

and Wildlife Service fulfill its mission to protect and preserve the Nation's fish and wildlife. These volunteer programs are very popular with folks throughout the country, with more applicants than available volunteer slots.

This legislation has broad support from several recreational and conservation organizations, as well as bipartisan support across the Congress.

I thank Chairman BISHOP for moving this legislation and, again, extend my great appreciation to Mr. JEFFRIES for sponsoring this important legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I urge adoption of the measure, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. HANABUSA. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from New York (Mr. JEFFRIES).

Mr. JEFFRIES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished gentlewoman from Hawaii (Ms. HANABUSA) for yielding, as well as for her leadership. I also thank Chairman BISHOP for his leadership in helping to move this legislation forward.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3979, the Keep America's Refuges Operational Act, a bipartisan bill that will reauthorize the volunteer, community partnership, and education program for our National Wildlife Refuge System.

Let me begin by thanking my good friend, the distinguished gentleman from the Commonwealth of Virginia (Mr. WITTMAN), who has partnered with me on this legislation and is a strong champion for our country's refuges.

This commonsense, bipartisan legislation will support conservation efforts at our Nation's refuges in a way that saves taxpayers dollars and stimulates jobs and economic opportunity.

Our National Wildlife Refuge System is comprised of 566 refuges located in every U.S. State and territory. Refuges make up over 800 million acres of habitat dedicated to the conservation of fish and wildlife.

Each year, 47 million Americans visit refuges, which help to support local economies by generating over \$2 billion in revenue and more than 35,000 local jobs. People visit refuges from all over the country to explore, hunt, fish, and experience America's natural beauty.

Refuges also help to mold the next generation of conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts by providing learning experiences and cherished memories for America's families. Refuges have a tremendous impact for communities all over America, even in my hometown of Brooklyn, New York.

But this wouldn't be possible without help from dedicated volunteers, who donate 20 percent of the total service work at our refuges. They support full-time staff by helping to operate visitor centers; conduct fish and wildlife population surveys; maintain visitor structures, roads, and paths; fight invasive species; and protect native plants and animals.

While volunteers may vary in age, background, and skill set, what they

all have in common is their dedication to preserving our country's natural beauty so that we can all enjoy it for years to come.

Advancing this legislation has been a collaborative process, and I greatly appreciate the hard work of Mr. WITTMAN and Members on both sides of the aisle. Through this bipartisan legislation, we will demonstrate the economic benefits to be gained from protecting America's natural beauty and being good stewards of the environment God has given to us all.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues to support H.R. 3979.

Mr. WITTMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have no additional speakers, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. HANABUSA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, the passage of H.R. 3979 extends the authorization of volunteer and educational programs on the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

This bill highlights the importance of community partnerships and volunteers and the value they bring to our public lands. In 2016, refuge volunteers donated 1.3 million hours, which equals \$30.6 million of labor value.

Volunteers are critical for the daily operation of the National Wildlife Refuge System and other Federal lands. I know, in many cases, visitors would not have access to these unique places without the participation of volunteers and other partners.

I serve as ranking member of the Federal Lands Subcommittee, where we held a hearing on this bill in November and heard testimony from the National Wildlife Refuge Association about the importance of sustaining the volunteer program. I am pleased we can work in a bipartisan fashion to move this important message through the House.

I commend the sponsor, Representative JEFFRIES of New York, for his hard work and dedication to this issue. This is a good bill, and I urge my colleagues to support its adoption.

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

Mr. WITTMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I echo the sentiment of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. This truly is what makes our Nation great: individuals willing to give of their time to work on these refuges.

Many times, the ability to access those refuges is dependent upon those volunteers. We take a few resources and stretch them across the Nation on many of these refuge lands, and it is our volunteers who, many times, help in maintaining these lands and making sure that there is access and making sure that people who come to visit understand the true value and nature of the resources that are there.

It is, truly, I think, a great example of what makes our country great: people willing to put their time and effort

into these refuges and making sure they, indeed, can be enjoyed by all. This is why I think this bill enjoys the support of folks on both sides of the aisle. This truly is, I think, an issue that should bring us all together.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WITTMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3979, 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. WITTMAN. 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.

UNITED STATES FIRE ADMINISTRATION, AFG, AND SAFER PROGRAM REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2017

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4661) to reauthorize the United States Fire Administration, the Assistance to Firefighters Grants program, the Fire Prevention and Safety Grants program, and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response grant program, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4661

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 "United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017".

SEC. 2. REAUTHORIZATION OF THE UNITED STATES FIRE ADMINISTRATION.

