

As a former educator and the Republican leader of the Education and Labor Committee, I can tell you that the bill may have equality in the title, but it certainly does not serve all Americans.

This legislation has a clever name and an allegedly noble purpose, but it is a vehicle for serious harmful consequences.

The Equality Act would empower the government to interfere in how regular Americans think, speak, and act. Specifically, it would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to make sexual orientation and gender identity protected classes. According to the National Review, this extreme legislation “redefines sex to include gender identity, undermines religious freedom, gives males who identify as females the right to women’s spaces, and sets a dangerous political precedent for the medicalization of gender-confused youth.”

Under H.R. 5, our Nation’s K–12 schools would be forced to treat gender as being fluid, subjective, and not tied to biological reality. The bill would undermine Title IX protections for girls by outlawing sex-based athletic competitions.

Even more troubling is the bill’s meticulous and intentional destruction of religious freedom protections.

Religiously-affiliated colleges and universities that maintain student codes of conduct, hiring practices, or housing rules reflecting sincerely held beliefs about marriage and sexuality, risk losing Federal funding under the Equality Act, as such policies would be deemed discriminatory.

Beloved secular private colleges that maintain single-sex policies, like Smith College and Morehouse College, would be forced to change their policies or forego Federal funding.

In the State of Virginia, we have already seen the displeasure among parents regarding such policy implementation. In an opinion piece published by the Washington Post in 2019, a former middle and high school teacher whose children attend Arlington public schools said: “It would erode parents’ rights over their children’s education, corrode Title IX protections for girls, and risk convincing healthy, normally developing boys and girls that their bodies are wrong and must be altered with hormones and be vandalized by surgical instruments.”

The bill also lacks any pro-life protections, which is why I am submitting my amendment that will protect religiously affiliated groups and individuals from being forced to perform abortions.

This bill is a brazen attempt to replace longstanding constitutional rights with the identity politics of the moment.

We have entered treacherous waters by considering legislation that stifles proven, bipartisan solutions and, more seriously, our Bill of Rights. It is outrageous that Democrats would adver-

tise these proposals as guaranteeing fundamental civil and legal rights.

Mr. Speaker, as elected Representatives, we all strive for equality before the law, but H.R. 5 is another classic example of Democrats passing a law now and figuring out what it means later. This is no way to legislate.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MCGOVERN). The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. COSTA) for 5 minutes.

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on behalf of the American Rescue Plan.

The critical need to provide economic relief for struggling Americans and communities across the Nation could never be more evident than it is now. A year into this pandemic, the world is reeling from the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.

This time last year, we had a handful of people that had, sadly, passed away from COVID-19 as it slowly made its way across the country. This week, we mourned over 500,000 lives lost and countless family members and loved ones that will be impacted forever, and we are still not out of the woods. Yesterday evening, we appropriately honored and recognized those Americans who lost their lives.

This pandemic has created a deep economic crisis for American families and small businesses. Economic inequities continue to accelerate, sadly. Our communities are hurting. They are hurting, and the time for decisive action is now, just as we did in a bipartisan effort last year.

Think about it. America—America, the richest country in the world, and yet the numbers are staggering. Over 18 million Americans are receiving unemployment benefits. Nearly 24 million Americans are going hungry, including 12 million children—12 million children. And nearly 40 million Americans cannot afford to pay the rent and possibly face eviction.

We must get more funding to our States and local governments so they can help those immediately impacted. This will allow us to begin to open our schools safely, which we must do, in addition to the rest of our economy. This is a key component of President Biden’s American Rescue Plan, which I support.

Now, let me repeat. The American Rescue Plan will work to keep communities safe and reopen schools with a robust vaccine plan for the public and educators that has been absent until the last 6 weeks.

In my own circumstance, my own constituency, the city of Fresno, in the heart of my district is facing a multi-million dollar budget shortfall. Like most cities across the country, they will be forced to cut jobs, including those of first responders, without Federal support. The same is true in the communities of Madera and Merced, also in my district.

