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Mitch Henck “Closing a door or curtain is the simple solution”

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"I knew I wanted to be a girl from the beginning," says Laura Gutknecht.

Gutknecht transitioned to a transgender woman 20 years ago at the age of 42. She completed the process surgically six years ago.

A regular caller on my radio show, Gutknecht speaks out against laws in Mississippi and North Carolina requiring citizens to use public bathrooms that align with their birth gender. She would have a hard time going into a men's bathroom wearing a dress.

"I really worry about those who have trouble passing soon after the transition," Gutknecht said. "The Adam's apple or height can make it difficult. We can take hormones to gain feminine characteristics, but we never lose the voice."

Gutknecht and her transgender brothers and sisters in Dane County have the support of County Executive Joe Parisi. The county executive sent a letter to department heads on Monday, suspending nonessential conference training or travel requests to North Carolina and Mississippi.

"In this day and age, I simply cannot support county money being spent on conferences, conventions and other events these states rely upon for sales taxes and other revenue," Parisi said.

He also sent a letter to Gov. Scott Walker on Tuesday, urging Wisconsin to use the North Carolina and Mississippi situations to its advantage.

"Wisconsin has an incredible opportunity to bring new business and jobs to our state, capitalizing on short-sided policies adopted and considered in a growing number of states," Parisi said.

So the pressure is coming from Hollywood and corporate America to avoid states with the bathroom restrictions. Even former Badgers coach and now Detroit Pistons coach Stan Van Gundy says the NBA should not play its all-star game in North Carolina next year.

But what about concerns regarding privacy? One woman emailed me this week saying she even feels uncomfortable dressing in a health club next to another woman. In fact, Wisconsin changed its civil rights law under Gov. Jim Doyle so Curves health clubs could ban men from being members.

So what about "new" women next to originalist women, or "new" men going into close quarters with originalist males? Gutknecht says showers could have curtains, and locker rooms would have to have changing areas. Gutknecht says she hasn't had a problem in the bathroom in 20 years.

"We already have laws against peaking under the stall or molesting someone," she says.

I once had a mortgage client approved for a loan as a man, and when I followed up a year later my client was a female.

"I'm so relieved," she said. At the time, I felt happy for her. All I wanted was her business.

Gutknecht remembers how she had nothing in common with the other boys: "I always liked girl things. I never liked sports."

Gutknecht embraced photography and audio visual activities instead. She says one challenge is when potential employers would find out from an old boss that her name used to be James.

"That can make it harder to get hired," she said.

North Carolina's governor has signed an executive order allowing businesses to opt out of the state's new law. Mississippi is giving business owners the right not to serve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens under the principle of religious freedom.

Indiana found out last spring how public and corporate backlash against such laws can be devastating.

I understand how people who grew up in more conservative families than I did will see this issue in a different light. I also respect the need for privacy. That's why it would make a whole lot of sense to close the door on the stall, close the shower curtain, or please change in another room.

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