

House bill bans transgender students from girls' sports

January 15, 2025

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Speaker Mike Johnson celebrated the House passage of a bill banning transgender students from girls' sports on Jan. 14 by linking opposition to transgender rights with a passage from the biblical book of Genesis.

Johnson made the comments shortly after the House passed the Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act in a 218-206 vote, with all House Republicans and two Texas Democrats—Reps. Vicente Gonzalez and Henry Cuellar—voting in favor of the bill.

The legislation bars transgender athletes from competing in girls' and women's sports from elementary school through college.

Johnson points to Genesis

"We know from Scripture and from nature that men are men and women are women, and men cannot become women," Johnson said in a news conference immediately after the vote.

He spoke while flanked by Rep. Greg Steube, who introduced the bill, as well as Riley Gaines, a former college athlete who is known for advocating against transgender women in sports.

Gaines has credited a Christian "spiritual awakening" with informing her activism and likened her work to fighting a "spiritual battle."

Johnson said he was referring to a passage in Genesis, and when asked by RNS how he responded to different interpretations of that passage by

Christians, including traditions that ordain openly transgender people, he said the Bible was “pretty clear.”

“Well, it goes back to the first book—Genesis. Male and female, he made them,” Johnson said. “I’m not sure there’s another interpretation, but everybody’s open to interpreting Scripture however they will.”

Johnson then argued that the bill “comports with common sense as well.”

“We know it from our religious tradition, which I believe is the truth. I’m a Bible-believing Christian and make no apology about that,” he said. “But whether you regard that as truth or not, it’s also nature. It’s biology, and biology is not bigotry, as we say.”

Johnson, a Southern Baptist, voiced the same scriptural claim in November during debate over whether to bar people from using bathrooms that do not correspond with their sex assigned at birth.

The debate was tied to then-incoming Rep. Sarah McBride of Delaware, a Democrat and a Presbyterian, who became the first openly transgender member of Congress when she was sworn in earlier this month.

‘About bullying children’

Johnson, who ultimately did institute the ban, quickly garnered pushback from religious leaders such as Bishop Gene Robinson, the first openly gay Episcopal bishop. Robinson preached a sermon in defense of McBride at the Washington National Cathedral in November and derided Johnson’s interpretation of Scripture as “absurd” in an interview with RNS.

On Jan. 14, shortly before the vote, Democrats spoke out against the bill, including Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, who is Catholic, and Greg Landsman of Ohio, who is Jewish.

Ocasio-Cortez condemned Republicans for what she said amounted to pretending to “care about women,” and Landsman, a Harvard Divinity School graduate, likened it to bullying.

“This bill is about bullying children,” Landsman said.

The bill, which advocates said President-elect Donald Trump is willing to sign after he is inaugurated next week, now moves to the Republican-controlled Senate.