

they were not chosen to be awarded Federal grant money, especially if they met all of the criteria listed when applying. This leads to grant applicants feeling as though the decisions are made behind closed doors. I think we can all agree that navigating the bureaucratic labyrinth known as Washington, D.C., can be complicated for local governments and for organizations.

Grant writers and applicant staff may even be unaware of which selection criteria are weighted more heavily when filling out applications.

The Grant Transparency Act requires Federal Government agencies to shine a light on their decisionmaking process when awarding competitive Federal grant money. With this legislation, Federal Government agencies would be required to disclose their selection methods when awarding competitive grants.

Specifically, the bill requires that notice of funding opportunities for all Federal competitive grants to have: one, a description of any rating system, evaluation, and selection criteria the agency uses to assess the grant application; two, a statement on whether the agency uses a weighted scoring method and a description of that method; and, three, any other qualitative or quantitative merit-based approach the agency may use to evaluate applications.

State and local governments across South Carolina's Seventh Congressional District and nationwide compete for Federal grant money on a continual basis. Federal grant money allows investment to come to our communities and improve the daily lives of our constituents, ranging from sewer and wastewater systems to airports, fire stations, and recreational facilities.

These are all things that Americans rely on and utilize in their daily lives. The Grant Transparency Act would help out our local governments and organizations when they fill out applications to compete for that funding. They deserve this transparency from their Federal Government.

Today, let's empower grant applicants to put their best foot forward and bring those Federal dollars home. I thank my Oversight Committee colleague JASMINE CROCKETT for co-leading on this bill. This simple bill has the potential to make a very meaningful impact in countless communities and nonprofits nationwide.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this straightforward, bipartisan bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. PORTER. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 5536 and applaud Representatives RUSSELL FRY and JASMINE CROCKETT for their bipartisan leadership on this bill.

H.R. 5536 aims to increase transparency in the Federal grantmaking review and award process. It does so by

strengthening agency compliance with title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations, which describes the contents that notices of funding opportunities must include.

It requires that each notice of funding opportunity for a competitive Federal grant to include specific information about how applications will be assessed, providing all applicants with greater access to the information they need to submit competitive applications.

The Biden-Harris administration has taken important steps to strengthen transparency in and improve accessibility to the Federal grantmaking process.

For example, in April 2024, the Office of Management and Budget announced significant updates to the Uniform Grants Guidance, which governs how agencies make grants and provide other forms of financial assistance. The updates focused on reducing compliance costs, removing barriers to entry and accessibility, and making Federal funds easier to track.

H.R. 5536 is aligned with these goals, and I urge my colleagues to support it today.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FRY. Madam Speaker, I encourage all my colleagues to support this commonsense and bipartisan bill to make the application process for competitive grants much more transparent on our local governments and nonprofits.

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

Ms. PORTER. Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. FRY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5536, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VOTE BY MAIL TRACKING ACT

Mr. FRY. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5658) to amend title 39, United States Code, to require mail-in ballots to use the Postal Service barcode service, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5658

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 "Vote by Mail Tracking Act".

SEC. 2. MAIL-IN BALLOTS AND POSTAL SERVICE BARCODE SERVICE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Title 39, United States Code, is amended by inserting after chapter 30 the following new chapter:

"CHAPTER 31—ELECTION MAIL

"Sec.

"3101. Trackable election mail.

"§ 3101. Trackable election mail

"(a) IN GENERAL.—No entity of government shall furnish a ballot envelope for the purpose of being carried or delivered by mail unless such envelope—

"(1) contains a Postal Service barcode (or successive service or marking) that enables tracking of each individual ballot consistent with parameters that the Postal Service may promulgate by regulation;

"(2) satisfies requirements for ballot envelope design that the Postal Service may promulgate by regulation;

"(3) satisfies requirements for machineable letters that the Postal Service may promulgate by regulation; and

"(4) includes the Official Election Mail Logo (or any successor label that the Postal Service may establish for ballots).

"(b) APPLICATION.—Subsection (a) does not apply to a Federal write-in absentee ballot under section 103 of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (52 U.S.C. 20303).

"(c) INFORMATION.—Not later than June 1 of each calendar year, the Postmaster General shall provide, to the entities described in the matter preceding paragraph (1) of subsection (a), the information necessary to comply with the requirements of this subsection, including how to access Postal Service tools to assist in generating the barcode or successive marking required by subsection (a)(1)."

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of chapters for part IV of title 39, United States Code, is amended by adding after the item relating to chapter 30 the following:

"31. Election Mail 3101".

(c) APPLICATION.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply to any election for Federal office occurring in 2026 and any succeeding year.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. FRY) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PORTER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FRY. Madam 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 South Carolina?

There was no objection.

Mr. FRY. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5658, the Vote by Mail Tracking Act.

Every American citizen who votes deserves to know that their vote has been counted and their voice has been heard.

This bill, the Vote by Mail Tracking Act, would ensure that this is the case. H.R. 5658 requires that all ballots for Federal election mailed within the United States to or from a voter contain a Postal Service barcode. This barcode would allow voters to track the status of their ballot in the United States Postal Service system, allowing voters to know in real time when their

ballot is received by the Postal Service, when it is in transit, and when it has arrived at their election authority.

Beyond a Postal Service barcode, under the bill, a ballot must meet other requirements, including utilizing the Postal Service's envelope design standards. Additionally, the ballot must include the official election mail logo or any future logo the Postal Service establishes for ballots.

