

Cathi Herrod's Daughter Is Gay, Progressive and Quietly Defying Her Mother's Work | Phoenix New Times

Elizabeth Whitman February 17, 2020

In February 1997, a little-known attorney named Cathi Herrod flew from Phoenix to Washington, D.C., to testify before the House Budget Committee in support of the [Balanced Budget Amendment](#).

The month before, Herrod had taken a part-time job as legislative counsel with the Center for Arizona Policy, a conservative, evangelical lobbying group. But she was still a self-described stay-at-home mom, and that day, she brought her 7-year-old daughter, Laura, with her.

Then-Representative John Kasich, a Republican and future Ohio governor who ran for president in 2016, chaired the committee. He addressed Laura first. “Wave at us, kid,” he said, according to a [transcript](#). “Give her a round of applause.

You didn’t cut out on school today, did you?”

“Well —” Cathi Herrod began, but Kasich kept going.

“You write a report, and Uncle John will help you,” he said to Herrod’s daughter.

In the 23 years since that day, Cathi Herrod has become ever more vocal about conservative causes. In 2006, she rose to become president of the Center for Arizona Policy. In the last several years, she has been hugely influential in Arizona, and she remains so today, notorious for pushing anti-abortion and anti-gay legislation and policies in the state.

And somewhere else in the 23 years since that trip to Washington, daughter and mother diverged, even as they both set out, in a sense, to change the world. Laura Herrod now works for a progressive philanthropy in New York City that funds social justice organizations across the country, *Phoenix New Times* has learned.

Among them has been the American Civil Liberties Union in Arizona, which has [worked](#) in direct [opposition](#) to the Center for Arizona Policy.

She and her wife, whom she married in 2017, are parents to two foster children. They live in Brooklyn.

The contrast between the views that Cathi Herrod espouses and lobbies for, and her own daughter’s career in social justice and her gay identity, is jarring, and one

that neither Herrod addressed directly in response to questions from *Phoenix New Times*.

"I am thankful to have been raised in a loving home. I love and respect my mother, and I always will," wrote Laura Herrod, who agreed to an email interview on the condition that *New Times* use her maiden name. "She has known that I am gay for about five years."

After *New Times* requested an in-person interview with Cathi Herrod, she responded with a brief statement, sent by email through a spokesperson for the Center for Arizona Policy.

"I've known about this for years," she wrote, presumably referring to the fact that her daughter is gay.

"This does not change my love and respect for my daughter," she said. "Nor does it change my commitment to advocate for Arizona families as I have for over 30 years."

She added, "I love my daughter very much. Like any mother, I ask that you would respect her privacy as she is not engaged in public life like I am."

Although mother and daughter appear on opposite sides of the sociopolitical arena, both are vocal in their own respective communities, and firm in their convictions.

'Healing and Hope'

Laura Herrod grew up in the Phoenix metro area. She has one sibling, an older brother named Joseph. She attended Scottsdale Christian Academy, from which she graduated as salutatorian.

From there, she moved east, to New York City, to earn her bachelor's degree in philosophy, politics, and economics at [King's College](#), also a Christian school.

"My AP (advanced-placement) history teacher encouraged me to do something crazy," she told the *Arizona Republic* in 2008, which covered her commencement speech at Scottsdale Christian Academy. "It will be an adventure."

Eventually, Laura Herrod went on to get her master's degree in community development and action at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee. There, she met the woman who would become her wife.

She did not respond to a question about whether her mother attended her wedding.

"I believe that community should bring healing and hope," she told *New Times*. "I am grateful to live and work in a community that embraces me in my authentic identity and my chosen family."

So far, the arc of Laura Herrod's career has had a strong bent toward progressive values and social justice. In an interview with a friend of a friend in 2014 that was posted on YouTube, she talked about being passionate about people who didn't fit in.

"I am grateful to live and work in a community that embraces me in my authentic identity and my chosen family." – Lauri [sic] Herrod

She has worked for a homeless shelter and a social enterprise nonprofit aimed at helping women who are recovering from trafficking, prostitution, and addiction. She and her friends once launched and operated an e-magazine that lasted for about two years, with the mission of hosting "conversations that inspire and equip women to practice lives of consequence."

