

A TRANSGENDER STUDENT'S BATTLE SPLITS RURAL TOWN

GLOUCESTER: Amid the cornfields and marinas dotting this conservative tidewater Virginia enclave between the York River and Mobjack Bay, people are divided over what one local pastor calls "the civil rights issue of this generation" - how to deal with a transgender student's demand to use the boys' restrooms at the local high school.

"If they're not fixed like a man, they should not use the men's bathroom," Gary Pilkinton, a 56-year-old movie special effects worker, told a reporter recently outside the local Wal-Mart. Another shopper, Cheryl Walker, took the opposite view. "I don't care what bathroom he uses," the 71-year-old retiree said. "Just don't go potty on the hallway floor."

Gavin Grimm, who was born female but identifies as male, sued school officials over a policy requiring him to use either the girls' restrooms or a single-stall, unisex bathroom open to all students. The 16-year-old Gloucester High School junior claims it's stigmatizing and discriminatory. Some classmates and their parents argue that his presence in boys' bathrooms would be disruptive and a violation of privacy.

It's a new and decidedly modern issue for this rural eastern Virginia county that dates to 1651, promotes itself as Daffodil Capital of the World and takes pride in its history: home of George Washington's grandmother and the Indian princess Pocahontas. But the dispute, which unfolded in heated school board meetings and spilled into federal court, is not unique to Gloucester. A transgender student's use of the girls' facilities in a Missouri high school triggered a late-August backlash by parents and a protest by nearly 200 students. Last year, Maine's highest court ruled that a transgender fifth-grader could use the girls' restroom.

'In the Stone Age'

Grimm said he's not surprised by the division in Gloucester County. "There's the side that's like, 'Wow, Gloucester is really in the Stone Age with this one - just let you pee and be yourself and be happy,'" Grimm said in an interview. "And there's a lot of people from Gloucester who are like, 'It's the Bible Belt and Satan is in our town.'"

Grimm, represented by the American Civil Liberties Union, says in the lawsuit that he started refusing to wear girls' clothes by age 6 and told his parents he was transgender in April 2014 - a year before Caitlin Jenner made an international splash by publicly divulging her transgender status.

Grimm's parents helped him legally change his given name and took him to a psychologist who determined he has gender dysphoria, characterized by stress stemming from conflict between one's gender identity and assigned sex at birth. Grimm began hormone treatment to deepen his voice and give him a more masculine appearance.

During the last school year, Grimm was allowed to use the boys' restrooms and did so without incident until some parents complained. Amid the ensuing turmoil, the school board voted 6-1 for the policy restricting students with "transgender issues" to the single-stall facilities or those corresponding to their biological sex. Grimm complied, using a restroom in the school nurse's office, but found the board's solution unbearable.

"It's humiliating, it's ostracizing and I don't want to take that walk of shame to the unisex bathroom and know that everyone who saw me go in there knows why I'm in there - because I'm different, and I've been marked different by my school and publicly. ... I'm not comfortable with it whatsoever. I'm not an 'other' and I'm not unisex, I'm a boy," Grimm said.

Some have used other words, including "it" and "freak," Grimm said - dehumanizing insults that sting, even though he believes deep down that they stem from ignorance. He recoils at public discussion of his genitals and disputes suggestions that he is just seeking attention. Gloucester, a community of about 37,000, voted nearly 2-1 for the Republican candidate in the last two presidential elections in a state won by Democrat Barack Obama. A recent random sampling of local opinion there yielded a variety of outlooks. — AP



CONCON: A car is submerged in a flooded street after an earthquake-triggered tsunami. — AP

CHILE QUAKE KILLS AT LEAST EIGHT, MILLION EVACUATED

8.3 MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE SPARKS TSUNAMI WARNINGS

SANTIAGO: A powerful 8.3-magnitude earthquake struck off Chile Wednesday, killing eight people, forcing the evacuation of a million and sparking warnings that tsunami waves could reach Japan. Buildings swayed as far away as in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1,500 kilometers to the east. In Chile, people ran out into the streets in terror. TV footage showed stores with floors strewn with a mess of broken bottles, jars and other spilled merchandise. It was the sixth most powerful quake in the history of geologically volatile Chile and the strongest anywhere in the world this year, Deputy Interior Minister Mahmoud Aleuy said.

