

PERMISSION FOR MEMBER TO BE
CONSIDERED AS FIRST SPONSOR
OF H.R. 137

Mr. CICILLINE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that I may hereafter be considered to be the first sponsor of H.R. 137, a bill originally introduced by Representative Conyers of Michigan, for the purposes of adding cosponsors and requesting reprintings pursuant to clause 7 of rule XII.

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

There was no objection.

PROTECTING ACCESS TO THE
COURTS FOR TAXPAYERS ACT

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3996) to amend title 28, United States Code, to permit other courts to transfer certain cases to United States Tax Court.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3996

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 "Protecting Access to the Courts for Taxpayers Act".

SEC. 2. TRANSFER OF CERTAIN CASES.

Section 1631 of title 28, United States Code, is amended by inserting "(or, for cases within the jurisdiction of the United States Tax Court, to that court)" after "any other such court".

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 3996, currently under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, American taxpayers fighting the Internal Revenue Service deserve their day in court. Not every taxpayer who thinks the IRS is wrong is right, but not every time the IRS brings a case are they right.

The Tax Court is a unique creation of Congress. It is, in fact, an article 1 court specifically created and dedicated to tax issues.

The Tax Court has the expertise necessary to hear complex or, in some cases, simple tax cases. Any situation in which a taxpayer is unable to contest an IRS action, therefore, would be simply unacceptable.

□ 1515

Unfortunately, the problem today is that, due to an oversight in the Federal

law, you can find yourself in a situation, by filing in good faith, not to be able to use a Tax Court. Unlike the IRS, not all taxpayers know about the requirement to file tax disputes in the Tax Court. Some taxpayers, in good faith, file in their local district court, which is wrong, and by the time it is discovered, their opportunity to file in Tax Court has expired.

Today, when a Federal Tax Court judge recognizes the improper venue, under current law he is prevented from simply transferring the case to Tax Court, where it rightfully belongs. By the time this happens, the taxpayer usually has lost their day in court since they only have a short time in which to ask for the Tax Court.

Because of this oversight in the Federal law, I, along with the ranking member of the full Judiciary Committee, introduced the Protecting Access to the Courts for Taxpayers Act. The legislation, quite simply, fixes this error that impacts dozens and dozens of Americans repeatedly every year. It is supported by advocates in the Judicial Conference and the Tax Courts.

It just makes sense, Mr. Speaker, that, in fact, getting your day in court should not be nullified by an actual petition to a court erroneously not recognized in time. In any other case in which you file in Federal court, if the court determines it is not an appropriate venue, the case is transferred. This is a lone exception.

I want to thank my colleague from Georgia for his support in this legislation and for his help in making sure it was drafted accurately.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3996, the Protecting Access to the Courts for Taxpayers Act. This bipartisan legislation would ensure that taxpayers who mistakenly file certain claims in the wrong venue will still have their day in court.

Under current law, when a Federal court does not have jurisdiction over a case, it typically may transfer that case to the appropriate Federal court that does have proper jurisdiction. However, due to a quirk in the law, the United States Tax Court is not authorized to have misfiled cases transferred to it, even when the Tax Court is the proper—and, in many cases, the only—court with jurisdiction to hear the case.

This legislation will remedy that flaw in the law and enable Federal courts to transfer cases directly to the Tax Court when appropriate. The need for this bill is not simply a matter of judicial efficiency; it is fundamentally one of access to justice.

The Tax Court was established to resolve disputes between taxpayers and the Internal Revenue Service, and many taxpayers choose to represent themselves in Tax Court proceedings.

Unfortunately, these litigants—lacking legal representation—make procedural errors, including filing in the wrong court.

In most instances, by the time a taxpayer's claim is dismissed for lack of jurisdiction, the strict guidelines and deadlines for filing in the Tax Court—generally 90 days or fewer—have long passed, and the taxpayer is then barred from filing a claim altogether.

By allowing these cases to be transferred directly to the Tax Court, H.R. 3996 ensures that the case will retain its original filing date and the taxpayer will be able to preserve his or her claim. As a result of this modest but significant amendment to current law, this bill will protect the right of taxpayers to be heard in court.

I appreciate the efforts of the various Tax Court representatives who are bringing this issue to our attention and for their guidance in helping us to develop the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to acknowledge H.R. 3996's author, my friend, Representative DARRELL ISSA, whose leadership on this issue is to be commended. Accordingly, I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

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

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I am with my friend, and would like to associate all of my further comments with his. So, again, I urge support for this bipartisan legislation.

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 California (Mr. ISSA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3996.

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.

PREVENTING CRIMES AGAINST
VETERANS ACT OF 2017

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 506) to amend title 18, United States Code, to provide an additional tool to prevent certain frauds against veterans, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 506

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 "Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act of 2017".

SEC. 2. ADDITIONAL TOOL TO PREVENT CERTAIN FRAUDS AGAINST VETERANS.

(a) *IN GENERAL.*—Chapter 63 of title 18, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

"§ 1352. Fraud regarding veterans' benefits

"(a) Whoever knowingly executes, or attempts to execute, any scheme or artifice to defraud an

individual of veterans' benefits, or in connection with obtaining veteran's benefits for that individual, shall be fined under this title, imprisoned not more than five years, or both.

"(b) In this section—

"(1) the term 'veteran' has the meaning given that term in section 101 of title 38; and

"(2) the term 'veterans' benefits' means any benefit provided by Federal law for a veteran or a dependent or survivor of a veteran.'"

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 63 of title 18, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

"1352. Fraud regarding veterans' benefits.'"

