

the potential cost of the fine would far outweigh the benefit.

To ensure that small businesses can get these reduced fees, in concert with the House, S. 3960 gives the USPTO director the authority to waive punitive penalties when a business demonstrates that it acted in good faith.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support S. 3960 which will ensure that small businesses, if claiming incorrectly, have an opportunity to make right their mistake, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of S. 3960. This legislation makes a minor technical change to give the Patent and Trademark Office the flexibility to decide when to penalize patent applicants for false certifications of eligibility for fee reductions.

When Congress passed the Unleashing American Innovators Act as part of the government funding package for fiscal year 2023, we did so with the intention of making patents no longer the sport of kings but an opportunity for inventors to make a decent living.

Innovators should not have to work for a Big Tech company, major manufacturer, or any other powerhouse of industry to be able to file a patent, but that is exactly what often happens.

Financial hurdles associated with obtaining and owning a patent, from hiring a lawyer to searching for prior art, to paying standard application fees, can prevent individuals from seeking patents for their inventions. Barriers to entry like these hurt everyone, but above all they hurt women, veterans, and minorities who often do not have the resources to go it alone.

The result is that fewer ideas make it out there into the American innovation space. All of our talent becomes siloed in just a few companies and in just a few industries, and prospective creators shelve their ideas for another day.

The Unleashing American Innovators Act sought to disrupt the current state of play by making a series of good-government changes to the way the USPTO works, including by increasing the discount on fees for small and micro entities and by imposing penalties for making fraudulent certifications to obtain a discount.

However, I am sure many out there will be shocked to learn that Congress sometimes makes mistakes, and in creating these new fee waivers and associated penalties for trying to abuse said waivers, we neglected to consider that applicants can make honest mistakes in their applications.

If innovators are too afraid to apply for financial exemptions because penalties for honest mistakes can lose them a chance at a patent, then all of our improvements may as well simply not exist.

S. 3960 would correct this minor error. Under this legislative fix, a

USPTO director would no longer be forced to fine a good-faith actor who erroneously asserts that they are entitled to a fee reduction for small- or micro-entity status. By allowing for honest mistakes in the application process, this technical fix will ensure that everyone has a seat at the table.

I thank the chairman of the Courts, Intellectual Property, and the Internet Subcommittee, Mr. ISSA, for introducing the House version of this legislation, which I was proud to join along with Congresswoman ROSS. I thank Ms. ROSS for leading the Unleashing American Innovators Act.

This legislation has already passed the Senate, and I encourage all Members to support it so that we can send it to the President's desk.

Madam Speaker, in closing, failing to account for good-faith mistakes harms the exact same people the Unleashing American Innovators Act sought to help. Individuals and entities that can barely afford filing fees certainly do not have the financial resources to weather a hefty fine.

Moreover, unlike large entities, the prospect of losing a patent associated with an erroneous application could very well mean losing everything. Smaller entities, therefore, are the most likely to avoid the risk of applying for the very programs that exist to help them.

This legislation will ensure that the USPTO director will no longer be forced to fine inventors who make honest mistakes when they apply for a patent, ensuring that the people we were trying to help in creating the program are not chilled from participation.

Again, I support this legislation, I encourage my colleagues to do the same, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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Mr. ISSA. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time for the purposes of closing.

Madam Speaker, we often get chastised in the House for not admitting our mistakes, but when a technical error could potentially lead to damages to the private sector, it is one of those areas I am proud to say that the Judiciary Committee is bipartisan and quick to recognize. In concert with the Senate, we have done so today.

Madam Speaker, I urge all Members to vote for the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3960.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

CONSOLIDATION OF CERTAIN DIVISIONS IN THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ALABAMA

Mr. ISSA. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 7177) to amend title 28, United States Code, to consolidate certain divisions in the Northern District of Alabama, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 7177

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

SECTION 1. CONSOLIDATION OF CERTAIN DIVISIONS IN THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ALABAMA.

Section 81(a) of title 28, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by striking “seven” and inserting “five”;

(2) in paragraph (1), by striking “and Lauderdale” and inserting “Lauderdale, and Lawrence”;

(3) in paragraph (2)—

(A) by striking “Lawrence,”;

(B) by inserting after “Madison,” the following: “Marshall,”; and

(C) by striking “and Decatur”;

(4) in paragraph (4), by striking “Clay, Cleburne,” and inserting “Cherokee, Clay, Cleburne, DeKalb, Etowah, Saint Clair,”;

(5) in paragraph (5), by striking “Greene, Pickens, Sumter, and Tuscaloosa” and inserting “Fayette, Greene, Lamar, Marion, Pickens, Sumter, Tuscaloosa, Walker, and Winston”;

(6) by striking paragraph (6); and

(7) by striking paragraph (7).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. JOHNSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ISSA. 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 H.R. 7177.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, this is, in fact, a good, commonsense reform that has come from the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. STRONG), who has shepherded this bill.

At this time, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. STRONG) to speak on his bill.

Mr. STRONG. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of my bill, H.R. 7177, which will improve the organization of the Federal courts in the Northern District of Alabama.

