

Civil Rights Protections for Gay and Lesbian Americans

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The House just passed the [Employment Non-Discrimination Act \(ENDA\)](#), a bill which represents an important step forward in the fight for civil rights in the United States. It is high time for Congress to recognize and address the fear of persecution in the workplace experienced by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Americans. The Federal Government is right to follow the lead of 20 progressive states to extend federal employment protection to the lesbian and gay community, and I was pleased to cast my vote in favor of this bill. ENDA ensures that American workers will be judged on their ability as workers instead of allowing ignorance and fear to bar them from contributing to the success of the nation and enjoying the unalienable rights of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Protecting the most vulnerable

Sadly, more inclusive language was narrowed to exclude the most vulnerable, least understood group within the LGBT community, transgender men and women. I congratulate [Rep. Baldwin](#) on offering an amendment to re-insert this wording into the underlying bill and I proudly support her effort. Although this amendment was withdrawn, I was prepared to vote in its favor. Despite this compromise, I support final passage of the bill because I recognize that the perfect should not be the enemy of the good. I trust in my colleagues and my leadership that we will not stop the push for civil rights after consideration of this bill, and I reiterate my dedication to further expanding protection to transgender men and women.

Mischaracterized as “Anti-Religious”

The bill has been mischaracterized as “anti-religious”. Gay, lesbian, and straight people alike, strongly religious and strongly secular, support this important step in the struggle for civil rights. Yet, the authors of the bill have wisely sought a compromise for those who still hold a religious objection to these civil rights protections by crafting exemptions for religious organizations and schools. I was proud to vote for this bill, and am glad that it passed the House.