

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 8575

To strengthen the public-private partnerships and policy efforts of the Department of State to advance women’s economic security in South and Central Asia, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 29, 2026

Ms. JOHNSON of Texas introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

A BILL

To strengthen the public-private partnerships and policy efforts of the Department of State to advance women’s economic security in South and Central Asia, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Enhancing Mobiliza-
5 tion of Public-Private Organizations for Women’s Eco-
6 nomic Rights Act” or the “EMPOWER Act”.

7 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

8 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) Women’s full and unfettered political, eco-
2 nomic, and social participation is vital to realizing
3 universal human rights, global prosperity, peace, and
4 security.

5 (2) Women’s labor force participation, asset
6 ownership, and economic security are development
7 multipliers, promoting family financial resilience,
8 community health and development, children’s edu-
9 cational attainment, and poverty reduction, among
10 other development gains across South and Central
11 Asia.

12 (3) Women’s economic participation and oppor-
13 tunity, educational attainment, health and survival,
14 and political empowerment are directly proportional
15 to countries’ economic competitiveness.

16 (4) Women make up about 33 percent of South
17 Asia’s labor force, among the lowest female labor
18 force participation rates in the world, yet gender
19 parity in employment could increase South Asia’s
20 Gross Domestic Product by between 19 to 58 per-
21 cent.

22 (5) While the percentage varies across the five
23 Central Asian states, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan also
24 have some of the lowest female labor force participa-

1 tion rates in the world, at 29.6 percent and 35.9
2 percent, respectively.

3 (6) The Women’s Councils are consortia of pub-
4 lic-private partnerships between the Department of
5 State and United States and South Asian busi-
6 nesses, civil society, and universities, to matchmake
7 technology, networks, expertise, and resources of our
8 corporate and civil society members to create more
9 impact together than any entity could alone.

10 (7) The Women’s Councils implement President
11 Trump’s Presidential Memorandum on Promoting
12 Women’s Global Development and Prosperity and
13 the bipartisan Women, Peace, and Security Act of
14 2017.

15 (8) The Women’s Councils accelerate women’s
16 economic empowerment in South and Central Asian
17 countries, growing economies and advancing stability
18 and prosperity for all, at no cost to American tax-
19 payers.

20 **SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY.**

21 It is the policy of the United States to promote wom-
22 en’s economic security and advancement, including in
23 South and Central Asia, as an integral part of the broader
24 conduct of United States foreign policy in the region.

1 **SEC. 4. WOMEN'S COUNCILS AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE PART-**
2 **NERSHIPS ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC**
3 **SECURITY IN SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of State shall
5 maintain and seek to expand existing women's councils
6 and other public-private partnerships that—

7 (1) forge ties between the United States and
8 countries in South and Central Asia, by catalyzing
9 commitments from the private sector, civil society,
10 and academia; and

11 (2) advance women's employment, entrepre-
12 neurship and access to education, such as the
13 United States-Pakistan Women's Council, the
14 United States-India Alliance for Women's Economic
15 Empowerment, and the Alliance for Afghan Wom-
16 en's Economic Resilience.

17 (b) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
18 gress that the activities authorized under subsection (a)
19 should support—

20 (1) women's financial inclusion and access;

21 (2) women's access to mentorship;

22 (3) women's asset ownership;

23 (4) incubation and scaling of women-owned
24 startups and small and medium enterprises;

25 (5) access to procurement opportunities by
26 women entrepreneurs;

- 1 (6) career-enhancing educational opportunities;
- 2 (7) women in science, technology, engineering,
- 3 the arts and mathematics;
- 4 (8) the care economy; and
- 5 (9) addressing legal and social barriers to wom-
- 6 en's economic empowerment.

7 (c) LOCATION.—Activities authorized under this sec-
8 tion may be conducted in the United States, in countries
9 in South and Central Asia, or in third countries.

10 **SEC. 5. ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIT.**

11 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of State shall es-
12 tablish within the Bureau of South and Central Asian Af-
13 fairs a Unit responsible for overseeing the public-private
14 partnerships described in section 4(a). Such Unit shall be
15 led by a Special Advisor for Women's Economic Security,
16 who shall report to the Assistant Secretary of State for
17 South and Central Asia.

18 (b) SPECIAL ADVISOR.—The Special Advisor for
19 Women's Economic Security shall—

- 20 (1) be appointed by the Secretary of State, in-
21 cluding from among existing officials or employees of
22 the Department of State to serve as the Special Ad-
23 visor in addition to that official or employee's exist-
24 ing role; and

- 25 (2) have the rank and status of Ambassador.

1 (c) DESIGNATED POINT OF CONTACT.—Each United
2 States diplomatic and consular post the Special Advisor
3 determines relevant shall designate a point of contact from
4 among the personnel of such post, whose duties shall in-
5 clude identifying and tracking relevant private sector com-
6 mitments with respect to the public-private partnerships
7 overseen by the Unit established under subsection (a).

8 **SEC. 6. REPORT.**

9 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year after the
10 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State
11 shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees
12 a report that includes—

13 (1) a description of the steps taken to imple-
14 ment this Act, including allocated personnel and
15 funding;

16 (2) the status of the commitments and partner-
17 ships described in section 4(a); and

18 (3) economic data on the impact of work of the
19 Unit authorized by section 5.

20 (b) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES
21 DEFINED.—In this section, the term “appropriate con-
22 gressional committees” means the following:

23 (1) The Committee on Foreign Affairs of the
24 House of Representatives.

- 1 (2) The Committee on Foreign Relations of the
- 2 Senate.

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