

In Alabama, for instance, when former Member of Congress Governor Bob Riley was elected Governor of Alabama, he was going over the budget and saw the amount for legal fees and asked what it was for. He was informed of the number of consent decrees that the State was under and they were paying out these legal fees, and it was an enormous amount.

States, municipalities, industry, stakeholders, and taxpayers are often directly affected by the terms of the agreements but are prevented from participating in the negotiations. In some cases, the settlements are declared to be confidential and the contents sealed, without providing any explanation.

Unfortunately, there is no uniform standard for recordkeeping across Federal agencies. While some agencies have issued directives to streamline and publish this information, most of the public's access to Federal settlement agreement information is primarily issued, as my colleague from North Carolina pointed out, in the form of a press release. It is, therefore, impossible for the public to determine the comprehensive costs and outcomes of these settlement agreements.

This lack of transparency leaves elected officials, agency officials, and the public in the dark about the consent decrees that can impact them. Oftentimes, newly elected officials, as I said, from Governors to attorneys general to mayors are sworn in and inherit substantial legal obligations they were completely unaware of before they took office.

The Settlement Agreement Information Database Act will address this problem. The bill establishes a centralized and electronic database of settlement agreements entered into by Federal agencies. Basic information about the settlement agreements already collected by Federal agencies, such as payments and dates, will be available to the public online through this database.

H.R. 995 provides long overdue transparency and accountability and standards to the Federal settlement agreements.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MEADOWS) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. HILL), for their support on this bill, and I urge my other colleagues to support this bill as well.

Mr. MEADOWS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Alabama for his leadership on this particular bill. I urge the adoption of it, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. HILL of California. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the distinguished gentlemen from Alabama and from North Carolina for their congratulations and in sharing my excitement over the passage of my first bill.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the passage of H.R. 995, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from California (Ms. HILL) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 995, 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.

Ms. HILL of California. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

CREATING ADVANCED STREAMLINED ELECTRONIC SERVICES FOR CONSTITUENTS ACT OF 2019

Ms. HILL of California. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1079) to require the Director of the Office of Management and Budget to issue guidance on electronic consent forms, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1079

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 "Creating Advanced Streamlined Electronic Services for Constituents Act of 2019" or the "CASES Act".

SEC. 2. SENSE OF CONGRESS.

It is the sense of Congress that—

(1) congressional offices provide crucial services to constituents by acting as a liaison between the constituents and the respective agencies;

(2) this includes assisting constituents by making inquiries and working toward resolutions on behalf of the constituent with the respective agencies; and

(3) this process should be simplified through the creation of electronic forms that may be submitted under section 552a of title 5, United States Code (commonly referred to as the Privacy Act), thus modernizing the process for constituents and improving access and efficiency of Government services and agencies in order to expedite the resolution of the problem for which constituents sought help.

SEC. 3. OMB GUIDANCE ON ELECTRONIC CONSENT AND ACCESS FORMS.

(a) GUIDANCE.—Not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Director shall issue guidance that does the following:

(1) Requires each agency to accept electronic identity proofing and authentication processes for the purposes of allowing an individual to provide prior written consent for the disclosure of the individual's records under section 552a(b) of title 5, United States Code, or for individual access to records under section 552a(d) of such title.

(2) Creates a template for electronic consent and access forms and requires each agency to post the template on the agency website and to accept the forms from any individual properly identity proofed and au-

thenticated in accordance with paragraph (1) for the purpose of authorizing disclosure of the individual's records under section 552a(b) of title 5, United States Code, or for individual access to records under section 552a(d) of such title.

(3) Requires each agency to accept the electronic consent and access forms described in paragraph (2) from any individual properly identity proofed and authenticated in accordance with paragraph (1) for the purpose of authorizing disclosure of the individual's records to another entity, including a congressional office, in accordance with section 552a(b) of title 5, United States Code, or for individual access to records under section 552a(d).

(b) AGENCY COMPLIANCE.—Each agency shall comply with the guidance issued pursuant to subsection (a) not later than 1 year after the date on which such guidance is issued.

(c) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) AGENCY; INDIVIDUAL; RECORD.—The terms "agency", "individual", and "record" have the meanings given those terms in section 552a(a) of title 5, United States Code.

(2) DIRECTOR.—The term "Director" means the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

SEC. 4. NO ADDITIONAL FUNDS AUTHORIZED.

No additional funds are authorized to carry out the requirements of this Act. Such requirements shall be carried out using amounts otherwise authorized.

SEC. 5. DETERMINATION OF BUDGETARY EFFECTS.

The budgetary effects of this Act, for the purpose of complying with the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010, shall be determined by reference to the latest statement titled "Budgetary Effects of PAYGO Legislation" for this Act, submitted for printing in the Congressional Record by the Chairman of the House Budget Committee, provided that such statement has been submitted prior to the vote on passage.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. HILL of California. 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 gentlewoman from California?

There was no objection.

Ms. HILL of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I support this bill, the CASES for Constituents Act, introduced by Representatives GARRET GRAVES and JOE KENNEDY. This bill would modernize the way Federal agencies process Privacy Act waivers and make it easier for Members of Congress to help constituents get assistance from Federal agencies.

Our constituents are required to provide Federal agencies with written consent before our offices can obtain information from the agency on their behalf. Some agencies have outdated policies and still require these consent

forms to be mailed or faxed, which can be next to impossible in certain circumstances, such as after a major storm or other natural disaster.

Under this bill, the Office of Management and Budget would be required to create a template for electronic consent forms and issue guidance to agencies requiring them to accept such forms.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the bipartisan way in which this bill was developed, and I thank Representatives GRAVES and KENNEDY for their diligent efforts to address this problem.

