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Truth and Tradition

House GOP Parents' Bill of Rights Moves One Step Closer to Floor Vote

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Republicans on the House Rules Committee have moved the Parents' Bill of Rights Act one step closer to a floor vote in the House.

The committee advanced the bill 9–3 along party lines. All three Democrats on the committee voted against it.

H.R. 5, the fulfillment of Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy's (R-Calif.) long-promised "parental bill of rights," would do several things, each with the overarching goal of ensuring that parents know what's going on in their kids' classrooms.

The main component of the bill would require schools to publicly disclose the contents of their curriculum and library materials to parents. Currently, many schools teaching controversial left-wing ideas do so without the parents' knowledge.

"Parents have the right to be heard," Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.) told the committee during her testimony in support of the measure, which she called "a cornerstone" of GOP priorities this Congress.

“Parents are the stakeholders in America’s future,” Foxx said later. “It’s about time we started listening to them.”

Additionally, the bill would establish the right of parents to see their kids’ schools’ expenditures.

“Public schools are paid for by taxpayer dollars,” Foxx added. “Mothers and fathers deserve financial transparency and to see how their money is being used.

The bill would also ensure that parents are notified of, and give consent to, any medical procedure performed on their child on school grounds.

A similar provision would require that parents be notified of any violent activity on school grounds.

At the close of the hearing, Democrats offered several amendments, but each were voted down by Republicans along party lines.

‘Prevents Teachers From Teaching’: Democrat Panelist

Democrats spoke out against the bill, dismissing the legislation as political in nature.

In his opening remarks, Ranking Member Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) said that the point of the bill is “to continue to make the classrooms ground zero for the MAGA culture wars.”

Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon (D-Pa.) said the bill would “inject national politics and culture wars into our local schools.”

Rep. Bobby Scott (D-Va.) made a similar contention, dismissing the legislation as the “Politics Over Parents Act.”

“H.R. 5 prevents learners from learning, and prevents teachers from teaching,” Scott said.

Scott said that while Democrats support “parental engagement” with their kids’ education, he claimed that the bill “does not take any meaningful steps to increase parental engagement.”

Scott also contended that the bill was not constitutional, citing an opinion published by the Cato Institute.

Scott said that the bill would allow “a vocal minority to impose their beliefs on the rest of the country.”

‘Book Banning’

Allegations of “book banning” took up a large portion of the hearing.

Scott repeated a misleading claim about “banning books” during his opening testimony.

“State Republicans are going on a book banning spree that would make the Chinese Communist Party blush,” McGovern said later.

Twenty-five states have passed such laws.

McGovern depicted this as “Republican legislators telling students what they are, and are not, allowed to learn.”

“That allows one racist or homophobic person to tell an entire class, an entire *school*, what they can and can’t read,” he added.

Many school districts and states have passed legislation to ensure that highly ideological or sexual material stays out of school libraries, particularly the libraries of elementary and middle schoolers.

For example, many school districts and states have barred the book “Gender Queer” by Maia Kobabe from school libraries. The book, delivered in the form of a graphic novel, recounts the experience of a minor female who believes she is male; during an especially graphic part of the story, the main character is depicted engaging in oral sex with another biological female who identifies as male.

In other cases, books have simply been pulled from the reading lists of one grade level and bumped up to a higher grade level.

“There’s a fundamental difference between banning books and ensuring books are appropriate for the age level,” Rep. Guy Reschenthaler (R-Pa.) said.

“Everything has to be age appropriate,” Foxx agreed later.

While some books are prohibited from being in the libraries of some schools or districts, these books remain protected by the First Amendment and available for the public at large to purchase and read.

During later questioning, Scott admitted that nothing in the bill would ban books. But he suggested that if libraries were forced to disclose their inventory, more books would be banned.

As part of the bill, school libraries would be required to publish the full list of books in their library, and to update those lists in a timely fashion when they purchase new materials.

Scott painted a portrait of right-wing organizations mounting crusades to have certain books removed from school libraries: “This bill will make the logistics of that easy.”

Rep. Chip Roy (R-Texas) responded to this argument later in the hearing, citing the book “Flamer.” Written by Mike Curato, the book traces the homosexual experiences of a minor boy at summer camp with another minor boy.

“If libraries have to publish their lists, yeah, some things might be removed,” Roy said. “[Flamer] *should* be removed. But it’ll be debated. It’ll be discussed.”

Protecting Parents Who Speak Out

One of Republicans’ key goals in crafting the bill was to ensure that parents who speak out against what is being taught to their children not face retribution from local, state, or federal authorities.

“No longer will [parents] have their speech denied, or feel threatened for expressing their concerns at school board meetings,” Foxx said.

The comment was a reference to a late-2021 controversy in which Attorney General Merrick Garland offered federal resources and guidance to local law enforcement to target parents who attended school board meetings.

In 2021, the United States saw a deluge of concerned parents coming to school board meetings to speak out against left-wing ideology in the classroom.

Many parents came to their school board to speak out against critical race theory (CRT), a highly contentious left-wing theory that holds that white people are inherently “privileged” and that non-white people are inherently oppressed. Critics of CRT note that it has its origins in the political thought of Karl Marx, the ideological founder of communism; the theory has also been criticized as racist for its efforts to reduce the individual to a member of a group on the basis of their skin color.

In his remarks against the bill, Scott suggested that CRT was “an accurate recounting of our nation’s history,” and that the legislation would “punish librarians” who pushed CRT.

Other parents came to school board meetings to speak out against fringe left-wing notions of sex and gender. Many left-wing activists claim that gender is a social construct and that a person can change their gender based on their feelings.

One parent, Terry Newsome of Chicago, who spoke out against allowing “Gender Queer” in his kids’ school library in 2021, was later placed on a terror watch-list with no warning or further explanation.

In an Oct. 4, 2021, memo Garland sent to U.S. attorneys across the nation, the attorney general offered to help local law enforcers to round up and file charges against parents who spoke out.

Republicans took the memo as a sign that the administration was prepared to target parents for protected First Amendment activity. Since then, they have vowed to deliver a “parents’ bill of rights” to protect against such abuses if they took back the House.

During his questioning, Rep. Ralph Norman (R-S.C.) explicitly referenced the Oct. 4 memo as part of the reason for the bill’s existence.

Big Tech

Other provisions of the bill relate to Big Tech.

Congress has increasingly focused on Big Tech since whistleblower testimony from a former Meta employee revealed the ways that social media can guide users and young children to dangerous or harmful content that promotes eating disorders, self-harm, among other things.

H.R. 5 would pick up on the bipartisan consensus that children need to be protected online. Current federal laws relating to the Internet are dated, with most being passed prior to the popularization of social media.

“This bill codifies the right of parents to protect their children’s privacy,” Foxx told the panel.

To this end, the Parents Bill of Rights Act would ensure that tech companies not harvest the data of minor children without parental knowledge and consent.

Members of both parties have increasingly raised alarm bells on the need to protect minors’ data from being harvested and sold to third parties for profit.

During the House GOP retreat, McCarthy indicated that parental rights in education was one of his top legislative priorities.

With its passage by the Rules Committee, the bill is set for a vote and likely passage in the House on McCarthy’s order.

