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## House Leaders May Strip Gender Identity From ENDA

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Immediately following the historic Senate vote to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the federal hate-crimes law, controversy erupted over the Employment Non-Discrimination Act now under consideration in the House of Representatives.

The Democratic House leadership is considering stripping protections for transgender people from ENDA after a preliminary vote count found the measure would not pass if it had trans-inclusive language.

"The fact of the matter is, we've been canvassing this -- the votes just are not there for a trans-inclusive bill," said Steven Adamske, spokesman for Rep. Barney Frank, sponsor of the original bill. Reps. Frank and Tammy Baldwin, the only openly gay members of Congress, called for the count after they learned House speaker Nancy Pelosi feared the measure lacked enough support to pass.

Adamske said that putting a trans-inclusive bill on the floor for a vote could result in a bruising debate that would make it very difficult to revisit the bill. "The one thing we don't want to do is embolden the enemy," he said of Republicans who might be looking to exploit the vote as a wedge issue.

"My boss's recommendation is to go forward with an historic ENDA bill and then, in the very near future, work on improving that bill, as has been done with every single civil rights bill that has been passed in the last 40 years," said Adamske, noting that the original Civil Rights Act of 1964 failed to include protections for both voting (added in '65) and housing (added in '68).

Brad Luna, spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign, confirmed that House leaders were likely to consider a bill without transgender protections.

"The indication we are getting from the Hill is that the leadership will possibly move forward with a new version of ENDA that does not offer explicit protections for gender identity," Luna said. "HRC is deeply disappointed and did not assent to this position."

HRC has been a lead organization in advocating for a trans-inclusive bill, targeting moderate members of Congress for support. The National Center for Transgender Equality, a group that has also been working the halls of Congress to pass ENDA, could not be reached for comment.

**Thursday afternoon, national LGBT rights organizations including the Human Rights Campaign, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and the National Center for Transgender Equality met to discuss the situation.**

Earlier in the day, shortly after reports of the change originally surfaced on the *Washington Blade's* Web site, LGBT advocacy groups fired off statements of disapproval.

**“If media reports from the last 24 hours are accurate, it is unconscionable that congressional leaders would rush to a decision to strip protections for transgender people at the same time as states across the nation are adding these protections at an unprecedented pace,”** said Matthew Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

**Foreman called it “incredibly ironic” that the House is considering such a move on the same day that the Senate voted 60–39 to allow a voice vote on a trans-inclusive hate-crimes bill. The House has passed a hate-crimes bill twice that included gender identity.**

The National Stonewall Democrats put out a statement echoing Foreman's sentiments, adding, “We would oppose any bill that did not protect transgender people.” Eleven other organizations signed on to the statement: Empire State Pride Agenda; Equality Texas; Garden State Equality; the Mautner Project; National Center for Lesbian Rights; National Center for Transgender Equality; **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**; National Stonewall Democrats; National Coalition for LGBT Health; National Coalition of Anti-Violence Projects; Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays; and the AFL-CIO's Pride at Work. (Kerry Eleveld, *The Advocate*)