

of times it had withheld pay to combat-injured veterans, the amount of each severance payment it withheld, and its actions to prevent future improper withholding to Congress within one year of the bill's enactment for Congress to assess the situation.

Our veterans deserve to be treated with respect.

It is only through the efforts and sacrifice of our veterans that America has the freedoms and privileges we do today.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 5015.

Mr. DANNY K. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 5015, a bill that would improve the fairness of the tax code and treat our service members with the respect they are due.

Veterans who suffered combat-related injuries who separated from the military are not supposed to be taxed on any one-time disability payments. Unfortunately, an accounting error has cost about 14,000 veterans more than \$78 million in taxes. Just under 500 of these veterans are from my home state of Illinois.

H.R. 5015 fixes this problem by instructing the DoD to identify those who were wrongfully taxed so that they can be reimbursed. The lion's share of the affected veterans are outside of the window for amending their tax returns to recoup the funds.

Consequently, this bill would allow those veterans identified by the DoD to file amended returns to recoup these unintentionally-withheld funds. This is a good bill that helps our service members as we should. I hope that this chamber can engage in similar bipartisan efforts to support other needy Americans as we move into the next Congress.

I am troubled that some stakeholders are advocating that a 15 to 20 percent corporate tax rate serve as the central metric by which we judge any tax reform effort. To achieve this rate, middle- and low-income families and small businesses will have to subsidize the wealthiest corporations, foregoing critical credits and deductions that provide much needed assistance.

I sincerely hope that we advance the intent of this bill to help Americans in need as we consider tax reform next year.

I strongly support H.R. 5015, and I urge my colleagues to support its passage.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BRADY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5015, 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. BRADY of Texas. Mr. 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 proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

PREScribed BURN APPROVAL ACT OF 2016

Mr. LUCAS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 3395) to require limitations on prescribed burns.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.
The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 3395

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 "Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2016".

SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) NATIONAL FIRE DANGER RATING SYSTEM.—The term "national fire danger rating system" means the national system used to provide a measure of fire danger according to a range of low to moderate to high to very high to extreme.

(2) PRESCRIBED BURN.—The term "prescribed burn" means a planned fire intentionally ignited.

(3) SECRETARY.—The term "Secretary" means the Secretary of Agriculture, acting through the Chief of the Forest Service.

SEC. 3. LIMITATIONS ON PRESCRIBED BURNS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subsection (b), the Secretary shall not authorize a prescribed burn on Forest Service land if, for the county or contiguous county in which the land is located, the national fire danger rating system indicates an extreme fire danger level.

(b) EXCEPTION.—The Secretary may authorize a prescribed burn under a condition described in subsection (a) if the Secretary coordinates with the applicable State government and local fire officials.

(c) REPORT.—At the end of each fiscal year, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report describing—

(1) the number and locations of prescribed burns during that fiscal year; and

(2) each prescribed burn during that fiscal year that was authorized by the Secretary pursuant to subsection (b).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. PETERSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oklahoma.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. LUCAS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members 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 Oklahoma?

There was no objection.

□ 1730

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

I rise today in support of S. 3395, the Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2016.

Across much of the country, Forest Service land borders private lands that are essential to the livelihood of farmers, ranchers, and foresters. While the Forest Service is tasked with managing these lands, many techniques are effective but carry risk.

On April 3, 2013, the Forest Service conducted a controlled burn on the Dakota Prairie Grasslands intended for 130 acres. As weather conditions changed, the fire escaped its boundary and burned 16,000 acres of private land.

The prescribed burn planned by Federal officials resulted in millions of dollars in damage to private lands in South Dakota, with ranchers losing valuable pasture, hay, fence, and structures.

In the aftermath of the fire, the Office of the General Counsel of USDA determined that the Forest Service had done nothing out of line and claimed no responsibility to those harmed by this carelessness. This commonsense piece of legislation that we are addressing today, simply put, would require the Forest Service to conduct prescribed burns only when the national fire rating system indicates that it is safe to do so in that county and contiguous counties.

Furthermore, this bill will encourage greater collaboration with local officials, helping to mitigate more of the risk to private lands.

We all strive to be good neighbors and hope our neighbors will do the same. With passage, this bill gives many neighbors to the Forest Service additional certainty, and I urge your support.

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

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES,

Washington, DC, December 1, 2016.

Hon. K. MICHAEL CONAWAY,
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: I write regarding S. 3395, the Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2016. This bill contains provisions under the jurisdiction of the Committee on Natural Resources.

I recognize and appreciate your desire to bring this bill before the House of Representatives in an expeditious manner, and accordingly, I will agree that the Committee on Natural Resources be discharged from further consideration of the bill. I do so with the understanding that this action does not affect the jurisdiction of the Committee on Natural Resources.

I also ask that a copy of this letter and your response be included in the Congressional Record during consideration of S. 3395 on the House floor.

Thank you for your work on this important issue, and I look forward to its enactment soon.

Sincerely,

ROB BISHOP,
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Washington, DC, December 1, 2016.

Hon. ROB BISHOP,
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources,
Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN BISHOP: I am writing concerning S. 3395, the Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2016. The bill was agreed to in the Senate on November 17, 2016, and was referred in the House primarily to the Committee on Agriculture, with an additional referral to the Committee on Natural Resources.

I ask that you allow the Committee on Natural Resources to be discharged from further consideration of the bill so that it may be scheduled by the Majority Leader. This discharge in no way affects your Committee's jurisdiction over the subject matter of

the bill, and it will not serve as precedent for future referrals. In addition, should a conference on the bill be necessary, I would support your request to have the Committee on Natural Resources represented on the conference committee. Finally, I would be pleased to include this letter and any response in Congressional Record to memorialize our mutual understanding.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued cooperation between our committees.

