

States dig in against transgender directive

By JONATHAN DREW and PAUL J. WEBER
Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Politicians in Texas, Arkansas and elsewhere vowed defiance — and other conservative states could follow suit — after the Obama administration told public schools across the U.S. on Friday to let transgender students use the bathrooms and locker rooms that match their gender identity.

The federal government's guidance was met with tearful praise from parents of transgender students.

"It's heartbreaking that these kids are losing their lives because they can't be accepted," Hope Tyler, who has a transgender son at a Raleigh high school, said in reference to suicides among transgender people. "Somebody has to speak for the kids."

The directive from the U.S. Justice and Education Departments represents an escalation in the fast-moving dispute over what is becoming the civil rights issue of the day.

One by one, conservative political leaders thundered against it and President Barack Obama.

"This is the most outrageous example yet of the Obama administration forcing its liberal agenda on states that roundly reject it," said Mississippi Republican Gov. Phil Bryant.

The guidance was issued just days after the Justice Department and North Carolina sued each other a state law requiring transgender people to use the public bathroom that corresponds to the sex on their birth certificate. The law applies to schools and many other places.

While supporters say the measure is needed to protect women and children from sexual predators, the Justice Department and others argue the threat is practically nonexistent and the law discriminatory.

The guidance issued on Friday is not legally binding, since the question of whether federal civil rights law protects transgender people has not been definitively answered by the courts and may ultimately be decided by the Supreme Court.

But schools that refuse



In this photo taken Thursday, signage is seen outside a restroom at 21c Museum Hotel in Durham, N.C. North Carolina is in a legal battle over a state law that requires transgender people to use the public restroom matching the sex on their birth certificate. The ADA-compliant bathroom signs were designed by artist Peregrine Honig.

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to comply could be hit with civil rights lawsuits from the government and could face a cutoff of federal aid to education.

Texas' lieutenant governor said the state is prepared to forfeit billions rather than let the Obama administration dictate restroom policy for its 5.2 million students.

"We will not be blackmailed by the president's 30 pieces of silver," Republican Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said.

Rodney Cavness, superintendent of the Port Neches-Groves school district in Texas, told KFDM-TV: "When I get that letter, I'll throw it away."

Similarly, GOP Gov. Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas said schools should disregard the directive, which he derided as "social engineering."

Governors and top leaders in other conservative states railed against the guidance but stopped short of telling schools to ignore it.

"The last time I checked, the United States is not ruled by a king who can bypass Congress and the courts and force school-age boys and girls to share the same bath-

rooms and locker rooms," North Carolina's Republican Senate leader Phil Berger said.

And Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin said: "It is difficult to imagine a more absurd federal overreach into a local issue."

However, Democratic Govs. Peter Shumlin of Vermont and Jay Inslee of Washington praised the Obama directive, saying it was consistent with their own policies.

"I applaud the Obama administration for establishing policies that will better provide all our children an opportunity to thrive," Inslee said.

The federal guidance may portend more court fights over transgender bathroom access.

Already, officials from eight states — West Virginia, Arizona, Kansas, Nebraska, Texas, Utah, Maine and North Carolina — signed on to a brief in recent days asking a federal appeals court to re-hear a case in which it sided with a Virginia transgender student seeking to use the boys' bathroom.

The new guidance says public schools must treat

transgender students in a way that matches their gender identity, even if their education records indicate a different sex.

Some school systems around the country already accommodate transgender students when it comes to bathroom use.

Nearly half the high schools in the 53,000-student Seattle district have gender-neutral restrooms, and students can also use the bathrooms in the nurses' office, spokeswoman Stacy Howard said.

The National School Boards Association has published guidelines for its members in dealing with transgender students. It stops short of telling them exactly what to do, instead advising them to work with their attorneys to determine the best course amid a "shifting legal landscape."

Francisco Negron, chief attorney for the organization, said there is a "disconnect" between what is happening in various states and what the federal government is demanding, "and school districts are caught in the middle."



Passengers wait in a security line at Washington's Ronald Reagan National Airport, Friday.

As fliers wait in security lines, gov't asks for patience

WASHINGTON (AP) — Facing a growing backlash over extremely long waits at airport security, Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson asked fliers "to be patient" as the government takes steps to get them onto planes more quickly.

