

THE HOUSE JUST PASSED A BILL PUNISHING “POLITICALLY MOTIVATED” BOYCOTTS OF ISRAEL

Far-right Rep. Lauren Boebert added an amendment to the Pentagon budget that targets the BDS movement against Israel.

Matt Sledge

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Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., walks in the U.S. Capitol on July 2, 2025, in Washington.
Photo: Andrew Harnik/Getty Images

IN A FIRST step toward a federal law punishing criticism of Israel, the House of Representatives on Wednesday passed a massive defense budget that would bar companies engaged in “politically motivated” boycotts of the country from Pentagon contracts.

The bill would effectively ban contractors boycotting Israel from tapping most federal contract dollars, since **more than half** of the \$755 billion the U.S. government spent on contracts last year flowed through the Defense Department.

The ban, the latest legislative attempt to target the **Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement** against Israel’s human rights violations, or BDS, would still have to pass the Senate.

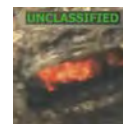
“This amendment is really designed to shield Israel from any accountability.”

The upper chamber was debating its own version of the budget bill on Thursday that does not include an anti-BDS provision.

Critics predict a court challenge if the anti-boycott provision makes it into law.

“This amendment is really designed to shield Israel from any accountability by penalizing those who protest its violations of Palestinian human rights through boycotts, which should be protected by the First Amendment,” said Hassan El-Tayyab, the legislative director for Middle East policy at the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

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The anti-BDS provision was spearheaded by Rep. Lauren Boebert. R-

Boebert’s measure received [no discussion](#) when it was approved by the House on a voice vote as part of a package of amendments to the budget bill Tuesday. The House went on to pass the full, amended version of the National Defense Authorization Act on Wednesday night.



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The overall bill passed 231–196, with [support from 214 Republicans and 17 Democrats](#).

El-Tayyab said that passing the anti-boycott provision in such a rushed manner did a “real disservice to the American people, especially people that are engaged in protesting an unfolding genocide going on in Gaza.”

Anti-BDS Laws

Bills targeting the BDS movement have passed many state legislatures. Some seek to bar people or companies supporting BDS from winning government contracts, leading critics of the laws to argue that they

violate the First Amendment's guarantee of free speech by punishing political views.

Federal courts have taken a mixed view on whether the anti-BDS laws violate the Constitution, and the Supreme Court has yet to consider the question.



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Thirty-eight states had some form of anti-BDS legislation in effect as of 2023, [according to Palestine Legal](#), a group that supports the free speech rights of pro-Palestine advocates.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order [targeting the boycott movement](#) during his first term in 2019, which he restored in January after his reelection. Pro-Palestine [activists](#) have [been](#) a [major](#) target of his ongoing [crackdown on universities](#) and immigrants.

Existing federal law takes aim at companies who observe Arab countries' boycotts of Israel. Earlier this year, however, pro-Israel lawmakers sought to criminally penalize anyone who boycotted companies that the United Nations has identified as doing business in illegal Israeli [settlements](#) in the [occupied West Bank](#). The bill [foundered](#) in the face of opposition from Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., and conservative activists.

Brian Hauss, an attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union, said the scope of the Boebert amendment is even broader. He warned that it could lead to the targeting of other social movements despised by the right, [as advocated by the Heritage Foundation](#).

“It’s not just applying to boycotts called for by international organizations, it’s applying to civil society boycotts,” he said. “It is an attempt to stifle and suppress a social movement that is designed to protest the actions of the Israeli government. That is exactly what it is targeted at. It started there but it’s not going to end there – that’s exactly what makes this so dangerous.”



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Chilling Dissent

Boebert’s provision makes clear that it is intended to punish political views.

“The Secretary of Defense may not enter into a contract with a person if such person is engaged in an activity that is politically motivated and is intended to penalize or otherwise limit significant commercial relations specifically with Israel or persons doing business in Israel or in Israeli-controlled territories,” the provision states.

That provision clearly runs afoul of the First Amendment, said Chip Gibbons, policy director of the nonprofit Defending Rights & Dissent.

“There can be no question this amendment is aimed at punishing people for political points of view and political speech,” he said, “which is precisely what the First Amendment prohibits.”

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