

Thank God for the hundreds of thousands of relentless pro-life activists, for millions of pro-life marchers, for tens of millions of pro-life voters, and thank God for the courage of six Supreme Court Justices who withstood the pressure, the threats, and the intimidation to do the right thing morally and constitutionally.

May our legislative bodies in Washington now match that courage. The responsibility passes to us now, the people's elected representatives, to pass laws protecting all life in the womb.

HONORING THE KIWANIS CLUB OF WARREN, PENNSYLVANIA

(Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, as co-chair of the Service Organization Caucus, which highlights the great work of service organizations across our country, I rise to recognize and honor the Kiwanis Club of Warren, Pennsylvania.

This month, the Kiwanis Club of Warren is celebrating 100 years of service. Since July 12, 1922, Kiwanis of Warren have worked toward fulfilling the mission of Kiwanis International "to improve the world one child and one community at a time."

Their work not only in Warren, but internationally, has made a positive impact for children and families everywhere.

The Kiwanis Club of Warren has raised funds for a joint effort between UNICEF and Kiwanis International to eliminate iodine dependency disorder and maternal neonatal tetanus worldwide.

In addition to the club's global impact, the Warren Kiwanis Club also makes a difference at home. In efforts to engage the next generation of service-minded leaders, the Kiwanis Club sponsors three service leadership programs where participants focus on leadership and character building.

The Kiwanis Club of Warren also sponsors a variety of community building events, like the Salvation Army bell ringing and annual blood screenings.

I congratulate the Kiwanis Club of Warren for 100 years of service.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Clerk of the House of Representatives:

OFFICE OF THE CLERK,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, July 11, 2022.

Hon. NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MADAM SPEAKER: Pursuant to the permission granted in Clause 2(h) of Rule II

of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Clerk received the following message from the Secretary of the Senate on July 11, 2022, at 3:42 p.m.

That the Senate passed S. 3157.

That the Senate passed S. 3846.

With best wishes, I am,

Sincerely,

CHERYL L. JOHNSON,
Clerk.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which the yeas and nays are ordered.

The House will resume proceedings on postponed questions at a later time.

REAFFIRMING THE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE CARIBBEAN NATIONS AND RECOGNIZING THE NEED TO STRENGTHEN TRADE AND INVESTMENT BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE CARIBBEAN NATIONS, OUR "THIRD BORDER"

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 1168) reaffirming the economic partnership between the United States and the Caribbean nations and recognizing the need to strengthen trade and investment between the United States and the Caribbean nations, our "Third Border", as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 1168

Whereas Congress commits to strengthening economic ties and cooperation with the Caribbean people to promote equitable economic growth and development across the region;

Whereas the Caribbean region has a population of approximately 44,000,000 people, millions of people have emigrated between the Caribbean and the United States, and approximately 13,000,000 people in the United States, or 4 percent of the United States population, share Caribbean ancestry;

Whereas it is in the national interest of the United States to support the economic development of sovereign Caribbean nations and territories;

Whereas greater opportunities for mutually beneficial trade and investments promote economic growth, development, poverty reduction, democracy, the rule of law, civil rights, and overall stability;

Whereas regional and global integration with our Caribbean neighbors should be strengthened to create decent jobs, boost economic growth in the Caribbean and the United States, and eliminate barriers to trade and investment in the Caribbean;

Whereas it remains the goal of the United States to support diversification of Caribbean exports to the United States;

Whereas, in 1983, Congress launched the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) through the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act

(CBERA) and expanded it in 2000 with the United States–Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act (CBTPA);

Whereas the United States shares a history of struggle with Caribbean neighbor countries, including with our courageous sister nation of Haiti;

Whereas Haiti suffered destabilizing events in 2021, including severe insecurity, a deadly earthquake, widespread democratic protests, continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, all of which have contributed to a governance and humanitarian crisis that requires immediate further attention and support from the United States and the global community;

Whereas specialized United States trade preferences with Haiti, including the Haiti Economic Lift Program (HELP) and Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Act (HOPE II) programs, aid Haiti's growing textile and apparel manufacturing industry and are a critical source of steady jobs for many Haitian people to support their families;