The death toll of eight was given by Interior Minister Jorge Burgos. Strong aftershocks followed the first quake, and a tsunami alert was imposed for hours for the Chilean coast. But it was lifted before dawn yesterday. Many people were evacuated to higher ground. Tsunami warnings were issued in New Zealand and other countries in the Pacific.

Without power

In Chile, more than 135,000 families were left without power in the north-central coast area, the National Emergency Office reported, lowering an early figure. Central Choapa province, which is closest to the epicenter, was declared a disaster zone and placed under military rule. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) said the quake occurred at 2254 GMT and measured a 8.3 on the so-called moment magnitude scale. It occurred at a shallow depth, 228 kilometers (about 140 miles) north of Santiago, a city of 6.6 million people. The Chilean government put the main earthquake at 8.4 on a slightly different measurement, the Richter scale. "The motion began lightly, then stronger and stronger," said Santiago resident Jeannette Matte. "We were on the 12th floor and we were very afraid because it was not stopping. First it was from side to side, then it was like little jumps."

Interior Minister Burgos said evacuation of coastal towns and cities had been ordered as a precautionary measure. Classes were cancelled in coastal areas. Among the dead were a woman in Illapel, close to the epicenter, and an 86-year-old man in Santiago, where there were scenes of pan-

demonium as thousands fled swaying buildings. Hardest-hit Illapel, a coastal city of 30,000, saw its electricity fail and several homes collapsed. Around a dozen people were injured. In coastal La Serena, in the north of Chile, "people were running in all directions," said resident Gloria Navarro. Waves crashed across coastal roads in the regions of Coquimbo and Valparaiso. Rough seas were also forecast yesterday.

Fear in Argentina

Fear also seized residents in Argentina. "We went into a panic and the floor kept moving. We went out into the hallway and down the stairs," Celina Atrave, 65, who lives in a 25-story high-rise near downtown Buenos Aires, told

AFP. Chilean President Michelle Bachelet said she would travel to the quake-hit area to assess the relief effort. The Hawaii-based Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said tsunami waves were also possible in French Polynesia, Hawaii and California, officials said, as well as smaller waves as far afield as Japan and New Zealand. The first tsunami waves struck Chile's coast, including the tourist city of Valparaiso, local television pictures showed, but there were no immediate details of damage or injuries. A precautionary alert for Peru was later called off, civil defense officials said, but scared residents in the city of Ilo, close to the border with Chile, remained out on the streets and on higher ground nonetheless. — AFP

NO RESPITE FROM THE SPOTLIGHT FOR BIDEN

LOS ANGELES: President Joe Biden's visits to Michigan and Ohio are being closely watched for signs he's gauging his support in two battleground states that typically play a key role in electing the next president. As he considers making a late entrance into the 2016 presidential race, his usual vice presidential appearances have taken on the air of campaign stops, with supporters cheering "Run, Biden, Run" at nearly every stop.

The vice president himself is keenly aware that anything he says will be interpreted as tipping his hand to which way he's leaning. The vice president has been deeply immersed in deliberations with his family and advisers about whether to enter the 2016 race. In recent days, Biden has opened a window into those deliberations, describing his lingering doubts about whether he has the emotional strength to mount a viable campaign just months after his son's death.

He's also started to speak out more directly against the Republican candidates he would face if he won the nomination. After denouncing front-runner Donald Trump on Tuesday for promoting a "sick"

anti-immigrant message, Biden traveled Wednesday to Anaheim, California, where he mocked Republicans who question mainstream science on global warming. "I think if you pushed them, they'd probably deny gravity as well," he said. Both of his stops will call attention to issues that have long been central to Biden's identity as a political leader - and could play equally important roles in his message to voters should he choose to run for president. In Detroit, Biden planned to join Mayor Mike Duggan at the city's transportation headquarters.

As it works to pull itself out of an economic morass, Detroit has been pursuing major improvements in its bus system, including a shortage of buses and drivers that has made bus service unpredictable for those who rely on it. The Obama administration refused to bail out Detroit when it declared bankruptcy, but has helped its bus system in line with its call for improved US infrastructure. Biden will close his trip in Columbus at Ohio State University, which is announcing new steps on sexual violence prevention including mandatory awareness training for all freshmen next year. — AP