Section 17(g)(1)(M) of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2216 (g)(1)(M)) is amended—

(1) by striking "fiscal year 2017" and inserting "for each of fiscal years 2017 through 2023"; and

(2) by inserting "for each such fiscal year" after "\$2,753,672".

SEC. 3. REAUTHORIZATION OF ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANTS PROGRAM AND THE FIRE PREVENTION AND SAFETY GRANTS PROGRAM.

(a) SUNSET.—Section 33(r) of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2229(r)) is amended by striking "the date that is 5 years after the date of the enactment of the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012" and inserting "September 30, 2024".

(b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—Section 33(q)(1)(B) of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2229(q)(1)(B)) is amended, in the matter preceding clause (i), by striking "2017" and inserting "2023".

(c) AUTHORIZATION FOR CERTAIN TRAINING UNDER ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANTS

PROGRAM.—Section 33(c)(3) of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2229(c)(3)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(N) To provide specialized training to firefighters, paramedics, emergency medical service workers, and other first responders to recognize individuals who have mental illness and how to properly intervene with individuals with mental illness, including strategies for verbal de-escalation of crisis.”.

SEC. 4. REAUTHORIZATION OF STAFFING FOR ADEQUATE FIRE AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE GRANT PROGRAM.

(a) SUNSET.—Section 34(k) of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2229a(k)) is amended by striking “the date that is 5 years after the date of the enactment of the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012” and inserting “September 30, 2024”.

(b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—Section 34(j)(1)(I) of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2229a(j)(1)(I)) is amended, in the matter preceding clause (i), by striking “2017” and inserting “2023”.

(c) MODIFICATION OF APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS.—Section 34(b)(3)(B) of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2229a(b)(3)(B)) is amended by striking “of subsection (a)(1)(B)(ii) and (F)” and inserting “of subsection (a)(1)(F)”.

(d) MODIFICATION OF LIMITATION.—Section 34(c)(2) of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2229a(c)(2)) is amended by striking “prior to the date of enactment of this section” and inserting “prior to the date of the application for the grant”.

(e) MODIFICATION OF WAIVER AUTHORITY.—Section 34(d)(1)(B) of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2229a(d)(1)(B)) is amended by striking “subsection (a)(1)(E) or subsection (c)(2)” and inserting “subsection (a)(1)(E), (c)(2), or (c)(4)”.

(f) EXPANSION OF STAFFING FOR ADEQUATE FIRE AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE GRANT PROGRAM; REPEAL OF AUTHORITY FOR CERTAIN USE OF GRANT AMOUNTS TRANSFERRED TO ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANTS PROGRAM.—Section 34(a)(1)(B) of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2229a(a)(1)(B)) is amended—

(1) by inserting “or to change the status of part-time or paid-on-call (as defined in section 33(a)) firefighters to full-time firefighters” after “firefighters”; and

(2) by striking “and to provide” and all that follows through “of crises”.

SEC. 5. TRAINING ON ADMINISTRATION OF FIRE GRANT PROGRAMS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, acting through the Administrator of the United States Fire Administration, may develop and make widely available an electronic, online training course for members of the fire and emergency response community on matters relating to the administration of grants under sections 33 and 34 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2229 and 2229a).

(b) REQUIREMENTS.—The Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency shall ensure that any training developed and made available under subsection (a) is—

(1) tailored to the financial and time constraints of members of the fire and emergency response community; and

(2) accessible to all individuals in the career, combination, paid-on-call, and volunteer fire and emergency response community.

SEC. 6. FRAMEWORK FOR OVERSIGHT AND MONITORING OF THE ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANTS PROGRAM, THE FIRE PREVENTION AND SAFETY GRANTS PROGRAM, AND THE STAFFING FOR ADEQUATE FIRE AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE GRANT PROGRAM.

(a) FRAMEWORK.—Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, acting through the Administrator of the United States Fire Administration, shall develop and implement a grant monitoring and oversight framework to mitigate and minimize risks of fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement relating to the grants programs under sections 33 and 34 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2229 and 2229a).

(b) ELEMENTS.—The framework required under subsection (a) shall include the following:

(1) Developing standardized guidance and training for all participants in the grant programs described in subsection (a).

(2) Conducting regular risk assessments.

(3) Conducting desk reviews and site visits.

(4) Enforcement actions to recoup potential questionable costs of grant recipients.

(5) Such other oversight and monitoring tools as the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency considers necessary to mitigate and minimize fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement relating to the grant programs described in subsection (a).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. COMSTOCK) and the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Virginia.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 4661, the bill now under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Virginia?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, the United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017 reflects a bipartisan, bicameral agreement reached between the House and the Senate authorizing committees.

