

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signs anti-democratic “Don’t Say Gay” bill”

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In a vicious attack on teachers and the democratic rights of the entire working class, far-right Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis signed HB-1557, commonly referred to by opponents as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill, on Monday. The bill declares that “classroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity may not occur in kindergarten through grade 3 or in a manner that is not age appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards.”

The Florida law, and similar ones, have the backing of far-right billionaires and Republican-linked organizations, such as the Alliance Defending Freedom, which in recent years, the *Washington Post* reported over the weekend, has “battled in court against abortion rights and in favor of religious practices in schools and drafted language for anti-transgender ‘bathroom bills’ later used in multiple states.”

The *Post* notes that last year, the Alliance Defending Freedom “formed a coalition with two other conservative nonprofits, the Heritage Foundation and the Family Policy Alliance, that published a list of positions on transgender and gay rights that have repeatedly surfaced in the restrictive new state bills.”

While Republicans have long agitated against democratic rights for LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning) persons, their efforts have found little support in the broader population. Recent polling conducted by PRRI found that “nearly eight in ten Americans (79%) favor laws that would protect gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people against discrimination in jobs, public accommodations, and housing.”

Even among self-identified Republicans, support for same-sex marriage is evenly divided, with 48 percent in support and only 50 percent opposed. Recent polling in Florida shows only 40 percent supported HB-1557, while 49 percent were against it, including the vast majority of young people.

Beginning July 1, HB-1557 allows for parents to sue school districts over alleged violations of the policy. Opponents of the law, formally titled the “Parental Rights in Education” bill, have correctly pointed out that the broad language regarding what is considered “age” or “developmentally appropriate” education effectively bars any teaching or discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity in every grade due to the risk of already cash-strapped public schools suffering further financial losses due to politically-motivated lawsuits filed by reactionary bigots.

The new law also forbids schools to enact policies that would

allow teachers to withhold so-called “critical decisions” to parents “affecting a student’s mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being,” essentially requiring teachers to inform parents if they suspect a student might be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, leading to schools potentially “outing” children to unsympathetic parents.

An avalanche of scientific research has established the immense psychological toll suffered by children during the pandemic due to the profit-driven responses of capitalist governments the world over which have refused to enact a Zero COVID policy, instead adopting the criminal “herd immunity” policy, resulting in over 20 million deaths globally and incalculable mental anguish.

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, suicide was the 12th leading cause of death in the US in 2020, with 45,979 Americans dying by suicide, an average of 130 per day. The highest suicide rate was found among young adults, 25 to 34 years (18.35 per 100,000) and person 75 years and older (up to 20.86 per 100,000) while the rate for young adults was 14.24 deaths by suicide per 100,000.

For LGBTQ children and young adults, the figures are even more horrific. While suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people according to 2020 CDC statistics, LGBTQ youth are four times more likely to seriously consider suicide. The Trevor Project’s 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that 42 percent of LGBTQ youth “seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including more than half of transgender and non-binary youth.” The figures, according to the Trevor Project, translate to an estimated “503,073 LGBTQ youth between the ages of 13-18 and 209,917 between the ages of 19-24 who attempted suicide in the past year,” or nearly three-quarters of a million combined.

Ignoring the lives and well-being of thousands of children and millions of their family members, DeSantis proudly signed the anti-democratic legislation on Monday surrounded by children holding signs that read “Protect Children, Support Parents.” Seeking to appeal to QAnon fascists, who claim Democratic politicians are engaged in Satanic pedophile sex traffic and sacrifice rings, the fascist governor accused his critics of not wanting to “admit that they support a lot of the things that we’re protecting against.”

In a barefaced lie aimed at inciting violence against teachers who have already been subjected to a torrent of anti-scientific and hateful attacks over the past two years for enforcing mask mandates or teaching any history that is critical of US

society/capitalism, DeSantis claimed his political opponents “support sexualizing kids in kindergarten. They support injecting woke gender ideology into second-grade classrooms. They support enabling schools to ‘transition’ students to a ‘different gender’ without the knowledge of the parent.”

Last year DeSantis signed into a law a bill that banned transgender girls and women at public schools and colleges from competing on girls and women’s sports teams. In Utah last Friday, the Republican-dominated legislature overwhelming overrode Republican Gov. Spencer Cox’s veto of anti-transgender legislation last Tuesday that prevents transgender athletes from competing in woman’s sports. Utah is at least the 12th state to enact a ban on transgender athletes.