Specifically, this bill will ensure that Alabamians are assigned to the closest and most convenient Federal courthouse, which will eliminate unnecessary and burdensome travel expenses. This commonsense proposal, which was

approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States earlier this year, reflects how cases have been managed following courthouse closures for over 60-plus years since these boundaries were last amended.

The Judicial Conference said it best: H.R. 7177 supports the efficient administration of justice.

I thank the Members of the Alabama delegation who have joined me to support the efficient administration of justice in north Alabama. I urge all of our colleagues to join me in supporting this proposal.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 7177, which would amend title 28 of the United States Code to consolidate certain divisions in the Northern District of Alabama. By reducing the divisions of the Northern District of Alabama from seven to five and reorganizing some Alabama counties within those divisions, this bill reallocates the judicial docket across the district, ensuring that the 2.8 million residents of the Northern District of Alabama have access to a speedy judicial system.

When a courthouse closes, we may not hear about it here in our Nation's Capital, but the people who live and work in those judicial districts are intimately aware of the deleterious effect of courthouse closures on their community: Office workers lose their jobs. Other nearby courthouses become overcrowded, and thousands of people are left wondering if our judicial system will still work for them when they need it most.

That is exactly what is happening in the Northern District of Alabama. After courthouses closed, the district itself requested these changes, which were elevated to Congress by the Judicial Conference of the United States earlier this year. These changes prescribed in this legislation are not meaningless, technical edits. Moving some Alabama counties to different judicial divisions would make a world of difference to the people who live and work in those communities.

About 59 percent of the population of Alabama lives in the Northern District, which includes 31 of the State's 67 counties, and 2 of the State's most populous cities, Birmingham and Huntsville. Since so many Americans rely on the Northern District of Alabama to access our courthouse doors, the judicial system there must be able to spread a large volume of cases across its different divisions.

This is not a question of apportionment. Our country cannot have a flourishing justice system when residents are unduly burdened in their attempts to access it.

Madam Speaker, I thank the Representatives from Alabama, especially the sponsor, Congressman STRONG, for introducing this legislation, and I encourage all of my colleagues to support the bill.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ISSA. Madam Speaker, I am prepared to close, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time for the purposes of closing.

Madam Speaker, by reallocating the judicial docket across the district, this bill ensures that 2.8 million residents of the Northern District of Alabama have access to a speedy judicial system. In a Nation such as ours, where the population is constantly evolving, our judicial system must be responsive to the needs of residents no matter where they live.

Constituents in different divisions of the Northern District of Alabama deserve a courthouse that is geographically convenient so that they do not have to drive hours away from home to access the American judicial system.

Responding to the needs of these residents is a small step in the right direction toward making our judicial system work for everyone, not just those who are fortunate enough to live close to a Federal courthouse in a metropolis.

Madam Speaker, I urge all Members to support the bill and send it to the Senate, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ISSA. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time for the purposes of closing.

Madam Speaker, we are the United States of America, and it is, in fact, the people of the State of Alabama who have asked for this, the people's Representatives of Alabama who have unanimously supported it, and the Judicial Conference which studied it and found it to be appropriate.

Today, I am honored to be part of the other 49 States ratifying the need of one in their best interest as they brought it to us, which is, in fact, what the United States was formed for, is to support the common good and the individual States in any way that we can.

Madam Speaker, I urge Members to support this bill, vote it out, and send it to the Senate. I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 7177, 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.

AMENDING TITLE 28, UNITED STATES CODE, TO AUTHORIZE HOLDING COURT FOR THE CENTRAL DIVISION OF UTAH IN MOAB AND MONTICELLO

Mr. ISSA. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill

(H.R. 8666) to amend title 28, United States Code, to authorize holding court for the Central Division of Utah in Moab and Monticello.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 8666

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

SECTION 1. JUDICIAL DISTRICT.

Section 125 of title 28, United States Code, is amended by striking "and St. George" and inserting "St. George, Moab, and Monticello."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. JOHNSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ISSA. 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 H.R. 8666.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, our Federal courts are critical to ensuring that Americans have access to justice. The Central Division of the District of Utah is currently authorized to hold court only in Salt Lake City, Provo, and St. George. For residents of southeastern Utah, however, traveling to those courthouses is burdensome and requires hours of driving, and it affects their ability to access the Federal court system.

H.R. 8666 addresses these issues at essentially no cost to the U.S. Government. The bill authorizes the Central Division of the District of Utah to hold court in Moab and Monticello in southeastern Utah, in addition to those other locations allowed by law.

In addition, this will be free of cost because the District of Utah already has agreements in place with State and county courthouses in those cities. Those facilities are being provided at no cost to the Federal Government because they are in the best interests of the people of Utah.

These changes, which have been requested by the District of Utah, are endorsed by the Judicial Conference of the United States and the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit. In fact, it is also endorsed by the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Federal Public Defender's Office for the District of Utah.

Madam Speaker, I strongly urge the passage of this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 8666, which would amend title 28 of the United States Code to