

US Senate

US Senate Democrats block bill to ban trans athletes from women's sports

Democratic senator says trans athletes 'deserve an ally' after Republican-led bill quashed in razor-sharp 51-45 vote



People rally in support of transgender rights in Washington DC on 1 March. Photograph: Hoi Yan Tang/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Joseph Gedeon in Washington

Tue 4 Mar 2025 10.21 EST

US Senate Democrats banded together to torpedo a Republican bill that would ban transgender athletes from women's sports, defeating the legislation in a razor-sharp party-line vote of 51-45 on Monday evening.

The Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act, led by Tommy Tuberville, a senator from Alabama, crashed before reaching the 60 votes needed to advance, halting the proposal that had passed the House in January.

A [New York Times/Ipsos poll](#) from January found 79% of Americans opposed transgender female athletes competing in women's sports, a statistic Republicans hoped would bolster their position. Democrats, however, swiftly branded the bill a cynical political distraction.

"Sen Tuberville is trying to churn the social wars about something that really doesn't exist," John Hickenlooper, a senator from Colorado, [told NBC News](#), adding that he believes "it's an infinitesimally small group of people that are really trying to find their ways."

Senator John Fetterman took a more direct approach, describing the targeted athletes as schoolchildren who "deserve an ally".

"Empty show votes or cruelty on social media aren't part of a thoughtful, dignified solution," he wrote on X.

Four senators did not vote: Shelley Moore Capito and Cynthia Lummis from the Republican party, and Elissa Slotkin and Peter Welch from the Democratic party.

Gary Peters, the senator from Michigan, suggested the issue was being deliberately overblown, noting [to NBC News](#) that there are "hundreds of thousands of athletes" and only "two individuals" in this specific situation.

“This is not really an issue like in Michigan,” he said. “People are going to realize that it’s really been an issue that **Republicans** have been trying to exploit.”

Still, the legislative maneuvering comes against the backdrop of increasingly restrictive **Trump administration** policies targeting transgender athletes. In late February, a state department directive **obtained by the Guardian** instructed visa officers to apply a “permanent fraud bar” against foreign transgender athletes, with officials told to consider whether misrepresentations about sex could support visa ineligibility.

Earlier in February, **Donald Trump** had explicitly directed homeland security **to deny visas** to “men attempting to fraudulently enter the United States while identifying themselves as women athletes” during the 2028 Olympics.

The crushed vote is likely to rear its head back around, with Republicans positioning the issue as a key cultural battleground for years to come.

“Why don’t **Democrats** agree that only biological women should compete in women’s sports?” Joni Ernst, a Republican senator, wrote on X. “It’s common sense.”

Ruben Gallego, a senator from Arizona, **told NBC News** that candidates should focus on substantive issues: “If you’re not known for fighting for people to have a decent living, these outside fringe issues are what is going to bring you down.”

Tuberville, a former college football coach, remained defiant after the defeat, posting on social media: “This is far from over. I’ll NEVER stop fighting to protect women and girls.”

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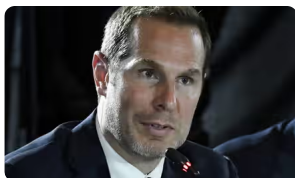


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