



Opening Statement
of
Chairman Edolphus Towns

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Hearing on H.R. 4869
the "Restroom Gender Parity in Federal Buildings Act"

May 12, 2010

Good morning and thank you all for being here.

Today's hearing will address the issue of equal access to restroom facilities.

This is not a minor issue.

I am certain that every woman in this room has frequently experienced the inconvenience, as well as the discomfort, caused by an insufficient number of women's restroom facilities.

Women are often forced to wait in long lines to use public restrooms, or walk further to find a restroom, while men rarely have the same problem.

The lack of restroom facilities for women has a number of causes.

Many public buildings, including universities, airports, theaters, offices, and factories, were built decades ago, before women had entered the workforce in large numbers.

Moreover, these buildings were designed and built at a time when contractors, architects, engineers, builders, and government procurement officials, were overwhelmingly male, and rarely considered the needs of women.

To be honest about it, while women have made a lot of progress, those professions are still dominated by men – and old habits die hard. Public restroom facilities for women have still not caught up to those for men.

Throughout history, public restrooms have been the site of institutional discrimination by race, physical ability, and gender. With laws such as the Civil Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, we have made great strides in dealing with race and disability discrimination.

However, we have not done as well with gender discrimination.

Today women still lack equal access to restrooms in many places of employment, education, and recreation. The fact that many Federal buildings do not provide as many restroom facilities for women as they do for men is simply unfair.

It's time for that to change.

Within the last couple of decades, public appreciation of gender parity issues has gradually resulted in improvements

in restroom gender parity. As of 2006, at least 21 states had adopted statutes addressing restroom gender parity.

That's good, but we need to take the next step.

That's why I introduced H.R. 4869, the Restroom Gender Parity Act.

The bill requires that all new Federal buildings, as well as major renovations of existing Federal buildings, have at least an equal number of restroom facilities for men and women. The passage of this bill would be a milestone on the path toward true gender parity.

I am proud to say that I introduced this bill with the support of the Ranking Member of the Committee, Mr. Issa, who was an original cosponsor. H.R. 4869 will ensure that, from now on, Federal buildings will be constructed with equal access to restroom facilities, regardless of gender.

This hearing is the next step toward enacting this important legislation. I look forward to hearing the testimony of today's witnesses.

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