

Trump bans transgender athletes from entering the United States

Isla Anderson, Evan Winters
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Secretary of State Marco Rubio issued a ban last week on international transgender athletes entering the United States, escalating ongoing attacks on transgender rights and immigrants, which lay the groundwork for broader attacks on the working class.

Over the last month and a half, the Trump administration and the Republican Party have issued a series of fascistic executive orders, decrees, and legal actions, attacking the rights of transgender people to make their own healthcare decisions, have government identification that matches their gender identity, and, in the state of Iowa, to have access to basic civil rights protections against discrimination.

Rubio justified the ban on international transgender athletes under the 1952 Immigration and Nationalities act, which authorizes a “permanent fraud bar” as punishment for “lying” on a visa application. The pretense is that a gender marker matching a transgender person’s gender identity, rather than one that aligns “with their sex assigned at birth,” amounts to “misrepresenting the purpose of their travel or sex,” which constitutes “fraud.” Such a “fraud bar” would lead to a lifetime ban on entry into the United States, with few opportunities for appeal.

Although currently targeting only athletes, the same logic could easily expand to a blanket ban on visas to all transgender people whose travel documents match their gender identity rather than sex assigned at birth. This precedent illustrates how easily the Trump administration can reinterpret existing law to impose sweeping travel bans.

The Trump administration is attempting to whip up hysteria over the participation of transgender athletes in sports as part of a broader attempt to demonize transgender people and scapegoat them for a variety of social ills. Even the title of Trump’s executive order,

“Keeping Men Out of Women’s Sports,” which bars trans women (female-identifying people born as males) from participating in women’s sports, is clearly designed to stoke prejudice.

This is of a piece with efforts to restrict transgender bathroom access, claiming in an executive order titled “Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government,” that trans women are “men [who] self-identify as women [to] gain access to intimate single-sex spaces and activities designed for women.” Such language of “protecting women and girls” from some threatening group of people has long been used by the far right to stoke a pogrom-like atmosphere.

The order also mandates the transfer of transgender women from women’s prisons to men’s prisons. Given the widespread prevalence of rape and sexual assault within US prisons, this decision will likely result in mass rape of transgender inmates. These relocations, in conjunction with the denial of gender-affirming care, will effectively force transgender inmates to involuntarily detransition (the traumatizing process of reversing a social or medical gender transition) and face the pervasive threat of rape from inmates and guards.

Further attacking the rights of transgender children and young adults, the Executive Order entitled “Protecting Children From Chemical And Surgical Mutilation” severely restricts access to lifesaving healthcare. The executive order effectively bans all forms of gender-affirming healthcare for transgender youth and young adults. According to the American Medical Association, “receipt of gender-affirming care, including puberty blockers and gender-affirming hormones, was associated with 60% lower odds of moderate or severe depression and 73% lower odds of suicidality over a 12-month follow-up” in a sample

study of 104 transgender and non-binary youth. In extending the age range to 18-year-olds, the Trump administration intends to test the legality of banning gender-affirming care for all transgender people, regardless of age.

By referring to life-saving gender-affirming-care as “chemical mutilation,” the Trump administration indicated that its public health policy is reactionary and willfully ignoring known science, a trend intensified by the appointment of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as the Secretary of Health and Human Services, despite his anti-scientific hostility to vaccinations.

Parents of transgender children should be particularly alarmed by Trump’s insistence on utilizing the Parental Kidnapping Prevention Act (PKPA) to remove children from parents who insist on treating their children’s gender dysphoria. The PKPA was implemented by Congress in 1980 to give the federal government control over interstate custodial battles between parents, giving family courts jurisdiction regardless of state borders. By abusing the PKPA to persecute the parents of transgender children for the “crime” of treating their children’s gender dysphoria, the Trump administration makes clear the brutality with which it will respond to opposition.

These federal attacks are now finding expression in state law. Most recently, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds signed Senate File 418a bill into law, eliminating civil rights protections from transgender Iowans by removing them as a protected class in the Iowa Civil Rights Act. Upon signing the bill into law, Reynolds, a Republican, echoed the Trump line, stating that “it is common sense to acknowledge the ‘obvious’ biological differences between men and women” and that enabling hiring and housing discrimination against transgender people is “necessary to secure ... protection for women and girls.”

At the beginning of February and in a move directly out of the Nazi playbook, the Trump administration ordered the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to purge all public mentions of transgender people, gender dysphoria, and myriad terms relating to the existence of transgender people. This includes the extreme step of recalling transgender-related scientific publications that are already under review at scientific journals. This is akin to a 21st-century book burning. It is not a coincidence that the first Nazi book burning targeted an

institute dedicated to studying healthcare for transgender people.

Taken together, these measures are clearly attempting to eliminate transgender people from public life. These attacks, and similarly vitriolic attacks on immigrants, are the tip of the spear in a much broader attack on the fundamental rights of the working class. The measures used today to suppress transgender people and brutally detain and deport immigrants will soon be employed against striking workers and political opponents.

Workers across the United States and internationally should come to the defense of transgender people, firmly opposing the Trump administration’s attacks. Despite their verbal support of transgender people, the response of the Democratic Party to these massive attacks has been passive complacency, at best only token opposition. This makes clear that the working class must lead the defense of the democratic rights of transgender people, including the right to live in peace, express their gender identity in public, and receive the healthcare required to do this.



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