Whereas trade preference programs for the Caribbean and Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries, such as the Generalized System of Preferences, CBI, and CBTPA have provided important economic benefits for Caribbean Basin country economies, including by facilitating niche production and more diversified exports, while also benefiting United States businesses and workers, including by helping to add value for customers and supporting United States jobs;

Whereas Caribbean people and their island nation economies have led globally by exploring innovative economic strategies to produce collective benefits for their communities, such as through the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, to reduce the economic impact of major disasters;

Whereas the United States seeks to prioritize and promote a worker-centered trade agenda that facilitates trade and protects freedom of association, fosters a sustainable environment and climate path, advances racial equity and supports underserved communities, addresses unfair economic trade practices, supports domestic producers, and promotes growth and development around the world;

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the public health and economies of the Caribbean and the United States, which has also contributed to inequality within and between nations, and further excluded vulnerable groups from the benefits of trade and economic development;

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to strengthen supply chain resilience and increase near-shoring in global trade;

Whereas the United States believes that free and fair trade practices, economic growth, and stable domestic employment foster democratic principles of good governance;

Whereas United States and Caribbean economic ties, including through Caribbean services and manufacturing sectors, produce critical goods and services for consumers and jobs for workers that strengthen their economies;

Whereas such economic ties serve strategic purposes by providing an alternative to potentially predatory economic practices of other foreign governments, including non-market economies, in the Caribbean that harm national and regional interests in the Western Hemisphere;

Whereas climate change and natural disasters pose acute risks for Caribbean people and island economies; and

Whereas the United States signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement in

2013 with CARICOM to drive strengthened trade and investment ties between CARICOM and the United States: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) urges the President to prioritize and implement trade programs with the Caribbean region that promote sustainable and resilient economic development;

(2) commits to engaging directly with diverse stakeholders from the Caribbean, including CARICOM Trade Ministers, policymakers, as well as labor, business, and civil society representatives, to dialogue and develop a shared multilateral trade agenda;

(3) affirms trade and tariff preference programs that strengthen the economic relationship between the Caribbean and the United States and produce economic benefits for people of all racial, ethnic, gender, ability, economic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds;

(4) encourages further enhancing trade programs between the Caribbean and the United States; and

(5) supports critical trade policies and preference programs, such as HELP and HOPE II, and further commits to strengthen those policies to ensure they advance sustainable economic development, produce positive economic benefits in Haiti, the Caribbean, and the United States, and protect our most vulnerable communities.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. PLASKETT) and the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. SMITH) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous materials on the bill under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands?

There was no objection.

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, let me begin by commending my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, Representatives WENSTRUP, SEWELL, and BLUMENAUER, and indeed the membership of the Ways and Means Committee collectively, for joining me in support of U.S. trade and economic relations with our Caribbean neighbors.

This resolution is the product of a year's worth of work, and today would not be possible without the bipartisan support of my colleagues from across the aisle, particularly Representative WENSTRUP, and his leadership, and our shared commitment to a focus on U.S. trade engagement with the Caribbean.

This resolution commits to enhance the economic partnership between the United States and the Caribbean region through strengthened trade engagement, including by promoting economic growth and development across the region, engaging directly with diverse stakeholders from the Caribbean, and supporting critical trade policies and preference programs.

The Caribbean, along with Latin America, has experienced significant

challenges in recent years. According to the International Monetary Fund, IMF, we have seen a larger GDP contraction from the region than any other place in the world. Simultaneously, per capita deaths from COVID have been greater from the Caribbean and Latin America than any other region in the world. Furthermore, many of the islands and countries in the Caribbean have also experienced severe natural disasters, such as the recent earthquake in Haiti and numerous other extreme weather events like hurricanes.

So this resolution simply expresses support for furthering U.S. trade ties and economic relations with the Caribbean region. Overall, the resolution expresses the importance of the existing economic partnerships between the United States and the Caribbean region and strengthening U.S. trade and investment ties with the region.

Presently, the U.S. does about \$35 billion in trade with the region, and American businesses can have a greater opportunity to grow in the region with our help.

Deepening economic ties between the U.S. and the Caribbean region helps American partnerships across the Western Hemisphere, where we support budding democracies at our doorstep and create mutually beneficial economic stability with our neighbors. Reciprocal trade is one of the mechanisms we pursue to do that.