Travelers across the country have endured lengthy security lines, some snaking up and down escalators, or through food courts, and into terminal lobbies. At some airports, lines during peak hours have topped 90 minutes. Airlines have reported holding planes at gates to wait for passengers to clear security.

Johnson said Friday that the government is working to ease the lines, although travelers should expect to wait as they travel this summer. Whatever steps TSA takes, Johnson said, it won't neglect its duty to stop terrorists.

"Our job is to keep the American people safe," Johnson told reporters at a news conference. "We're not going to compromise aviation security in the face of this."

The Transportation Security Administration has fewer screeners and has tightened security procedures. Airlines and the TSA have been warning customers to arrive at the airport two hours in advance, but with summer travel season approaching even that might not be enough.

Airlines are expecting

a record number of fliers this summer, meaning more passengers and bags to screen. Johnson said TSA is working with airlines to enforce limits on carry-on bags and their size. Passengers often over-pack carry-ons to avoid paying the \$25 checked bag fee most airlines charge. Two U.S. senators this week suggested that airlines should drop those fees. But that doesn't appear to be a solution either.

The TSA still scans checked luggage. And even that might not ease checkpoint problems. On Thursday, a video surfaced of giant lines at Chicago's Midway airport. Southwest Airlines — which is the only U.S. airline that doesn't charge for checked bags — is the predominant airline at Midway.

In the past three years, the TSA and Congress cut the number of front-line screeners by 4,622 — or about 10 percent — on expectations that an expedited screening program called PreCheck would speed up the lines. However, not enough people enrolled for TSA to realize the anticipated efficiencies.

Congress this week agreed to shift \$34 million in TSA funding forward, allowing the agency to pay overtime to its existing staff and hire an extra 768 screeners by June 15 to bring it up to the congressionally mandated ceiling of 42,525.

BRIEFLY

General is first woman to lead top-tier U.S. combat command

PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. (AP) — Air Force Gen. Lori J. Robinson on Friday became the first woman to lead a top-tier U.S. warfighting command when she took charge of the North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command in Colorado.

Robinson — one of just two female four-star generals in the Air Force — was "the clear and obvious choice," said Defense Secretary Ash Carter, who attended the change of command ceremony in a vast hangar at Peterson Air Force Base. Outside, a row of cannons fired a 19-gun salute.

Carter praised Robinson's extensive experience and her skill as a strategic thinker capable of making split-second, life-and-death decisions. Her promotion shows the U.S. has female officers qualified for the most senior positions, he said.

Robinson is an inspiration to female cadets at the nearby Air Force Academy, said Academy Superintendent Michelle Johnson, a three-star general and the first woman to head the school. "They appreciate seeing somebody that they can aspire to," Johnson said after the ceremony.

Robinson's family has deep roots in the Air Force. Her husband, David Robinson, is a retired two-star general and was a pilot in the Thunderbirds demonstration team. A daughter, 2nd Lt. Taryn Ashley Robinson, was fatally injured in a pilot training crash months after graduating from the Air

Force Academy. She died in January 2006, four weeks before her 23rd birthday.

People who know Robinson describe her as the personification of a new generation of leaders, someone who understands that the Air Force has a broad role in space, cybersecurity and drones, not just flying and fighting.

Sheriff Joe Arpaio found in contempt of court

PHOENIX (AP) — A judge found the longtime sheriff of metro Phoenix in contempt of court Friday for disobeying his orders in a racial profiling case, bringing the lawman who calls himself "America's Toughest Sheriff" a step closer to a possible criminal contempt case that could expose him to fines and even jail time.

The ruling Friday marked one of the biggest legal defeats in the six-term career of Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who is known for cracking down on illegal immigration, and was expected to lead to greater court oversight of his office. A hearing will be held May 31 to examine whether he will face a criminal contempt case.

Two months ago, Arpaio made national news by showering his support on Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump, then campaigning for him ahead of Arizona's primary. Trump even invoked Arpaio's name in his calls for tougher immigration enforcement.

The 83-year-old Arpaio, who is seeking a seventh term this year, and three of his top aides "have demonstrated a persistent disregard for the orders of this court."

BUTTE CHALLENGE THANK YOU

A special thank you to everyone who helped with the East Oregonian and Hermiston Herald 17th Annual Butte Challenge 5 & 10k Walk & Run. Each of you had a part in the success of this event.

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