The American Rescue Plan will bring nearly \$200 million to these two local communities combined, providing critical relief needed to provide funding for services their residents require, my constituents.

Now that vaccines are being administered, with millions inoculated so far, we have to continue to build on that momentum, for gaining the upper hand over this disease is on the horizon if we stay the course and implement the plan the President has outlined.

But we must do more to help Americans than just providing vaccinations. Obviously, that is at the front lines, and we will produce more vaccines in the next month and in the next 2 months so that, as the President said, 300 million Americans, by this summer, will have the ability to be vaccinated. But economic relief is part of the necessity to help them, and the American Rescue Plan does that.

Now, I have heard some of my colleagues on the other side talk about the concerns about the fiscal impacts to our economy. I am a Blue Dog. I believe that we need to have fiscal discipline, and I believe, after being here 17 years, that happens when Democrats are willing to deal with expenditures and Republicans are willing to deal with revenues. And unless we do deal with those two things together it isn’t going to happen.

The last administration indebted this Nation over \$7.5 trillion—\$7.5 trillion in the last 4 years. I didn’t hear much discussion during that time about the fiscal deficit. But I learned another thing in 17 years here; when Democrats are in charge, the debt matters. But when Republicans are in charge, who cares?

So let’s get real about this deficit. America is hurting today, and it needs our support and it needs our help.

Over 140 executives of major American corporations are supporting this plan. Over 140 of the major companies in America think that this is necessary, the \$1.9 trillion, to get this economy going and to put our country back on a track that we can be safe from this pandemic.

So I urge my colleagues to do the right thing and to vote in favor of the American Rescue Plan, as we did previous measures on a bipartisan effort.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize February as Career and Technical Education Month. Each year, this month highlights the benefits of a skills-based education and the valuable contributions that CTE students make to the American workforce.

A one-size-fits-all approach to education is not an effective way to prepare students for the workforce. We are

doing students a great disservice when we only promote what is considered a traditional college experience.

My appreciation for CTE came at an early age. My father, after leaving the Navy, went through a CTE program, which led him to a job as a tool and die maker. Eventually, he decided to start his own business, which became quite successful.

As co-chair of the Career and Technical Education Caucus, and a senior member of the Committee on Education and Labor, I have also supported, and will continue to support, CTE programs that provide learners of all ages with career-ready skills.

From agriculture to the arts, from marketing to manufacturing, CTE programs work to develop America's most valuable resource, its people.

CTE has established itself as a path that many high-achieving students choose in pursuit of industry certification and hands-on skills that they can use right out of school, in skill-based education programs, or in college.

Congress recognized the importance of CTE when we passed the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, which helps close the skills gap by modernizing the Federal investment in CTE programs and connecting educators with industry stakeholders. This bill was later signed into law by President Trump in 2018.

While this is a major milestone, there is still more work to be done. That is why I am supporting additional pieces of legislation on the horizon to keep updating and promoting workforce development throughout our Nation. These include:

The Skills Renewals Act, which creates a flexible skills training credit in the amount of \$4,000 per person that may be applied to cover the cost of a wide range of training programs that build skills expected to be in high demand by employers in the coming months.

There is also the Skills Investment Act, which enhances the Coverdell education savings accounts—tax-advantaged savings accounts for educational expenses—so American workers can use the accounts to pay for their skills-based learning, career training, and workforce development.

And lastly, the Cybersecurity Skills Integration Act, which creates a \$10 million pilot program within the Department of Education to award competitive grants to education-employer partnerships for the development and implementation, and/or expansion of postsecondary CTE programs that integrate cybersecurity education into curricula preparing students for careers in critical infrastructure sectors.

COVID-19 has demonstrated the need for CTE. Many of those who have been deemed as life-essential employees are those who have made their way to those jobs through the Career and Technical Education pathway. It gives

people from all walks of life an opportunity to succeed and restores rungs on the ladder of opportunity.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to encourage my colleagues to join my co-chair and I, Mr. LANGEVIN, on the bipartisan Career and Technical Education Caucus, to help us equip individuals of all ages with the skills necessary to fill jobs now and in the future.

