

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

By Eriade Hunter*

H. R. 288 Civil Rights Amendments Act of 2005

Introduced by Representative Towns (D-NY)

This bill will amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fair Housing Act to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and will be known as the "Civil Rights Amendments Act of 2005." The amendment contains the same text of the original Acts protecting people from being discriminated against, but substitutes the words "religion" and "color" with "affectional or sexual orientation."

H. R. 40 Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act

Introduced by Representatives Conyers (D-MI), Brown (D-FL), Clay (D-MO), Davis (D-IL), Jackson-Lee (D-TX), Lee (D-CA), Meek (D-FL), Nadler (D-NY), Olver (D-MA), Payne (D-NJ), Rush (D-IL), Thompson (D-MS), Waters (D-CA), Watt (D-NC), Jackson (D-IL), McDermott (D-WA), Meeks (D-NY), Millender-McDonald (D-CA), Norton (D-DC-AL), Owens (D-NY), Rangel (D-NY), Schakowsky (D-IL), Towns (D-NY), and Watson (D-CA).

This bill acknowledges the abhorrent nature of the slavery as it existed in the United States and aims to establish a commission to evaluate the subsequent discrimination against African-Americans and to make recommendations to the Congress on possible reforms. The purpose of this Act is to "examine the lingering negative effects of the institution of slavery" and decide if any formal apology is needed or any form of compensation to the descendants of the African slaves is fitting.

H. R. 286 Medicaid Obesity Treatment Act of 2005

Introduced by Representative Towns (D-NY)

This bill intends to require the states that provide Medicaid prescription coverage to cover drugs medically necessary to treat obesity. Deaths related to obesity are the second leading cause of death in the U.S. and the prevalence of obesity in children is nearly twice what it was in the 1980s. This is particularly troublesome as childhood obesity continues into adulthood and increases the risk of other serious diseases. Gender, age, race, ethnicity, and income create variances in risk factors for many of these diseases. For instance, there are overweight people in all segments of the population, but obesity is more common in Hispanic, African American, Native American, and Pacific Islander women. Overweight people often are victims of discrimination and thus, psychological stress and reduced income.

S. 2160 Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Higher Education Enhancement Act

Introduced by Senator Boxer (D-CA)

This bill aims to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to include Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. The Asian American and Pacific Islanders are an extremely diverse population due to the existence of varying ethnicities, immigration patterns, historical experiences, and social group issues. Census figures record that there are seventeen ethnic groups considered as Asian and four considered as Pacific Islander. Despite acknowledging these differences, educational programs and policies are based on aggregated data that assumes Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are a homogenous group, neglecting the differences in level of education attained by subgroups within the larger group. The diverse cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and historical experiences affect educational levels.

In addition, the predominating "model minority myth" negatively affects many youth who are incorrectly perceived as being academically superior and thus, not needing educational support services. Only 12.6% of the total Asian Americans and Pacific Islander population lives in poverty which masks the disparity contained within the group. For instance, 25% of Vietnamese Americans, 63.6% of Hmong Americans, 42.6% of Cambodian Americans, 34.7% of Laotian Americans, and 17.7% of Pacific Islanders live in poverty. These statistics are inextricably linked with educational attainment as only 13.8% of Vietnamese Americans, 5.8% of Laotian Americans, 6.1% of Cambodian Americans, less than 5.1% of Hmong Americans, and only 13.8% of Pacific Islanders had college degrees.

H. RES. 367 Condemning bigotry, violence, and discrimination against Iranian-Americans.

Introduced by Representatives Meehan (D-MA), Shays (R-CT), Mica (R-FL), and Feeney (R-FL).

This resolution urges all levels of law enforcement officials to aggressively prosecute crimes committed against Iranian Americans as a result of their national origin or ethnicity. Iranian Americans have been subjected to an increased number of arrests followed by extended arbitrary detentions without charges, denials of access to counsel, and abuse by prison guards in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Additionally, since September 11, there has been a massive surge in the number of discriminatory crimes directed towards Americans of Middle Eastern descent, including Iranian Americans.

* Eriade Hunter is a first-year law student at American University Washington College of Law and staff writer for *The Modern American*.