I want to particularly thank our chairman and ranking member and my friend, Senator MCCAIN, for his leadership on this bill in the Senate, in helping us get this agreement today. I note we all appreciate his service as well as his commitment to the service of all those here whom we are working for today.

Fire prevention and safety is literally a matter of life and death. In 2015, there were 1.34 million fires reported in the United States, causing more than 3,000 civilian deaths and 15,000 injuries. In addition to this devastating human loss, fires cost \$14.3 billion in property damage.

As I travel throughout my district and visit with firefighters and paramedics, I am constantly reminded of the sacrifices they make to protect our neighbors. Certainly, as we have seen the raging fires in California, that is brought to mind also.

One thing I consistently hear from our volunteer and professional firefighters is how critical these grants are to their stations. Whether they help by providing training for additional firefighters or providing upgraded respirators to ensure their safety, towns and communities around the district are safer as a result of these grants.

Sadly, last year, 69 of our firefighters across the country lost their lives in the line of duty.

Fire prevention has improved dramatically since Congress passed the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act in 1974, which created the U.S. Fire Administration and the National Fire Academy. This has certainly professionalized all of this work, but there are still areas for improvement.

Firefighting activities and funding are primarily the responsibility of States and local communities. The USFA and NFA, however, are responsible for national data collection, public education, and research and training programs to reduce fire deaths and make our communities and residents safer, as well as make our firefighters safer.

For the last 15 years, the Federal Government has also awarded competitive grants directly to local fire departments and unaffiliated emergency medical services, or EMS, organizations to help with a variety of equipment, training, and other needs.

FIRE Act awards provide funding and equipment training to ensure the safety of our Nation's first responders.

SAFER Act awards help local departments to recruit, hire, and retain trained firefighters. Many firefighting departments in my district rely on these grants in order to maintain high-quality fire and emergency services for their communities.

Loudoun County, in particular, received \$2 million through this grant program. According to Fire Chief Brower: “These programs greatly assist localities in the areas of firefighter safety, fire and life safety education, and improved resourcing for tactical fire operations.”

More than 80 people lost their lives in the horrific Grenfell Tower fire in London that occurred earlier this year.

Closer to home, it was just 2 years ago that a Metro fire injured 70 and killed a Virginia resident who was a grandmother of three, who was on her way to work.

California's huge wildfires are in today's headlines and remind us that, as communities continue to expand into wildland areas, wildfires pose growing risk for human life, home and property losses, and entire communities.

When fires occur, first responders run toward the flames and put themselves

in danger in order to prevent lives from being lost.

This bill will reauthorize the USFA and the FIRE and SAFER programs for 6 years and ensure that our Nation's firefighters and paramedics have the tools and training they need to fight and prevent devastating fires.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill today, and I reserve the balance of my time.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
Washington, DC, December 18, 2017.

Hon. LAMAR SMITH,
*Chairman, Committee on Science, Space, and
Technology, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.*

DEAR CHAIRMAN SMITH: I am writing to you concerning the jurisdictional interest of the Committee on Homeland Security in H.R. 4661, the "United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017." The bill contains provisions that fall within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Homeland Security.

I recognize and appreciate the desire to bring this legislation before the House of Representatives in an expeditious manner, and accordingly, the Committee on Homeland Security will not assert its jurisdictional claim over this bill by seeking a sequential referral. The Committee takes this action with the mutual understanding that by foregoing action at this time we do not waive any jurisdiction over subject matter contained in this or similar legislation.

This waiver is also given with the understanding that the Committee on Homeland Security expressly reserves its authority to seek conferees on any provision within its jurisdiction during any House-Senate conference on this or any similar legislation, and requests your support for such a request.

I ask that a copy of this letter and your response be included in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD during consideration of this bill on the House floor.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL T. MCCAUL,
Chairman.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY,

Washington, DC, December 18, 2017.

Hon. MICHAEL T. MCCAUL,
*Chairman, Committee on Home Security, House
of Representatives, Washington, DC.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your letter regarding the Committee on Homeland Security's jurisdictional interest in H.R. 4661, the "United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017," and your willingness to forego consideration of H.R. 4661 by your committee.

I agree that the Committee on Homeland Security has a valid jurisdictional interest in certain provisions of H.R. 4661 and that the Committee's jurisdiction will not be adversely affected by your decision to not request a sequential referral of H.R. 4661. As you have requested, I will support your request for an appropriate appointment of outside conferees from your Committee in the event of a House-Senate conference on this or similar legislation should such a conference be convened.

Thank you again for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

LAMAR SMITH,
Chairman.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE,
Washington, DC, December 18, 2017.