Sincerely,

K. MICHAEL CONAWAY,
Chairman.

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

Mr. Speaker, the Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2016, S. 3395, will help alleviate unintentional disasters when prescribed burns don't go exactly as planned. This is commonsense legislation, and I urge my colleagues to vote in support of it.

Prescribed burns are an important tool used by the Forest Service to help manage our national forests and grasslands. However, there is the risk of damage to nearby private property when prescribed burns get out of control, which happened, as was described recently, in the upper Midwest.

This bill will allow the Forest Service to continue to use prescribed burns while taking practical steps to prevent disasters. S. 3395 prohibits the Forest Service from utilizing prescribed burns in areas of high fire risk, unless the Forest Service coordinates with State governments and local officials.

Having local officials and responders aware of activities can help them be prepared and equipped to assist, if necessary. Frankly, this is something I would hope the Forest Service is already doing, but this bill is a good step. It will make sure that it happens in the future.

Again, I urge my colleagues to support the bill.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. LUCAS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from South Dakota (Mrs. NOEM), who not only understands these issues but lives these issues.

Mrs. NOEM. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding to me today.

Mr. Speaker, today, I rise in support of S. 3395, the Prescribed Burn Approval Act. This is a commonsense bill that will prohibit the U.S. Forest Service from authorizing prescribed burns in an area that is labeled an extreme fire danger except under circumstances that have local coordination. Unfortunately, we have seen instances where the Forest Service has acted recklessly by starting prescribed burns under extremely hazardous conditions.

The Pautre fire in South Dakota is one such example. Despite the hot and windy conditions and being warned repeatedly from local ranchers and local officials that it was too windy and too dry to be starting a controlled burn, the Forest Service still carried out a prescribed burn that was intended to cover just 130 acres of dead crested wheatgrass.

Within hours, the fire escalated out of control. More than 10,000 acres of Forest Service land, grazing association controlled land, and private land was consumed by the wildfire. Millions of dollars of damage was done not only to the land but to fences and families. Families were devastated.

Multiple firefighting units and personnel were put in harm's way. This burn should not have occurred that day without the collaboration and additional precautions that such a burn will require. It should happen in consultation with local officials and those who know the land best, those who live on the land and work the land each and every day—local farmers and ranchers.

It only makes sense that the Forest Service has the responsibility to coordinate with local and State fire officials in circumstances where the threat of wildfire is high. This bill is a step in the right direction to make certain that necessary precautions are taken.

Furthermore, this bill would add transparency and a degree of accountability to the Forest Service's actions by ensuring that Congress is aware of the prescribed burns that are done under hazardous conditions.

I would like to thank Senator THUNE for his work on this bill and the chairman for bringing this bill forward.

I urge my colleagues to vote in favor.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

It is worth noting that before there were ever farmers and ranchers on the plains, before Coronado ever came up from the south, or Lewis and Clark crossed through the north, and even before our Native American friends first appeared in North America fire has been an important management tool in the ecosystem of the Great Plains—whether the northern plains where my colleague, Mrs. NOEM, lives or the southern plains where I live—an important tool. Maintaining the health of the grasslands, addressing the woody plants that are invasive, this is an important tool.

This is why today we rise together to ask for our colleagues to vote for this bill, to provide the ability for everyone who occupies the plains to comfortably work together to use this tool to maintain the health of the Great Plains.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to join us in passing the bill.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, S. 3395.

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.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OPERATIONS AUTHORIZATION AND EMBASSY SECURITY ACT, FISCAL YEAR 2016

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 1635) to authorize the Department of State for fiscal year 2016, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 1635

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the “Department of State Authorities Act, Fiscal Year 2017”.

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; Table of contents.

Sec. 2. Definitions.

TITLE I—EMBASSY SECURITY AND PERSONNEL PROTECTION

Subtitle A—Review and Planning Requirements

Sec. 101. Designation of high risk, high threat posts.

Sec. 102. Contingency plans for high risk, high threat posts.

Sec. 103. Direct reporting.

Sec. 104. Accountability Review Board recommendations related to unsatisfactory leadership.

Subtitle B—Physical Security and Personnel Requirements

Sec. 111. Capital security cost sharing program.

Sec. 112. Local guard contracts abroad under diplomatic security program.

Sec. 113. Transfer authority.

Sec. 114. Security enhancements for soft targets.

Sec. 115. Exemption from certain procurement protest procedures for noncompetitive contracting in emergency circumstances.

Sec. 116. Sense of Congress regarding minimum security standards for temporary United States diplomatic and consular posts.

Sec. 117. Assignment of personnel at high risk, high threat posts.

Sec. 118. Annual report on embassy construction costs.

Sec. 119. Embassy security, construction, and maintenance.

Subtitle C—Security Training

Sec. 121. Security training for personnel assigned to high risk, high threat posts.

Sec. 122. Sense of Congress regarding language requirements for diplomatic security personnel assigned to high risk, high threat post.

Subtitle D—Expansion of the Marine Corps Security Guard Detachment Program

Sec. 131. Marine Corps Security Guard Program.

TITLE II—OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE AND BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Sec. 201. Competitive hiring status for former employees of the Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction.

Sec. 202. Certification of independence of information technology systems of the Office of Inspector General of the Department of State and Broadcasting Board of Governors.