

minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WELCH. Madam Speaker, America needs a farm bill. The Senate has passed a farm bill. The House Agriculture Committee on a bipartisan basis has passed a farm bill, and that is not being brought to the floor for a vote.

We have a drought. It's the worst that we've seen in 50 years. We've got nutrition programs that need to be funded. We have environmental and conservation programs that need to be revised and passed. We have farmers across this land whose goal is to feed America, and they need a farm bill.

Never in the history of the United States Congress has a farm bill passed by the House Agriculture Committee not been brought to the floor for a vote. There's no question that a farm bill is contentious. It always is. But with FRANK LUCAS and COLLIN PETERSON, Republican leader and Democratic leader, and the Agriculture Committee working together, we got a bipartisan vote. Why is this not being brought to the floor?

That it's difficult is not a reason not to do it. Bring a farm bill and pass it.

WORLD WAR II VETERAN WILLIAM "BILL" KLING

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

Mr. DEUTCH. Madam Speaker, the south Florida community recently lost a hero when World War II veteran William Kling passed away at the age of 84.

Bill Kling, a native New Yorker, served in the Navy during World War II. Throughout his life, he was an active member of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Jewish War Veterans, and the Disabled American Veterans. For me, he was an inspiration and a friend.

However, Bill is best known for his role as the president of the Broward County Veterans Council for 27 years. Bill's activism led to building of an outpatient VA clinic in Broward County, a veterans nursing home in Pembroke Pines, and the opening of the South Florida National Cemetery in 2007.

So even as we mourn the loss of an incredible advocate, we know that Bill Kling's contributions live on in every veteran cared for at the outpatient clinic he helped to build, in every family who visits an elderly veteran residing at the nursing home he helped to establish, and in every prayer spoken at the national cemetery that he helped make possible.

I join with Bill's family in mourning his loss; but on this anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, I express the gratitude of our entire south Florida community that will long benefit from Bill Kling's tireless efforts to honor those who so bravely served our Nation.

ACT TOMORROW TO PASS FISA AMENDMENTS

(Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California. Madam Speaker, today, September 11, 2012, is a beautiful day outside. The sun's in the cloudless sky, much like it was 11 years ago.

We remember those tragic criminal terrorist acts. We remember the heroism of those who responded. But there's something we can do more than just remember. There's something we can do in addition to the prayers that we offer. We can act tomorrow to pass the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act amendments which allow us to respond to the criticism rendered by the 9/11 Commission, that is, that we did not do enough to connect the dots of intelligence to warn us about that attack and future attacks.

The FISA amendments allow us to connect the dots so we can analyze those dots, so we can bring the intelligence to bear, so that we can protect our people with the courage and the bravery of those men and women who are in uniform, guided by the intelligence that we collect and that we apply. It is as strong a statement as we can make this week to ensure that we do not blind our eyes to that which is out there that may threaten us.

Let us work together in a bipartisan basis to pass that, and let us give those tools that are necessary to protect us.

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages in writing from the President of the United States were communicated to the House by Mr. Brian Pate, one of his secretaries.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. MILLER of Michigan). Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken later.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF 2012

Mr. WALSH of Illinois. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4631) to amend title 5, United States Code, to institute spending limits and transparency requirements for Federal conference and travel expenditures, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4631

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 "Government Spending Accountability Act of 2012" or the "GSA Act of 2012".

SEC. 2. LIMITS AND TRANSPARENCY FOR CONFERENCE AND TRAVEL SPENDING.

(a) AMENDMENT.—Chapter 57 of title 5, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 5711 the following:

"§ 5712. Limits and transparency for conference and travel spending

"(a) CONFERENCE TRANSPARENCY AND SPENDING LIMITS.—

"(1) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF CONFERENCE MATERIALS.—Each agency shall post on the public website of that agency detailed information on any presentation made by any employee of that agency at a conference (except to the extent the head of an agency excludes such information for reasons of national security) including—

"(A) the prepared text of any verbal presentation made; and

"(B) any visual, digital, video, or audio materials presented, including photographs, slides, and audio-visual recordings.

"(2) LIMITS ON AMOUNT EXPENDED ON A CONFERENCE.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subparagraph (B), an agency may not expend more than \$500,000 to support a single conference.

