gigantically, in low-income communities and communities of color.

(16:18) And so, you know, if you look at our criminal justice system, if you look at any system, you'll see that LGBTQ+ people are over-represented in these different systems in which folks, you

know, we have folks on the ground trying to reform. So yeah, yeah, trans issues, LGBTQ+ issues, they spread out into all areas of life because we are multifaceted human beings. I mean, the price of gas affects us, like our rent going up affects us. Affordable housing. . . like, (17:00) we're not single issue people. Everything that affects anyone else also affects us. And then we have this area of our lives in which we are also very uniquely attacked for being who we are and suffer real consequences, unfortunately.

Tristan: Yeah, thank you. I mean, on that note, what you know, we are witnessing over the last few years. I mean, it's kinda hard to date, because there's always sort of anti-trans sentiment historically, right, in the United States and in U.S. politics. But I think definitely kind of one of the upticks was under the Trump administration, and then, I think, you know, it's particularly in the last few years, a really intensification of proposed and successful anti-trans legislation at various state levels. I'm interested in how you're making sense of this backlash, which may be, kind of, historically consistent or an intensification, right? But we're definitely facing a different kind of moment and a different kind of rhetoric under which trans people, and particularly trans youth, I think, are getting really targeted in ways that feel to me – I'm not that old – but to me, more intense than previous generations. So how, what's your thinking about what's happening? And how can we respond to that? How should we be responding to that?

Evan: (18:29) Well, you know, for it's me, it's scary, and it's dangerous. And it's not just theoretical. And I hear folks sometimes talking about it like it's just theoretical, and it's just the natural order of things to make progress and then to go back and make progress and go back. But it's just like, I mean, I work with LGBTQ+ youth and particularly trans youth here in our Sacramento region on the ground. And ever since this uptick, particularly in 2023, they've been feeling it in their schools, you know. They've been feeling it from their peers. And then I have two nieces who are in our public schools here locally. And there's been more and more conversation about, and debate about, trans people, like going on in the classroom around them. And my nieces hate it, cause you know they love me, their uncle Evan. And so, whether these bills are passing or not, you know the fights come to California.

And I'm so glad there our youth have the words to express who they are. It makes me so happy to have so many of our youth, our young people, so dedicated to advancing justice and good causes, you know, and inclusivity and fairness. (20:26) But at the same time, these bills, these legislative attacks, this weaponizing of legislation, these political attacks, you know, what it's looking like in the real world – it's death, it's violence. It's open discussions of, questioning our morality and existence. And I get so concerned, because it's just, like, you know, how isolating must that feel if you're that trans kid in that classroom, overhearing those discussions, you know, about your own self.

These are some of the discussions that we were able to put to bed, we were able to put them to bed. And so I see that, you know, the Republicans have found an issue that, you know, they feel that they can win elections on. And so they, they kick the dust up on it, you know. And they don't care who they're hurting in the process. So for me, it's them maliciously, strategically, trying to win elections. But in the process we're seeing this play out in a lot of different ways that are hurting people. But I also want to say, on the other hand, I could not applaud our young people any more than I am, you know, because I do think that it's a vocal minority, who are, you know, not the inclusive type.

Tristan: I'm an educator, so one of my responses to that is education, right? Conversation, discussion, folks learning about histories, learning how to unpack arguments, right, is one way to

respond to this backlash. But I'm wondering what your thoughts are. I imagine some of it might be through electoral politics as well, right? But how? What are ways to that you think are effective in responding or shifting the conversation, yeah, how are you thinking about that?

Evan: Yeah, yeah. (22:54) Well, in my mind, we, you know, need to stop the forced outing of trans kids by school districts. Like, that is something that is incredibly dangerous for trans kids that live in abusive households. One of my best friends is a trans woman who had to run away from her household at the age of 12, when her parents discovered that she was trans, and she lived on the streets of LA for a number of years. She lived in Florida, she took a bus to LA, I mean, at the age of 12.

(23:39) So we've got to, you know, say as a State what our values are. And then follow those values – which are inclusivity and fairness – and then follow that with our policies and our budget. And I mean, that includes, you know, educating the educators around, you know, safer schools and classroom discussions.

And I've been proud to pass resolutions here with teeth at the local level in a few different school boards this last year around Trans Day of Visibility. When I knew all this was hitting the fan, I decided that I needed, you know, to start combating this in a big way. And so we were able to pass resolutions committing schools to use the correct pronouns and the correct names, and, you know, honoring and celebrating, you know, Trans Day of Visibility, Trans Day of Remembrance, and encouraging classroom discussion at age appropriate levels.

I see policy as the way. It's my magic wand to improve people's lives. (24:54) And so, you know, I've always said that policy is my way of making for permanent, widespread, positive change. And so that's what I do. You create safer spaces through the use of policy. You create education through the use of policy. And at the same time in our daily lives, continuing to have those sometimes tough conversations about who we are, you know, and breaking through the barriers to be able to see eye-to-eye with folks and have folks see it to eye-to-eye with us.

Tristan: Okay, thank you Evan. Those are my questions. Do you have anything else that came up for you that you'd like to add to the conversation?

Evan: No, I don't think so. I think your questions were pretty thorough. And, yeah, I wanna thank you so much for just this conversation and having me on, I really appreciate it.

Tristan: Well, it was wonderful to talk with you, Evan, thank you. And thank you everyone for listening. We hope our ongoing conversations spark understandings, empathies, and motivation to join the struggle for a better future for all.

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Outro Music Lyrics

No more penalties and no more wars. Based on the actions. Now, time for "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Time for building justice, justice.