Our overall trade agenda was well served by agreements like the 2013 Trade and Investment Framework Agreement between the U.S. and the Caribbean Community, CARICOM, as well as important trade promotion programs like the U.S.-Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act and the HOPE/HELP trade preference programs for Haiti.

The Ways and Means Committee will be taking a hard look at what is needed for the Caribbean. As this resolution provides, we will engage with diverse stakeholders, including CARICOM trade ministers, policymakers, as well as labor, business, and civil society representatives, to dialogue and develop a shared multilateral trade agenda.

The trade programs that we have for the Caribbean, especially the Caribbean Basin Initiative programs like CBTPA preference programs, along with HOPE/HELP for Haiti, have historically enjoyed bipartisan and bicameral support, in part because of the shared history and close ties that the United States has with the Caribbean region.

I am pleased that this resolution also indicates how important the HOPE/HELP trade promotion program is for our sister nation of Haiti. I am committed to strengthening and renewing this program in a timely fashion.

Like any good trading relationship, we must continue to work to improve labor conditions, political stability, and especially to expand economic de-

velopment to all countries in the important region of the Caribbean.

President Bush recognized the importance of this region by naming it as our "Third Border."

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this resolution. The month of June was Caribbean American Heritage Month. There are about 13 million Americans who have Caribbean ancestry here in this country. They represent 4 percent of the American population. This is an opportunity for us to reaffirm this community and demonstrate to our neighboring nations in the Caribbean that we are committed to working together to improve trade and economic conditions.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of Nebraska. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 1168.

I thank Dr. WENSTRUP and Representative PLASKETT for their work on this bipartisan resolution. This measure affirms the importance of U.S. economic partnerships in the Western Hemisphere and, more specifically, with nations in the Caribbean region.

Over the last two decades, economic partnerships and trade programs have created job opportunities for Caribbean workers and innovators, provided incentives for nations to strengthen the rule of law, and provided new market opportunities for American businesses.

While this resolution highlights the importance of existing trade programs in the region, it also encourages further enhancements to these trade programs.

I have said it before, and I will say it again: If we are not proactive in engaging with our trading partners in the region and around the world, others who do not share our values, our respect for economic freedom and the rule of law, or our interest in regional stability and growth, will.

By engaging and fostering trade with our Caribbean neighbors, we will strengthen and make the Western Hemisphere more competitive as a region as China tries to seize even more of the global market share.

I look forward to working with the sponsors to use trade as a key tool in strengthening the region.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Nebraska for his words, and I indeed recognize with him the importance of American engagement in the region. As Americans, this is our border. We must be engaged in the region so that others do not usurp our authority, our position in the region, and so our American businesses can grow as well. Economic development in this area is in the best interest of the United States.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this measure, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. PLASKETT) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 1168, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. GOOD of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to section 3(s) of House Resolution 8, the yeas and nays are ordered.

Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion are postponed.

ACCESS FOR VETERANS TO RECORDS ACT OF 2022

Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 7337) to require the Archivist of the United States to submit a plan to Congress to eliminate the records backlog at the National Personnel Records Center, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 7337

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Access for Veterans to Records Act of 2022".

SEC. 2. PLAN TO ELIMINATE RECORDS BACKLOG AT THE NATIONAL PERSONNEL RECORDS CENTER.

(a) **PLAN REQUIRED.**—Not later than 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Archivist of the United States shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees a comprehensive plan for reducing the backlog of requests for records from the National Personnel Records Center and improving the efficiency and responsiveness of operations at the National Personnel Records Center, that includes, at a minimum, the following:

(1) An estimate of the number of backlogged record requests for veterans.

(2) Target timeframes to reduce the backlog.

(3) A detailed plan for using existing funds to improve the information technology infrastructure, including secure access to appropriate agency Federal records, to prevent future backlogs.

(4) Actions to improve customer service for requesters.

(5) Measurable goals with respect to the comprehensive plan and metrics for tracking progress toward such goals.

(6) Strategies to prevent future record request backlogs, including backlogs caused by an event that prevents employees of the Center from reporting to work in person.

