

SCHMIDT STATEMENT

It was just a touch – a light one – and it lasted for only a moment. I was a 13-year-old boy at the Rock Hill Boy Scout Camp. His name was Ray, and he was the camp medic. The older scouts called him “Gay Ray,” and taunted and teased us about our inevitable encounter with him when the itch of the mosquito bites became too much to bear. It happened almost precisely like the older kids said it would. Covered in bites, I went to the Medical Cabin. He told me to take my clothes off. I complied. He looked at my body and examined the bites, just like they said he would. He began applying an ointment just like they said he would. I remember being paralyzed as his hands moved up my body and brushed over my penis. I remember all of this with perfect clarity up to the moment I was touched. The next part is fuzzier. I just know that I left. Then, I came back to camp, and I must have had a look on my face because I remember the laughing. The look on my face must have looked familiar to the other boys because it was the same one they must have had when they returned from Ray’s exam. Camp continued, and I made sure never to return the Medical Cabin.

When I got home, I told my parents. The adults huddled, and the collective decision they made was to deal with it internally. He wasn’t turned into the police because the consensus of the adults was that dealing with law enforcement would be traumatic for all of the boys involved. In the end, we were told that Ray wouldn’t return. I don’t know what happened to him, and even when the day came that I had the power, money and ability to find out and do something to him, or about him, I chose not to.

Something else happened in that cabin that day. The extroverted little boy who walked in died; an introverted boy with deep trust issues walked out. Before that day, I have no memory of ever feeling anger. After that day – and despite the passage of so many years – the anger has never left. It’s always there; below the surface. It has risen up many times over the years.

Later in life that anger would immolate my faith in the Catholic Church. My faith had been diminished to a flicker of flame by the time I served in the White House. I remember feeling like something that had anchored me was stolen. I felt lost in a strange way, though at the time, I would never have described myself as particularly religious. I reached out to see if I could get an audience with the man who had presided over my Confirmation at St. Luke’s Church in North Plainfield, New Jersey. By this point, he was a Monsignor and the acting Auxiliary Bishop of the Metuchen Diocese. When I met with him in Washington, he was his Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick. Learning that the man I trusted to share my soul and the deepest memories of my violation was amongst the most prolific of the Catholic Church’s sex criminals permanently shattered my faith and left me estranged from God. It has taken nearly 16 years since that betrayal to find faith again, which I have during the process of my conversion to Judaism.

A touch on a table at age 13 that lasted seconds has been a defining event in my life. It never went away. That moment bequeathed me the three companions of my life that are always close and often present: anger, shame and depression.

Depression has always been the companion I feared the most, and it something I was too ashamed to admit I was struggling with. I found help in a most unlikely place: Curtis Houck is a writer for NewsBusters. He attacks me and the Lincoln Project with fervor and glee, and yet one day he wrote bravely about his struggles with depression. When I read it, I felt like it was meant for me and I reached out to him to thank him. He saved my life and liberated me from a fear of seeking help. I will always be

grateful for his courage and I am talking about my struggle in an open way for the first time because maybe it will be the case that I can help just one person understand what I couldn't until I was almost 50 years old. It wasn't my fault.

I met a man for the first time in my life in late 2006. His name was John Weaver. I met him at a fundraiser for Arnold Schwarzenegger where John McCain was the headliner at the end of the 2006 campaign. I arrived at that event with Arnold and I left with McCain. Within months, under Weaver's leadership the campaign had collapsed and was bankrupt. During all the time I worked for John McCain I never heard a single person ever whisper that John Weaver was a predator.

I did not have a professional relationship with John Weaver again until December 2019.

I have said on the record that I learned about John Weaver's misconduct this past January. I know this is true, and I have certainty that the Lincoln Project independent investigation into John Weaver's conduct will validate this.