Continuing his bigoted campaign, which is aimed at a run for president in 2024, DeSantis signed a public declaration last Tuesday declaring that college swimmer Emma Weyant was the “rightful winner” of the 500-yard freestyle race at this year’s NCAA women’s swimming championship. In reality, Weyant finished second losing by two seconds to Lia Thomas, a swimmer for the University of Pennsylvania. Thomas, who is currently transitioning and had to submit to testing by the NCAA to prove her testosterone levels were within specific thresholds before competing, is the first known transgender athlete to win an NCAA title and thus has been subject to unrelenting attack from the right.

In a sparsely attended campaign-style rally this past Saturday in Commerce, Georgia, ex-President Trump, flanked by dozens of his Republican co-conspirators, including Reps. Marjorie Taylor-Greene (Georgia) and Matt Gaetz (Florida), voiced his support for “banning critical race theory” across the US government and the current wave of anti-trans and LGBTQ legislation under the guise of protecting “woman’s sports.”

Attacking Thomas, Trump referenced the swimming title at his rally, falsely claiming that while “a woman was going to try and break the record,” a “guy came along” and “broke the record by 38 seconds.” Republicans posturing as defenders of woman’s sports is completely hollow and cynical. For 50 years, Republicans have led the charge against Title IX, an amendment to the 1964 Civil Rights Act that extended race and gender protections to education.

While the amendment doesn’t specifically address sports, in 1974 Republican Sen. John Tower (Texas) attempted to amend Title IX to exempt prohibitions against sex discrimination in sports. Tower claimed, as conservatives and reactionaries would for the next 50 years, that by guaranteeing woman access to the same sports as men it resulted in less opportunities for men, because, in capitalist America, there is “no money” to field a men’s *and* a women’s team.

Trump and DeSantis’s fascistic appeals are part of a coordinated effort by the Republicans to run on a campaign of hate in the 2022 midterm elections and beyond. According to data from Freedom for All Americans, an LGBTQ advocacy group, at least 166 bills have been advanced in state legislatures so far this year that seek to restrict LGBTQ rights, nearly four times as many bills as introduced three years ago according to the group.

Separately, the Human Rights Campaign is tracking over 500 “pieces of potentially LGBTQ+-related legislation introduced in

the 2022 state legislative session. Of those at least 313 are classified as harmful to the LGBTQ+-community, and 137+ are specifically anti-transgender bills.”

The continued scapegoating and increasing attacks against transgender persons by capitalist politicians have deadly consequences. According to HRC, 53 trans-Americans were murdered in 2021, compared to 44 in 2020 and 25 in 2019.

When not passing discriminatory legislation, some Republican politicians are openly inciting fascistic violence against transgender people. In a Twitter thread on May 24, former Mississippi lawmaker and failed Republican 2019 gubernatorial candidate Robert Foster called for his political opponents that support LGBTQ and transgender rights “to be lined up against [a] wall before a firing squad to be sent to an early judgment.”

Foster served in the Mississippi state House from 2016 until 2020, during which the *Mississippi Free Press* reports, “he authored the state’s current death penalty law in 2017, allowing for execution by gas chamber, electrocution and firing squad. He placed third in the 2019 Republican primary for governor after making national headlines for refusing to allow women journalists to ride along in his truck on the campaign trail despite allowing male journalists to do so.”

Like DeSantis, in 2021, Republican Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves signed a bill into law banning transgender students from participating on sports teams that match their new gender. The 2021 law was written by the aforementioned Alliance Defending Freedom, which also wrote the Mississippi law banning abortion at 15-weeks gestation. The law was purposely written to be taken to the Supreme Court where it could be used to reverse *Roe v. Wade*, which overturned state bans on abortion nationwide some 45 years ago.

The current Republican-led fascistic campaign against LGTBQ persons has more than a whiff of Nazism to it. Commenting on the historical parallels, courageous whistle-blower Chelsea Manning posted in a recent Twitter thread on her visit to the Bebelplatz, in Berlin, the site of the infamous Nazi book-burning ceremonies held on May 10, 1933.

She wrote that visiting the site “where much of the archives of Magnus Hirschfeld’s research on gender and sexuality were burned in May 1933 by a crowd of brownshirts and fascist student groups, the context is different, but lately it feels very close to home.”

Positing a photo of a plaque with a quote from the radical German poet Heinrich Heine, Chelsea typed: “the plaque reads: ‘Das war ein Vorspiel nur, dort wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man auch am Ende Menschen.’ in English: ‘that was only a prelude; where they burn books, they will in the end also burn people.’”



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