(b) **UPDATES.**—Not later than 90 days after the date on which the comprehensive plan is submitted under subsection (a), and biannually thereafter until the response rate by the National Personnel Records Center reaches 90 percent of all requests in 20 days or less, not including any request involving a record damaged or lost in the National Personnel Records Center fire of 1973 or any request that is subject to a fee that has not been paid in a timely manner by the requestor (provided the National Personnel

Records Center issues an invoice within 20 days after the date on which the request is made), the Archivist of the United States shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees an update of such plan that—

(1) describes progress made by the National Personnel Records Center during the preceding 90-day period with respect to record request backlog reduction and efficiency and responsiveness improvement;

(2) provides data on progress made toward the goals identified in the comprehensive plan; and

(3) describes any changes made to the comprehensive plan.

(c) **CONSULTATION REQUIREMENT.**—In carrying out subsections (a) and (b), the Archivist of the United States shall consult with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

(d) **APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES DEFINED.**—In this section, the term "appropriate congressional committees" means—

(1) the Committee on Oversight and Reform and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives; and

(2) the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate.

SEC. 3. ADDITIONAL FUNDING TO ADDRESS RECORDS BACKLOG.

(a) **AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**—In addition to amounts otherwise available, there is authorized to be appropriated to the National Archives and Records Administration, \$60,000,000 to address backlogs in responding to requests from veterans for military personnel records, improve cybersecurity, improve digital preservation and access to archival Federal records, and address backlogs in requests made under section 552 of title 5, United States Code (commonly referred to as the Freedom of Information Act). Such amounts may also be used for the Federal Records Center Program.

(b) **REQUIREMENT TO MAINTAIN IN-PERSON STAFFING LEVELS.**—Not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Archivist of the United States shall ensure that the National Personnel Records Center maintains staffing levels and telework arrangements that enable the maximum processing of records requests possible in order to achieve the performance goal of responding to 90 percent of all requests in 20 days or less, not including any request involving a record damaged or lost in the National Personnel Records Center fire of 1973 or any request that is subject to a fee that has not been paid in a timely manner by the requestor (provided the National Personnel Records Center issues an invoice within 20 days after the date on which the request is made).

(c) **INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORTING.**—The Inspector General for the National Archives and Records Administration shall, for two years following the date of the enactment of this Act, include in every semiannual report submitted to Congress pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, a detailed summary of—

(1) efforts taken by the National Archives and Records Administration to address the backlog of records requests at the National Personnel Records Center; and

(2) any recommendations for action proposed by the Inspector General related to reducing the backlog of records requests at the National Personnel Records Center and the status of compliance with those recommendations by the National Archives and Records Administration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New York (Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY)

and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. KELLER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on this measure.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the Access for Veterans to Records Act would address the serious backlog of requests for veterans' records currently pending at the National Personnel Records Center, or NPRC, which is part of the National Archives and Records Administration. This bill has received bipartisan support, and I thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, including Ranking Member COMER and Representative FRED KELLER, who have cosponsored this legislation, along with a number of other Members.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the NPRC has accumulated a backlog of veterans' records requests, which reached a peak of 603,000 during March of 2022.

□ 1430

Veterans and their families need these records to access critical services, including housing and healthcare.

Many of these records are only available as paper documents. That limitation, combined with limited building operations and a reduced workforce to protect NPRC employees during the coronavirus pandemic, have been the primary cause of this backlog.

The NPRC has made some progress to reduce the backlog. As of February 28, the NPRC workforce has returned to full capacity at its facility in St. Louis, Missouri. NPRC also added overtime shifts on weekends and some holidays. However, the backlog, which currently stands at 515,000 records requests, remains significant and can only be remedied with legislative intervention.

This bill has two components. First, it requires National Archives to provide the Oversight and Reform Committee with a detailed plan and target timeframes to eliminate the backlog and strategies to prevent a future records requests backlog. This includes submitting biannual status updates on the backlog and maintaining staffing levels to meet the goal of responding to 90 percent of requests in 20 days or less.

Second, the bill would authorize \$60 million for NARA to make upgrades to its information technology infrastructure. The upgrades are necessary for NARA to improve its ability to digitize documents and to prevent future backlogs.