BLACK HISTORY IS AMERICAN HISTORY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. COSTA). The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Georgia (Ms. BOURDEAUX) for 5 minutes.

Ms. BOURDEAUX. Mr. Speaker, this week, as February becomes March, Black History Month comes to an end. But I want to be clear, every month is Black History Month because Black history is American history.

Today, I am thinking of the amazing Black women and men who inspire us daily and who changed the world.

I am thinking of Ruby Bridges who, at only 6 years old, became the first Black student to integrate a southern elementary school.

I am thinking of Gwinnett's own Beauty Baldwin, the first Black woman to be a school superintendent in Georgia.

I am thinking of Hank Aaron, who showed the world the meaning of Black excellence when he broke Babe Ruth's home run record, and he was a proud Georgian.

I am thinking of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., an Atlanta preacher who shared his dream with the world and, in the process, changed it forever.

And I am thinking of Senator RAPHAEL WARNOCK, who preached from the same pulpit as Dr. King, and who now follows in his footsteps as an advocate for change.

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I am thinking of KAMALA HARRIS, our Nation's first Black and first female Vice President, and of all the Black and Brown girls around the country who are finally able to look at the White House and see themselves reflected there.

Finally, I am thinking of our beloved Georgia friend, mentor, and colleague, John Lewis. Congressman Lewis would have turned 81 this weekend. Congressman Lewis spent his life getting into good trouble.

At 21, he was one of the original 13 Freedom Riders. At 23, as the chairman of SNCC, he spoke at the March on Washington. At 25, he led the march from Selma to Montgomery, in the process withstanding all the violence and hatred local and State officials could throw at him.

Congressman Lewis went on to serve Atlanta on both the city council and in Congress for more than 35 years, becoming the conscience of the Congress.

The tireless work of heroes like John Lewis pushes me to continue pursuing

equitable and just policies. Over the past 2 years, our country has had a much-needed awakening to the systemic inequality people of color face every single day. I promise to continue using my privilege as a Member of Congress to try to break down that inequality wherever it is found.

In that spirit, I am proud to be co-sponsoring some critical pieces of legislation being considered in Congress: H.R. 1, the For the People Act, a transformational bill that seeks to ensure free and fair elections and easy access to the ballot box, to secure nonpartisan redistricting, and to put people over dark money and special interests in elections; the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, the first-ever bold, comprehensive approach to holding police accountable, changing the culture of law enforcement and building trust between law enforcement and our communities by addressing systemic racism and biases in order to help save lives; H.R. 40, which creates a commission to study reparations; H.R. 55, the Emmett Till Antilynching Act; H.R. 959 to address the Black maternal mortality crisis in America; a resolution to recognize the difficulty Black veterans face when returning home after serving our country; and a resolution to award the Congressional Gold Medal, Congress' highest honor, to the Freedom Riders.

Of course, while it hasn't been introduced, you can be certain my name will be one of the first ones signed up to co-sponsor the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, which will restore and modernize portions of the Voting Rights Act scrapped by the Supreme Court. The right to vote is sacred. John Lewis knew that better than most, and we must protect it.

Nor is it enough to sign on to these pieces of legislation and call it a day. Just as Black history should be celebrated every month, every piece of legislation we consider must also be looked at for how it will impact our Black communities.

Mr. Speaker, as I deliver remarks today in celebration of Black History Month, I would be wrong to not acknowledge that yesterday was the 1-year anniversary of the murder—yes, the murder—of Ahmaud Arbery. A young man from my State of Georgia, Ahmaud was killed while going out for a jog, a simple luxury that so many of us enjoy without fear of harm.

Ahmaud's case and the way it was handled continue to show us all that inherent biases and systemic racism remain prevalent in our society. We here on this floor must do everything we can to break those barriers down. You have my word, I will continue to do so.

CELEBRATING JACKIE SMITH'S RETIREMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. RUTHERFORD) for 5 minutes.