"(B) EXCEPTION.—The head of an agency may waive the limitation in subparagraph (A) for a specific conference after making a determination that the expenditure is justified as the most cost-effective option to achieve a compelling purpose. The head of an agency shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees a report on any waiver granted under this subparagraph, including the justification for such waiver.

"(C) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this paragraph shall be construed to preclude an agency from receiving financial support or other assistance from a private entity to pay or defray the costs of a conference the total cost of which exceeds \$500,000.

"(b) INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE RULE.—An agency may not pay the travel expenses for more than 50 employees of that agency who are stationed in the United States, for any international conference, unless the Secretary of State determines that attendance for such employees is in the national interest.

"(c) REPORT ON TRAVEL EXPENSES REQUIRED.—At the beginning of each quarter of each fiscal year, each agency shall post on the public website of that agency a report on each conference for which the agency paid travel expenses during the preceding 3 months that includes—

"(1) the itemized expenses paid by the agency, including travel expenses, and any agency expenditures to otherwise support the conference;

"(2) the primary sponsor of the conference;

"(3) the location of the conference;

"(4) the date of the conference;

"(5) a brief explanation of how the participation of employees from such agency at the conference advanced the mission of the agency;

"(6) the title of any employee, or any individual who is not a Federal employee, whose travel expenses or other conference expenses were paid by the agency;

"(7) the total number of individuals whose travel expenses or other conference expenses were paid by the agency; and

"(8) in the case of a conference for which that agency was the primary sponsor, a statement that—

"(A) describes the cost to the agency of selecting the specific conference venue;

“(B) describes why the location was selected, including a justification for such selection;

“(C) demonstrates the cost efficiency of the location;

“(D) provides a cost benefit analysis of holding a conference rather than conducting a teleconference; and

“(E) describes any financial support or other assistance from a private entity used to pay or defray the costs of the conference, and for each case where such support or assistance was used, the head of the agency shall include a certification that there is no conflict of interest resulting from such support or assistance.

“(d) **FORMAT AND PUBLICATION OF REPORT.**—Each report posted on the public website under subsection (c) shall—

“(1) be in a searchable electronic format; and

“(2) remain on that website for at least 5 years after the date of posting.

“(e) **DEFINITIONS.**—In this section:

“(1) **AGENCY.**—The term ‘agency’ has the meaning given that term under section 5701, but does not include the government of the District of Columbia.

“(2) **CONFERENCE.**—The term ‘conference’ means a meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium, or event to which an employee travels 25 miles or more to attend, that—

“(A) is held for consultation, education, discussion, or training; and

“(B) is not held entirely at a Government facility.

“(3) **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE.**—The term ‘international conference’ means a conference occurring outside the United States attended by representatives of—

“(A) the Government of the United States; and

“(B) any foreign government, international organization, or foreign nongovernmental organization.”.

(b) **TECHNICAL AND CONFORMING AMENDMENT.**—The table of sections for chapter 57 of title 5, United States Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 5711 the following:

“5712. Limits and transparency for conference and travel spending.”.

(c) **ANNUAL TRAVEL EXPENSE LIMITS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—In the case of each of fiscal years 2013 through 2017, an agency (as defined under section 5712(e) of title 5, United States Code, as added by subsection (a)) may not make, or obligate to make, expenditures for travel expenses, in an aggregate amount greater than 70 percent of the aggregate amount of such expenses for fiscal year 2010.

(2) **IDENTIFICATION OF TRAVEL EXPENSES.**—

(A) **RESPONSIBILITIES.**—Not later than December 31, 2012, and after consultation with the Administrator of General Services and the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall establish guidelines for the determination of what expenses constitute travel expenses for purposes of this subsection. The guidelines shall identify specific expenses, and classes of expenses, that are to be treated as travel expenses.

(B) **EXEMPTION FOR MILITARY TRAVEL.**—The guidelines required under subparagraph (A) shall exclude military travel expenses in determining what expenses constitute travel expenses. Military travel expenses shall include travel expenses involving military combat, the training or deployment of uniformed military personnel, and such other travel expenses as determined by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, in consultation with the Administrator of General Services and the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WALSH) and the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. CLAY) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WALSH of Illinois. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. WALSH of Illinois. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

The Government Spending Accountability Act, or GSA Act, will end the days of unnecessary boondoggles and lavish trips for Federal bureaucrats.