My purpose in writing this isn't to express what and when I knew about John Weaver, but how I feel about him, what he did and how many people he hurt. This is my truth. John Weaver has put me back into that faraway cabin with Ray, my Boy Scout leader. I am incandescently angry about it. I am angry because I know the damage that he caused to me, and I know the journey that lies ahead for every young man that trusted, feared and was abused by John Weaver.

I know the shame, the guilt, the doubt, the depression and anger that lies ahead. I know John Weaver will be a life-long companion for them in the way that Ray has been for me. I detest John Weaver in a way I can't articulate. My heart breaks that young men felt unseen and unheard in an organization that started. I am ashamed of it. I promise that we will release the full findings of what we discover through an independent investigation.

There is another truth about John Weaver of which I must speak. Like all predators, he is a skilled liar, and like all predators, he left clues. I had the surreal experience in the last month of being grilled by a national newspaper about my knowledge of John Weaver's misconduct. When I got off that call, I talked to another reporter from the same newspaper who said the newspaper has known for years. Since John Weaver's misconduct was made public, I learned about another national reporter that was going to write about Weaver, but then was ultimately dissuaded to do so by Weaver because he had told the reporter that his cancer had returned, and he had just six months to live. I was asked by a reporter if I thought the heart attack he told us about was real. The truth is: I don't know. I responded by saying I don't know if he lives in Texas. I just know that he is a liar and a predator, and I wish our paths never crossed. Unfortunately, they did.

I wish John Weaver was not a cofounder of the Lincoln Project, but as hard as I wish for that to be, I can't change that he was. I am enormously proud of the Lincoln Project and what we have accomplished to-date. I believe we built the most successful and politically lethal SuperPAC in history. We built a movement with millions of people, and we played a decisive role in Donald Trump's defeat.

During these last weeks, I have been consumed by anger and rage as I have seen the attacks from the rancid collection of liars, thugs and fascists, including Donald Trump Jr. and Laura Ingraham, attack the Lincoln Project, my character and the character of my friends over John Weaver's amoral predations.

I am in a tough business, and I know what I signed up for. I am long past the moments of fear that gripped me when FBI agents showed up at my house to tell me I was on the hit list of the Trump bomber. The truth is that these attacks awakened all of my old companions at once – shame, anger and depression. For those around me, it is the anger that has been most visible. For those who love me, it has been the depression.

Either way, it has not brought out my best self. I am not the daily manager of the Lincoln Project, but I am the senior leader. As the senior leader, it is my responsibility to set an example and to assume accountability.

I would like to apologize to Jennifer Horn. I let my anger turn a business dispute into a public war that has distracted from the fight against American fascism. Jennifer was an important and valuable member of our team. Truth be told, I didn't interact with Jennifer very often, but I always enjoyed the occasions when we did. She deserved better from me. She deserved a leader who could restrain his anger. I am sorry for my failure.

Yesterday, I was shown correspondence between Jennifer Horn and Amanda Becker, a reporter at The 19th News. I was told it came from an anonymous source. That direct message should never have been made public. It is my job as the senior leader to accept responsibility for the tremendous misjudgment to release it.

I apologize on behalf of the organization to both Jennifer Horn and Amanda Becker. I woke up this morning, and realized I've been fighting for a long time. It's taken a toll. I'm tired.

Presently, the Lincoln Project board is made up of four middle-aged white men. That composition doesn't reflect our nation, nor our movement. I am resigning my seat on the Lincoln Project board to make room for the appointment of a female board member as the first step to reform and professionalize the Lincoln Project.

The Lincoln Project was built to fight. It is my deepest hope that, despite the recent internal events that have distracted from our cause, you will entrust in us to continue to fight for what the entire Lincoln Project movement believes in: combatting the rising tide of fascism and authoritarianism in this country. We are one election away from seeing the end of American democracy. This fight will go on for the rest of my life.

For me, it's time to step back from the front – to get healthy mentally, physically and spiritually. I look forward to being on Real Time with Bill Maher tonight on HBO, and then to taking some much-needed time off.

Stay strong. There is much work to be done.

Steve