"I care very deeply about people who have been oppressed and devalued in our society," Laura Herrod told *New Times*. "As a privileged person, I have the opportunity to listen, to grow, and to empower leaders that will build a more just and equitable society."

Her current employer, which *New Times* is not naming per Herrod's request, funds organizations that advocate for civil and human rights, among other progressive causes. Several organizations in Arizona, like the ACLU, have been among its recipients.

"I work in progressive social justice movements because I believe in listening, welcoming the stranger, and uplifting voices that have gone unheard," Laura Herrod told *New Times*.

She remains strong in her faith as a Christian.

"For a long time, I thought 'progressive Christianity' was just a watered down version of the Truth that I grew up with," she wrote in 2017, in an online post for the church she attended at the time.

"But here I found that our interdenominational beliefs meant we were more rigorous in assessing Scripture, dissecting the bias we bring to the text from each of

our traditions and open to doubting the way we've always been taught," she continued.

"Our bond is not about identifying who is right and who is wrong. Instead, this community seeks to embody the greatest ideals of the Great Book — justice, mercy and love," she wrote.

These days, Laura Herrod attends The Choir, a progressive and welcoming, nondenominational Christian church in New York City.

'One Man and One Woman'

Cathi Herrod has led the Center for Arizona Policy for 14 years. The group's stated mission is to "promote and defend the foundational values of life, marriage and family, and religious freedom."

Among its **strategic partners** are right-wing groups like Focus on the Family, which the civil-rights organization **Human Rights Campaign** has called "one of the most well-funded anti-LGBTQ organizations in America," and Alliance Defending Freedom, which the Southern Poverty Law Center has **designated** as a hate group for its anti-LGBTQ ideology.

Her **biography** on the Center for Arizona Policy's website touts her achievements in the state's halls of power, noting that media describe her as "one of the 10 most influential leaders" at the Arizona Capitol. In a nod to the power she wields, some have **nicknamed** her "Arizona's 31st Senator."

"In 2008, Cathi led the YESforMarriage Coalition that spearheaded the successful passage of Proposition 102 to define marriage in the Arizona Constitution as only the union of one man and one woman," CAP's website states.

"This does not change my love and respect for my daughter. Nor does it change my commitment to advocate for Arizona families as I have for over thirty years." - Cathi Herrod

Six years later, when a federal judge ruled that Arizona's ban on gay marriage was unconstitutional, Cathi Herrod lamented the decision.

"Today, we grieve. We grieve for the children who now have no chance of growing up with a mom and a dad," she **told** the *Arizona Republic* at the time. "We mourn the

loss of a culture and its ethical foundation. We mourn a culture that continues to turn its back on timeless principles."

That year, Cathi Herrod also **wrote** SB 1062, a bill that drew widespread condemnation for sanctioning discrimination against gays and thrust Herrod, along with the Center for Arizona Policy, into the **national spotlight**. The bill had proposed allowing business owners to refuse to serve gays, on the basis of "sincerely held" religious beliefs.

It passed both chambers of the State Legislature, but then-Governor Jan Brewer ultimately **vetoed** SB 1062, facing **pressure** from major banks, Apple, Marriott, Delta Air Lines, the Super Bowl Host Committee, and **a slew of other businesses**.

Cathi Herrod's statement to *New Times* did not address a query about how the policies she has sought and still seeks would directly impinge upon the rights of her own daughter.

This year, she is **backing** a bill that would **bar transgender girls and women from playing on female sports teams**, sponsored by Republican State Representative Nancy Barto.

Last week, she appeared on a panel at the headquarters of the Arizona Republican Party to discuss religious freedom, according to an event invitation. So did Barto and Joanna Duka, one of the owners of Brush & Nib Studio, a plaintiff in a discrimination case that went to the Arizona Supreme Court last year.

In *Brush & Nib Studio v. City of Phoenix*, the court **narrowly ruled** in favor of the studio, saying that a Phoenix anti-discrimination ordinance could not force the business to serve certain people based on religious beliefs, i.e. members of the LGBTQ community. This year, Herrod has **denounced** antidiscrimination bills at the Legislature that were inspired in part by the ruling.

That case began in 2016, when Duka and her business partner, Breanna Koski, did not want to create wedding invitations for same-sex couples.