I think we're all aware of GSA's recent escapades in Las Vegas where the agency paid more than \$44 a head for breakfast, \$7,000 in sushi at a networking reception, and \$75,000 to build bicycles.

I think we can all agree that all of this spending is outrageous and unacceptable. We can't continue to ask hardworking taxpayers to tighten their belts and make tough decisions when for years the GSA and other Federal agencies have thrown away those taxpayer dollars on lavish conferences like this.

The days of wasting taxpayer dollars on fancy junkets for government bureaucrats should soon be over. I introduced the GSA Act because, as stewards of taxpayer dollars, it is our responsibility to ensure that they are not wasted on lavish conferences and posh junkets.

The GSA Act requires that every quarter Federal agencies publish an open report that details every conference for which the agency paid travel and expenses. The bill also limits the amount that an agency can spend on any one conference to \$500,000 and on travel annually to 70 percent of the amount the agency spent on travel in 2010.

I would like to thank Chairman ISSA, Ranking Member CUMMINGS, and my friends across the aisle for joining me in this effort. The bipartisanship displayed here shows what Congress can accomplish when both parties come together to tackle reckless spending.

We need to come together to fix Washington and start cultivating some respect for hard-earned taxpayer dollars. The GSA Act will help change the culture of waste in Washington and put us on a path to a sustainable future for our children and grandchildren.

Please join me in standing up for taxpayers. I support this measure and urge its adoption.

With that, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4631, the Government Spending Accountability Act, as amended.

This legislation will improve congressional oversight of Federal Government spending on meetings and conferences. It is modeled on similar reporting requirements contained in the DATA Act, which passed the House of Representatives earlier this year with bipartisan support.

This legislation will help rein in the type of wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars that we have witnessed over the past several months. In April, the committee held a hearing to examine the GSA's expenditure of \$800,000 on a single conference in Las Vegas in 2010.

The gross abuse of Federal funds must not be repeated, and one way to avoid that is to monitor more closely how Federal agencies use their funds on such activities.

We are all aware that conferences are an important part of staff development and can help improve the quality of Federal Government work; however, we must make sure that they do not turn into resort vacations funded by taxpayers, many of whom are continuing to struggle to make ends meet.

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Madam Speaker, the GSA incident tarnished the reputation of government workers who dedicate their lives to public service, which I believe is unfair. This legislation, as amended, would prevent a few reckless and selfish individuals from engaging in activities that discredit the entire Federal workforce.

Madam Speaker, I urge support for this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WALSH. I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CLAY. Madam Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. HOLT).

Mr. HOLT. I thank my friend from Missouri.

Madam Speaker, I rise in opposition to H.R. 4631. I oppose this bill because it would make significant changes to Federal employees' ability to travel to conferences and meetings.

Although I appreciate the sponsors' efforts to ensure oversight on travel expenditures, I'm not sure they realize the impact that this legislation would have on science and technology, which is the engine of American innovation.

This bill institutes prohibitions and impediments that would hinder American scientists' ability to collaborate and communicate with scientists at other institutions and laboratories. Now, to be sure, they can probably get around these prohibitions and impediments, but we should not be putting these in place in the first matter.

As a scientist, I know firsthand how important scientific conferences and

meetings are. The informal conversations, as well as the formal presentations and poster sessions and everything else that goes into it between scientists from different institutions, lead to new collaborations that have the promise of new discoveries. These are not fancy junkets.

Now, people often ask students, well, what is science. What's so special about science? Why does it work? Well, it works because one of its fundamental tenets is communication.

To be sure, there are various ways to have communication, but scientific conferences are critically important. In a recent op-ed by the presidents of the American Chemical Society and the president of the American Physical Society, they discuss, for example, an anticancer drug that was the result of collaboration between a team of scientists from three laboratories that took place at conferences.

This bill would hinder that kind of collaboration. Just about any scientific society in this country can give you examples where large numbers of federally sponsored researchers go off to conferences. It happens in plasma physics. It happens in microbiology. It happens in AIDS policy and AIDS research.

In a time when the Federal Government should be making science a priority, passing a bill that would make scientists jump through hurdles and get around impediments would, in fact, weaken American scientists, weaken American science, and impede the ability of American scientists to innovate.

