As a former educator and the Republican leader of the Education and Labor Committee, I can tell you that the bill may have equality in the title, but it certainly does not serve all Americans.

This legislation has a clever name and an allegedly noble purpose, but it is a vehicle for serious harmful consequences.

The Equality Act would empower the government to interfere in how regular Americans think, speak, and act. Specifically, it would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to make sexual orientation and gender identity protected classes. According to the National Review, this extreme legislation ''redefines sex to include gender identity, undermines religious freedom, gives males who identify as females the right to women's spaces, and sets a dangerous political precedent for the medicalization of gender-confused youth.''

Under H.R. 5, our Nation's K–12 schools would be forced to treat gender as being fluid, subjective, and not tied to biological reality. The bill would undermine Title IX protections for girls by outlawing sex-based athletic competitions.

Even more troubling is the bill's meticulous and intentional destruction of religious freedom protections.

Religiously-affiliated colleges and universities that maintain student codes of conduct, hiring practices, or housing rules reflecting sincerely held beliefs about marriage and sexuality, risk losing Federal funding under the Equality Act, as such policies would be deemed discriminatory.

Beloved secular private colleges that maintain single-sex policies, like Smith College and Morehouse College, would be forced to change their policies or forego Federal funding.

In the State of Virginia, we have already seen the displeasure among parents regarding such policy implementation. In an opinion piece published by the Washington Post in 2019, a former middle and high school teacher whose children attend Arlington public schools said: ''It would erode parents' rights over their children's education, corrode Title IX protections for girls, and risk convincing healthy, normally developing boys and girls that their bodies are wrong and must be altered with hormones and be vandalized by surgical instruments.''

The bill also lacks any pro-life protections, which is why I am submitting my amendment that will protect religiously affiliated groups and individuals from being forced to perform abortions.

This bill is a brazen attempt to replace longstanding constitutional rights with the identity politics of the moment.

We have entered treacherous waters by considering legislation that stifles proven, bipartisan solutions and, more seriously, our Bill of Rights. It is outrageous that Democrats would advertise these proposals as guaranteeing fundamental civil and legal rights.

Mr. Speaker, as elected Representatives, we all strive for equality before the law, but H.R. 5 is another classic example of Democrats passing a law now and figuring out what it means later. This is no way to legislate.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MCGOVERN). The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. COSTA) for 5 minutes.

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on behalf of the American Rescue Plan.

The critical need to provide economic relief for struggling Americans and communities across the Nation could never be more evident than it is now. A year into this pandemic, the world is reeling from the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.

This time last year, we had a handful of people that had, sadly, passed away from COVID–19 as it slowly made its way across the country. This week, we mourned over 500,000 lives lost and countless family members and loved ones that will be impacted forever, and we are still not out of the woods. Yesterday evening, we appropriately honored and recognized those Americans who lost their lives.

This pandemic has created a deep economic crisis for American families and small businesses. Economic inequities continue to accelerate, sadly. Our communities are hurting. They are hurting, and the time for decisive action is now, just as we did in a bipartisan effort last year.

Think about it. America—America, the richest country in the world, and yet the numbers are staggering. Over 18 million Americans are receiving unemployment benefits. Nearly 24 million Americans are going hungry, including 12 million children—12 million children. And nearly 40 million Americans cannot afford to pay the rent and possibly face eviction.

We must get more funding to our States and local governments so they can help those immediately impacted. This will allow us to begin to open our schools safely, which we must do, in addition to the rest of our economy. This is a key component of President Biden's American Rescue Plan, which I support.

Now, let me repeat. The American Rescue Plan will work to keep communities safe and reopen schools with a robust vaccine plan for the public and educators that has been absent until the last 6 weeks.

In my own circumstance, my own constituency, the city of Fresno, in the heart of my district is facing a multimillion dollar budget shortfall. Like most cities across the country, they will be forced to cut jobs, including those of first responders, without Federal support. The same is true in the communities of Madera and Merced, also in my district.

The American Rescue Plan will bring nearly $200 million to these two local communities combined, providing critical relief needed to provide funding for services their residents require, my constituents.

Now that vaccines are being administered, with millions inoculated so far, we have to continue to build on that momentum, for gaining the upper hand over this disease is on the horizon if we stay the course and implement the plan the President has outlined.

But we must do more to help Americans than just providing vaccinations. Obviously, that is at the front lines, and we will produce more vaccines in the next month and in the next 2 months so that, as the President said, 300 million Americans, by this summer, will have the ability to be vaccinated. But economic relief is part of the necessity to help them, and the American Rescue Plan does that.

Now, I have heard some of my colleagues on the other side talk about the concerns about the fiscal impacts to our economy. I am a Blue Dog. I believe that we need to have fiscal discipline, and I believe, after being here 17 years, that happens when Democrats are willing to deal with expenditures and Republicans are willing to deal with revenues. And unless we do deal with those two things together it isn't going to happen.

The last administration indebted this Nation over $7.5 trillion—$7.5 trillion in the last 4 years. I didn't hear much discussion during that time about the fiscal deficit. But I learned another thing in 17 years here; when Democrats are in charge, the debt matters. But when Republicans are in charge, who cares?

So let's get real about this deficit. America is hurting today, and it needs our support and it needs our help.

Over 140 executives of major American corporations are supporting this plan. Over 140 of the major companies in America think that this is necessary, the $1.9 trillion, to get this economy going and to put our country back on a track that we can be safe from this pandemic.

So I urge my colleagues to do the right thing and to vote in favor of the American Rescue Plan, as we did previous measures on a bipartisan effort.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize February as Career and Technical Education Month. Each year, this month highlights the benefits of a skills-based education and the valuable contributions that CTE students make to the American workforce.

A one-size-fits-all approach to education is not an effective way to prepare students for the workforce. We are