Hon. LAMAR SMITH,
*Chairman, Committee on Science, Space, and
Technology, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.*

DEAR CHAIRMAN SMITH: I write concerning H.R. 4661, the United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017. This legislation includes matters that fall within the Rule X jurisdiction of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

I recognize and appreciate your desire to bring this legislation before the House of Representatives in an expeditious manner, and accordingly, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will forego action on the bill. However, this is conditional on our mutual understanding that foregoing consideration of the bill does not prejudice the Committee with respect to the appointment of conferees or to any future jurisdictional claim over the subject matters contained in the bill or similar legislation that fall within the Committee's Rule X jurisdiction. Lastly, should a conference on the bill be necessary, I request your support for the appointment of conferees from the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure during any House-Senate conference convened on this or related legislation.

I would ask that a copy of this letter and your response acknowledging our jurisdictional interest as well as the mutually agreed upon changes to be incorporated into the bill be included in the Congressional Record during consideration of the measure on the House floor, to memorialize our understanding.

I look forward to working with the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology as the bill moves through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

BILL SHUSTER,
Chairman.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY,
Washington, DC, December 18, 2017.

Hon. BILL SHUSTER,
*Chairman, Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your letter regarding the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's jurisdictional interest in H.R. 4661, the "United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017," and your willingness to forego consideration of H.R. 4661 by your committee.

I agree that the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure has a valid jurisdictional interest in certain provisions of H.R. 4661 and that the Committee's jurisdiction will not be adversely affected by your decision to not request a sequential referral of H.R. 4661. As you have requested, I will support your request for an appropriate appointment of outside conferees from your Committee in the event of a House-Senate conference on this or similar legislation should such a conference be convened.

Thank you again for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

LAMAR SMITH,
Chairman.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the United States Fire Administration,

AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017.

I hope we can all agree on the urgency of reauthorizing this program before the sunset in current law would terminate this program in January. We heard from the local, State, and Federal experts at our hearing in July just how essential these programs are to ensuring both firefighter and community safety in all of our districts across the Nation.

This bill authorizes funding at the 2017 levels for the U.S. Fire Administration, Assistance to Firefighters Grants, Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grants.

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It also directs establishment of a grant monitoring and oversight framework. It makes important technical fixes to current law. It ensures lesser resourced fire departments have the tools to successfully apply for grants. These are critical programs to ensure the safety and security of all Americans, and they must be reauthorized.

Unfortunately, I must also express my disappointment and frustration with the majority's insistence on including a new sunset clause in this bill. The sunset currently in law is putting these programs at risk as we speak. Congress shouldn't need sunsets to do a job properly. In this case, arbitrary program sunsets puts lives at risk. Every single firefighting organization wants this sunset out. On a bipartisan basis, the Senate has voted to remove this sunset, yet here we are today running up a program termination that nobody wants, and senselessly adding a future program termination date that nobody wants.

Legislating by self-created emergency is bad for Congress and bad for our country. Here we are in December desperately trying to avoid terminating assistance to firefighters. At the same time, we are desperately trying to keep the Federal Government from shutting down and we are desperately trying to provide disaster assistance to Americans who are suffering. Of course, we have already missed the deadline on CHIP, and now 9 million children all across our country are in danger of losing health coverage. This is no way to run a country.

So we will vote on this bill today and, in 7 years, probably be right back in the same boat we are today. We can and should do better than this.

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

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. MIMI WALTERS).

Mrs. MIMI WALTERS of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4661, the United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017.

Mr. Speaker, 2017 has been the most devastating year in California wildfire history. Thousands of California residents were displaced, over 1 million

acres burned, and thousands of homes and businesses were destroyed by this year's fires.

Now, more than ever, it is critical that California's fire departments are fully staffed. SAFER grants provide resources for fire departments that struggle to meet their staffing needs, including Orange County Fire Authority in my district.

SAFER grants will undoubtedly help fire departments across the country meet the needs of their communities, while ensuring firefighters are ready and able to assist with wildfire suppression efforts.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to offer my sincerest condolences to CAL FIRE and the family of Cory Iverson, who tragically lost his life this past week battling the Thomas fire.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I have no requests for time, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. ABRAHAM).

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I strongly support the reauthorization of the United States Fire Administration, the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program, the Fire Prevention and Safety Grant Program, and the SAFER grant program.

These programs are vital to protect the public and the Nation's firefighters. Recent trends have shown that fire safety and prevention remains a serious national concern. Data from the U.S. Fire Administration shows that, while there are fewer fires and fire-related deaths overall, fires are becoming more severe and costly in both lives lost and property damage per fire. The best-trained, best-equipped firefighters cannot always overcome the dangers associated with today's severe fires.