That is not wise. This is not the way to build our economy. We should be investing more in research and development, which means, of course, investing in scientists, but also investing in their ability to pursue science.

We should be spending more on international conferences. We should be spending more on national conferences. We should be spending more on national laboratories. We should be spending more on public and private research and development for the sake of jobs, for the sake of our economic vitality, for the sake of the quality of life of Americans. This is not the way to build our economy and to foster innovation.

I urge my colleagues to vote "no."

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

I appreciate the concerns of my colleague, and I would only note that new technology, I think, has made it easier to teleconference and communicate remotely. This not only would save money, which is important, but it has already and will continue to increase the amount of collaboration.

Mr. HOLT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. WALSH. I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. HOLT. Do you think that the Congress of the United States might do better if we don't meet in person, if we stay home and get on conference calls every once in a while and phone in?

I don't think so. I think the gains that are made in good legislation that come from conferences, as we gather here for votes, on the side between votes, is invaluable. The same can be said many times over for microbiology, for plasma physics, for—let's go through a long list.

Mr. WALSH. Reclaiming my time, again, I would say Congress, in today's day and age, where we hit \$16 trillion in debt last week, Congress, like all institutions in this country, needs to figure out how to work more efficiently and save hard-earned taxpayer dollars.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CLAY. Madam Speaker, I also urge my colleagues to vote in favor of H.R. 4631, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WALSH. Madam Speaker, I urge all Members to join me in support of this 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 Illinois (Mr. WALSH) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4631, 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.

GOVERNMENT CUSTOMER SERVICE IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. WALSH. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 538) to require the establishment of customer service standards for Federal agencies, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 538

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 "Government Customer Service Improvement Act".

SEC. 2. DEVELOPMENT OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND STANDARDS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE PROVIDED BY FEDERAL AGENCIES.

(a) REQUIREMENT.—

(1) PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND STANDARDS.—The Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall develop—

(A) performance measures to determine whether Federal agencies are providing high-quality customer service and improving service delivery to their customers; and

(B) standards to be met by Federal agencies in order to provide high-quality customer service and improve service delivery to their customers.

(2) REQUIREMENT TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT CERTAIN INFORMATION.—The standards under paragraph (1) shall be developed after taking into account the information collected by Federal agencies under subsection (b).

(b) CUSTOMER SERVICE INPUT.—The head of each Federal agency shall collect information from its customers regarding the quality of customer services provided by the agency. Each Federal agency shall include

this information in its performance report submitted under section 1116 of title 31, United States Code.

(c) ANNUAL PERFORMANCE UPDATE.—The Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall include achievements by Federal agencies in meeting customer service performance measures and standards developed under subsection (a) in each update on agency performance required under section 1116 of title 31, United States Code.

SEC. 3. IMPLEMENTATION OF CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS.

(a) CUSTOMER RELATIONS REPRESENTATIVE.—The head of each Federal agency shall designate an employee to be the customer relations representative of the agency. Such representative shall be responsible for implementing the customer service standards developed under section 2 and the agency requirements under subsection (b).

(b) AGENCY REQUIREMENTS.—

(1) GUIDELINES AND CONTACT INFORMATION.—The head of each Federal agency, acting through its customer relations representative, shall—

(A) issue guidelines to implement the customer service standards developed under section 2 within the agency, including specific principles of customer service applicable to that agency; and

(B) publish customer service contact information, including a mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address.

(2) AVAILABILITY.—The guidelines and the customer service contact information required under this subsection shall be available on the agency's public website.

SEC. 4. PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL.

Compliance with customer service standards developed under this Act shall be included in the performance appraisal systems referred to in sections 4302(a) and 4312 of title 5, United States Code.

SEC. 5. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) The term "customer", with respect to a Federal agency, means any individual or entity, including a business, State or local government, other Federal agency, or Congress, to which the agency provides services or information.

(2) The term "Federal agency" has the meaning given the term "Executive agency" by section 105 of title 5, United States Code, except that the term does not include an agency if the President determines that this Act should not apply to the agency for national security reasons.

SEC. 6. DEFICIT REDUCTION.

Any savings or reductions in expenditures resulting from this Act shall be used to offset the costs of implementation of this Act, and any additional savings shall be used to reduce the deficit.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WALSH) and the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. CLAY) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WALSH. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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