

U.S. lawmakers push legislation to punish universities divesting from Israel

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Signs are displayed in front of Deering Meadow, where an encampment of students protesting in

support of Palestinians set up their tents, at Northwestern University campus in Evanston, Illinois, on April 25, 2024. (Photo by Reuters)

Washington, November 29 (RHC)-- Two U.S. lawmakers have put forward a controversial bill that will withhold federal funding for universities engaging in a “commercial boycott” of Israel after a year of massive pro-Palestinian mobilization across university campuses in the United States over the occupying regime’s genocidal war in the besieged Gaza Strip.

Earlier this week, Republican Congresswoman Virginia Foxx and Democratic Congressman Josh Gottheimer introduced “The Protect Economic Freedom Act”, a bill aimed at amending Title IV of the Higher Education Act to deny federal funding to institutions engaged in a “non-expressive commercial boycott of Israel.”

The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which is modeled after the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, was launched in 2005 by over 170 Palestinian organizations that were pushing for “various forms of boycott against Israel until it meets its obligations under international law.”

Thousands of volunteers worldwide have since then joined the BDS movement, which calls for people and groups across the world to cut economic, cultural, and academic ties to Tel Aviv, to help promote the Palestinian cause.

During the spring semester earlier this year, university campuses across the US became the battleground for demonstrations against Israel’s war on Gaza, resulting in a series of tense and violent encounters. The students were calling for an end to Israel’s genocidal war on Gaza and in line with the BDS movement, demanding colleges divest financial stakes in companies profiting from Israel’s ongoing war on Gaza

“If an institution is going to capitulate to the BDS movement, there will be consequences - starting with the Protect Economic Freedom Act,” Foxx said in a statement.

Pro-Israel lawmakers have been warning for months that they may use federal funding as leverage against universities that yield to pro-Palestinian protesters’ demands and divest from companies benefiting from the war on Gaza, labeling such boycotting as “anti-Semitic.”

The bill is similar in nature to anti-boycott laws enacted in over 30 state legislatures across the U.S., which require individuals contracted with the state to pledge not to boycott Israel.

The pro-Israel measures have faced strong criticism from pro-Palestinian groups and free speech organizations, who argue that they contradict the First Amendment of the US Constitution, which protects the right to freedom of speech.

Backed by Washington and its Western allies, Israel launched the war on Gaza on October 7, 2023, after the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas waged the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Flood against the Israeli regime in response to the occupying entity’s decades-long campaign of bloodletting and devastation against Palestinians.

The regime’s bloody onslaught on Gaza has so far killed 44,249 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 104,746 others. Thousands more are also missing and presumed dead under rubble.

[SOURCE: REUTERS]



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