This is a good bipartisan bill, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

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

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

I rise in support of H.R. 1079, the CASES for Constituents Act, introduced by the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. GRAVES) and, as was mentioned, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. KENNEDY).

I have some prepared remarks, Mr. Speaker, but let me just deviate from that for just a second.

Finally, two people have come together to get rid of the archaic way that we have to get disclosures, that only go to hurt our constituents whom we aim to serve. I mean, only in the government do we have this kind of way where we actually have to make sure that we run it over by a carrier pigeon to get something done.

All of us have been together where we are trying to serve our constituents. Sometimes it is very time sensitive, Mr. Speaker, and what do they want?

Well, you need to go get the privacy release form.

And if you go get the privacy release form: Well, no. That is not okay. You have got to get their actual signature.

And so we are sending people all over.

So it is with heartfelt gratitude, Mr. Speaker, that I want to thank these two gentlemen for doing something that is not only common sense but much needed.

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

Ms. HILL of California. Mr. Speaker, I will just note for the record that I believe faxes may or may not have ended their usefulness before I was born.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. KENNEDY).

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from California for her support and for her observation about the utility of fax machines; the gentleman from North Carolina as well for his comments of support; and my colleague, Mr. GRAVES, for his leadership, his advocacy on this piece of legislation, and for his determination in getting this done. It was a long, long slog to try to navigate our way through the morass to get there, but we did, and Mr. GRAVES' office deserves a lot of credit for that.

We were able to clear the House unanimously last year, Mr. Speaker, and I am excited for our prospects this year.

Importantly, as well, Mr. Speaker, today is the first time that identical texts have been introduced in the United States Senate. Senators CARPER and PORTMAN are taking the lead, and I look forward to our offices working together to get this bill across the finish line.

For all the attention that is placed on Members of Congress when we are in Washington, there is no more important responsibility of this job than helping our constituents back home. Whether assisting a veteran seeking benefits or a retiree accessing Medicare, we can ease the burden off of our neighbors' shoulders by getting them the help that they have earned.

When one of our constituents calls our office, whether it is in Newton, Massachusetts, or in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, they don't ask us about our political parties or policy positions; they just ask for a little bit of help.

Usually, those neighbors only reach our office when they have fought every other battle possible first; but too often, archaic rules, as outlined by Mr. MEADOWS, build obstacles in our efforts to provide that help. With the CASES for Constituents Act, we can modernize our government, streamline that process, and more directly assist them when they need it.

Let's bring the casework process a step closer to the 21st century and provide electronic access to privacy release forms.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the bill.

Mr. MEADOWS. Mr. Speaker, I yield as much time as he may consume to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. GRAVES) in support of this particular piece of legislation that he and the gentleman who just spoke have led so eloquently and diligently on.

Mr. GRAVES of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from North Carolina for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, years ago, they created something called the internet. If you are not familiar with it, I would urge you to go to your local library, go to the card catalog system to get the right Dewey decimal number, go find a book, and read up on it, because apparently many in our Federal Government haven't realized that this has been created.

As was noted a little while ago, in 1974, there was an act called the Privacy Act that was passed—1974. Since that time, we have had companies like Apple and Amazon and Microsoft and many others that have proliferated and are now worth billions and billions of dollars, some of the largest companies in the world.

Mr. Speaker, this is similar to us having to mail in a form to get an ambulance to come to our house.

As was noted by some of the previous speakers, in many cases, people con-

tact us because of emergency situations. We have had family members contact us when their loved ones were stuck overseas in emergency situations. We have had people contact us because there was water filling up their home and they needed emergency services at the time. Under the Privacy Act of 1974 that was written 45 years ago, we were unable to help them, as Mr. MEADOWS noted, unless they sent us a signed privacy release form.

I remember distinctly, in August of 2016, when we had a record flood in my home State of Louisiana, talking to constituents who were on their cellphones saying that their homes had 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 feet of water and asking for help with FEMA, the Small Business Administration, and other government services, and myself or other folks on our team having to tell them: You bet, we want to help you. All you need to do is go to your computer, go to this website, click the link, print it out.

You can imagine the response from people: I would love to be able to go to my computer right now. I would love to be able to find it, if it wasn't under 4 feet of water right now.

Incredibly frustrating.

Mr. Speaker, the government today has a customer service approval rating of 70 percent—70 percent is the customer service approval rating. While that was sufficient to get me through high school, that is not okay for the Federal Government. It is entirely inappropriate.

This bill simply updates the Federal Government to put it online with how we file our taxes, how we handle our banking, insurance, and virtually everything else we do, ensuring that when people contact us, we can use those same technologies to protect privacy, that we can ensure the right people are asking for the right approvals, and we can quickly, within minutes, begin providing them services through their own Federal Government.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Massachusetts (Mr. KENNEDY) for persevering and continuing to work with us on this. I want to thank my friends, Mr. MEADOWS from North Carolina and Ms. HILL from California. Thank you all very much for doing this.

This is bipartisan. This is common sense. It should have been done decades ago.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Jennifer Bollinger, Eric Fins, all the OGR staff and others who helped get this bill done, and I am looking forward to passage.

I urge full support.

Mr. MEADOWS. Mr. Speaker, I want to go ahead and close, if we can, at this particular point, but before I do so, I want to thank all of our staff.

It is so easy at times for us to get up here, and yet the legislation that gets introduced oftentimes is not just due to our personal staff in our offices, but the committee staff, and so I want to make sure that I emphasize that today.

Mr. Speaker, I will close with this final comment.