While I encourage every citizen who wishes to vote in person on election day to do so, many States have adopted vote-by-mail policies. We must take the integrity of our elections serious and account for the fact that a significant number of Americans choose to cast their ballots by mail.

This bill is a commonsense, bipartisan response to a rising level of mail-in voting nationwide and will put in place requirements to ensure that the U.S. Postal Service can more efficiently handle and more transparently track the mailed ballots of every American citizen.

I thank my colleagues, Representatives PORTER, DONALDS, and MACE, for their work on this important legislation. I encourage all my colleagues to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. PORTER. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, regardless of party affiliation, every voting American wants to be confident that their ballot will get processed. No matter who we vote for, we all want our ballots to get smoothly to their final destination on time to be counted.

After all, this desire applies to anything important that we want processed. When was the last time anyone here sent a family heirloom through the mail to their relative without getting a tracking number? Who hasn't tracked an order of clothing or medicine at least once? I don't know about you, but for me, it is comforting to know what city my new shoes are in when they are being shipped so I know they are truly on the way.

Ballots are so much more important than shoes. When something is important to us, we all want to know it is in good hands, and our ballots are no exception.

Fortunately, the United States Postal Service created a tracking barcode for mail-in ballots, but unfortunately, right now, not everyone gets to use ballot envelopes that meet the Postal Service design requirements. That is why I joined Republican Representatives BYRON DONALDS and NANCY MACE in introducing the Vote by Mail Tracking Act, to fix that problem.

Under this nonpartisan bill, every ballot envelope will meet Postal Service standards and get a tracking barcode. Voters of all political stripes can have confidence that their ballot is accounted for along the journey to our election officials.

This commonsense modernization can improve transparency and trust in

our elections for Republicans, Democrats, and Independents alike. That is exactly why this bill is led by 10 Republicans and 10 Democrats who represent every major ideological caucus in the House. That includes both Chairman COMER and Ranking Member RASKIN, two people named Jamie who couldn't be more different but both co-sponsor this bill.

Madam Speaker, it just doesn't get more bipartisan than this bill. These days, it can be hard enough just to get Democrats to agree with Democrats and Republicans to agree with Republicans in this Congress, let alone to have conservatives, moderates, progressives, and Members somewhere in between all teaming up to back legislation. The Vote by Mail Tracking Act has support from every corner of the House because it is not partisan. It is just good policy.

If the shipment carrying Christmas presents that I order online is trackable, then we should certainly all expect something as valuable and as sacred as our ballots to be trackable, too.

This bill doesn't just make things more streamlined for the American people; it also makes processing easier and more efficient for the Postal Service, reducing its burden and making efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

I thank all of my colleagues who co-sponsored this legislation and unanimously voted to advance it out of the Oversight Committee. I give a special thank-you to Chairman COMER, Ranking Member RASKIN, and their staff for their work on this bill.

The Vote by Mail Tracking Act is truly a reflection that it is still possible, even in this political moment, to find consensus in Washington and come together on real solutions. I urge every single Member of this body to support it.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

□ 1615

Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers. I urge the passage of H.R. 5658, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. FRY. Madam Speaker, I encourage my House colleagues to support this bipartisan, commonsense bill that will help further build trust in American Federal elections in the future, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. FRY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5658, 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. FRY. Madam Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further pro-

ceedings on this motion will be postponed.

BANNING OPERATIONS AND LEASES WITH THE ILLEGITIMATE VENEZUELAN AUTHORITARIAN REGIME ACT

Mr. FRY. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 825) to prohibit contracting with persons that have business operations with the Maduro regime, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 825

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 "Banning Operations and Leases with the Illegitimate Venezuelan Authoritarian Regime Act" or the "BOLIVAR Act".

SEC. 2. PROHIBITION ON CONTRACTING WITH PERSONS THAT HAVE BUSINESS OPERATIONS WITH THE MADURO REGIME.

(a) PROHIBITION.—Except as provided in subsections (b), (c), and (d), the head of an executive agency may not enter into a contract for the procurement of goods or services with any person that the head of an executive agency determines, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, knowingly engages in significant business operations, as defined by the Secretary in consultation with the Director, with an authority of the Government of Venezuela that is not recognized as the legitimate Government of Venezuela by the United States.

(b) EXCEPTIONS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The prohibition under subsection (a) does not apply to a contract that the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, determines—

(A) is necessary—

(i) for purposes of providing humanitarian assistance to the people of Venezuela;

(ii) for purposes of providing disaster relief and other urgent humanitarian aid or lifesaving measures; or

(iii) to carry out noncombatant evacuations; or

(B) is in the national security interests of the United States.

(2) SUPPORT FOR UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES.—The prohibition in subsection (a) shall not apply to contracts and agreements that support United States Government activities in Venezuela, including those necessary for the maintenance of United States Government facilities in Venezuela, or to contracts with international organizations.

(3) NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENT.—The Secretary of State shall notify the appropriate congressional committees of any contract entered into on the basis of an exception provided for under paragraph (1), which may be submitted in a classified form, as appropriate.

(c) OFFICE OF FOREIGN ASSETS CONTROL LICENSES.—The prohibition in subsection (a) does not apply to a person that has a valid license to operate in Venezuela issued by the Office of Foreign Assets Control.

(d) AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN VENEZUELA.—The prohibition in subsection (a) does not apply to contracts related to the operation and maintenance of the United