This alarming trend jeopardizes the economic health of our communities and our national goal of increased resilience to fire. Adequate funding for the brave men and women who fight fires is essential, but we must also be effective in reducing these trends by preventing the fire's ignition and growth, in the first place, through robust fire prevention.

I will work with the Science, Space, and Technology Committee to request that the U.S. First Administration and FEMA investigate the upward trend in fatalities and property damage per fire.

Mr. Speaker, I thank both Chairman SMITH and subcommittee Chairwoman COMSTOCK for their leadership and hard work on the reauthorization bill, and I hope to work with them to address these issues moving forward.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I urge passage of the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to note that the International Association of Fire Chiefs has endorsed this bill.

I appreciate, again, the bicameral, bipartisan support we were able to bring together for the sixth year reauthorization—actually, the seventh year, also, for extra room there.

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

Mr. PASCRELL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the United States Fire Administration, the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program, the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant program, and the Fire Prevention and Safety programs.

As an original author of these critical grant programs, I understand their importance to the firefighting community. It is often local firefighters who are the first on the scene before help from elsewhere can arrive. Our first responders provide immediate assistance to those in need; and these grants enable local firefighters across our nation to receive the training and equipment necessary to fulfill this important mission.

The proper training and equipment provided to local firefighters by the AFG and SAFER grant programs and Fire Prevention and Safety programs can often mean the difference between life and death.

It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that it took so long for the House to act on reauthorizing these important federal grants. We have had nearly an entire year for the Majority to introduce a bill, have it considered in committee, and see action on the House floor. Or simply, we could have just considered S. 829, which passed the Senate by unanimous consent on August 2, 2017.

I even introduced H.R. 3881, a House version of the Senate-passed legislation and co-led a letter with 153 members of this House to show support for reauthorizing these grant programs. However, no action was taken to reauthorize these critical grant programs until today.

The bill before us today makes meaningful and technical changes to the administration of these grant programs. One important change this bill makes, that I know is significant to my home state of New Jersey and fire departments across the nation, is permitting the use of these grants to permit the use of grants to change the status of part-time or paid-on-call firefighters to full-time firefighters.

However, unlike the Senate bill, the bill before us today continues to have a dreadful sunset clause. Typically, the Congress sunsets programs to ensure there is an opportunity to review the importance of a program's continuation and that there is no waste, fraud, or abuse. Since the establishment of these fire programs, there have been no major issues with waste, fraud, or abuse—and we certainly cannot dispute the major benefits these programs provide. So it is a wonder why some are insisting on sunseting these critical grant programs in this bill.

This sunset causes needless anxiety, which many have been feeling this year as the House is only now reauthorizing these programs just two weeks before they're set to expire. This is a situation where states and localities and tens of thousands of fire departments across our nation are left wondering about the future of critical funding they rely on to keep their communities safe. This sunset is unnecessary and we should eliminate it.

It is not an understatement to say that the funding provided by these programs has saved countless lives. The federal resources these grants have provided fire departments with the equipment, training and staffing needed to swiftly respond to over 30 million calls annually. These programs also have improved firefighters' response capabilities and prevented numerous fires through safety programs targeted toward high-risk populations.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues Congressman PETER KING, STENY HOYER and DAVE REICHERT as co-chairs of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus and for their tireless work on behalf of our nation's fire service.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to encourage my colleagues in this Chamber to support the reauthorization of these critical grant programs.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. COMSTOCK) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4661.

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.

STEM RESEARCH AND EDUCATION EFFECTIVENESS AND TRANSPARENCY ACT

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Mr. Speaker I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4375) to provide for a study on broadening participation in certain National Science Foundation research and education programs, to collect data on Federal research grants to science agencies, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4375

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 "STEM Research and Education Effectiveness and Transparency Act".

SEC. 2. BROADENING PARTICIPATION IN STEM PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 12 months after the date of enactment of this Act, the Director of the National Science Foundation shall submit a report to Congress on the effectiveness of all National Science Foundation research and education programs for broadening the participation of women and other historically underrepresented individuals in STEM studies and careers, including—

(1) development or identification of performance metrics to evaluate such programs;

(2) information on student outcomes using all available data, including dropout rates, enrollment in graduate programs, internships or apprenticeships, and employment;

(3) identification of any data gaps for evaluating the effectiveness and outcomes of National Science Foundation programs to broaden participation; and

(4) recommendations for maintaining, translating, and disseminating outcomes data for STEM programs funded by the National Science Foundation.

(b) DEFINITION OF STEM.—In this section, the term "STEM" has the meaning given the