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) and the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 506, currently under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, the Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act of 2017 closes a small but significant loophole in Federal law and, in so doing, gives Federal prosecutors an additional mechanism to protect veterans from criminals who seek to defraud them.

In recent years, we have heard distressing and infuriating stories about particularly elderly veterans being swindled out of their veterans' benefits. Some of these veterans, including those in low-income housing, have been deceived by fraudsters who, in fact, have preyed on their age and infirmity.

Helping veterans in this case certainly should be a priority in this Congress.

This is particularly insidious in that, in some cases, the criminal will claim to get a veteran's benefits approved in record time, will charge outrageous fees to file, and, ultimately, will provide the veteran with little or no assistance. They will just pocket the money that rightfully belongs to the elderly veteran.

Mr. Speaker, this change in the law is critical. I want to thank Mr. TOM ROONEY, the author of the bill. I want to urge that we consider it quickly, close this loophole, and provide prosecutors with the kind of ability to protect our aging veterans in a way that is currently not available.

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

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act of 2017 would make it a crime to knowingly engage in any scheme to defraud a veteran or

his or her dependents of veterans' benefits. This legislation provides an important, additional tool for Federal prosecutors to use to combat veterans' benefits fraud.

Because we honor the service of our brave men and women, and because of the sacrifices our veterans have made for us, it is particularly important that we protect them from fraud and ensure the integrity of the benefit system we provide.

According to a 2016 AARP study of investment fraud victims, it shows that while veterans are less than 10 percent of the U.S. population, they were one-third, 33 percent, of the victims of investment fraud because their money is certain. A recent Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Sentinel program reveals that the number of complaints filed by military veterans each year has increased by 63 percent over the past 5 years.

Recently, my State of Texas highlighted these issues in an article which reported that several disabled veterans were unable to receive their benefits via direct deposit. Investigation revealed a number of veterans did not receive their VA disability compensation checks due to the theft that occurred by way of perpetrators rerouting veterans' benefits to virtual banks.

Veterans are the targets of many of the same types of fraudulent activities as the rest of society, including mail, telephone, and online fraud. They are more victimized by fraud than non-veterans, and have lost money to scams 16 percent more than non-veterans during the past 5 years.

Nearly 78 percent of veterans report having been a target of veteran-specific scams, such as approving a VA loan, taking advantage of little-known government programs for vets, or paying for a back, knee, or arm brace because of one's military service. Nearly 22 percent of veterans report receiving 10 or more suspicious phone calls per week. Nearly all veterans, 97 percent, have received at least one scam attempt in the past 5 years.

We hope we can stop this.

Currently, there are about 21 million veterans—and more upcoming—of the United States military. These are men and women who selflessly served our Nation and in the theaters of war, from the Second World War, Korea, and Vietnam, to more recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. As I indicated, our veterans will continue to grow and be vulnerable to scams.

Unfortunately, many of our veterans, as a result of their service, have physical and mental scars. There are well over 1 million American veterans with service-connected disabilities. It was my privilege to institute a PTSD center in my own district supported by the late Congressman Murtha.

In addition, veterans are more likely than nonveterans to become homeless. They comprise 17 percent of our homeless population, even though many of them are eligible for veterans' benefits.

On any given night, an estimated 50,000 veterans are sleeping on America's streets.

In recognition of the extreme sacrifice by our veterans and the hardships many of them continue to face after their military service, it is our duty to provide, to the best of our ability, an appropriate measure of compensation for them, particularly those in need.

For instance, we provide disability payments to those with service-connected disabilities, pensions for veterans with limited incomes, education and training under the GI Bill, and also various life insurance benefits.

This is the least we can do, and it is still not enough. There continues to be issues with the medical care we provide our veterans and problems about some benefits never being processed and paid because of the loss of claims by the Veterans Benefits Administration.

That is why we must prohibit any schemes to defraud a veteran of his or her veteran's benefits. Anyone convicted of such crime could be fined, imprisoned, or be subject to both penalties. Those who defraud veterans or their surviving spouses or dependents endanger our system of veterans' benefits not only by harming the victims, but also by diminishing resources required to pay the claims and fund the programs that are needed to help those who have served their country have a decent quality of life.

Accordingly, I support H.R. 506. I commend the bill's sponsors, Representative TOM ROONEY and Representative TED DEUTCH, for their work on this important issue.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support H.R. 506, the "Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act of 2017," which would make it a crime to knowingly engage in any scheme to defraud a veteran or his dependents of veteran's benefits. This legislation provides an important, additional tool for federal prosecutors to use to combat veterans' benefits fraud.

Because we honor the service of our brave men and women, and because of the sacrifices our veterans have made for us, it is particularly important that we protect them from fraud and ensure the integrity of the benefit system we provide.

According to a 2016 AARP study of investment fraud victims, it showed that while veterans are less than 10% of the U.S. population, they were one third (33%) of the victims of investment fraud. A recent Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Sentinel program reveals that the number of complaints filed by military veterans each year has increased by 63% over the past five years.

Recently, my state of Texas highlighted these issues in an article, which reported that several disabled veterans were unable to receive their benefits via direct deposit. Investigation revealed that a number of veterans did not receive their VA disability compensation checks, due to the theft that occurred by way of perpetrators re-routing veterans' benefits to virtual banks.

Veterans are the targets of many of the same types of fraudulent activities as the rest of society, including mail, telephone and online

fraud. They are more victimized by fraud than nonveterans and have lost money to scams (16%) than nonveterans during the past five years.

Nearly (78%) of veterans report having been a target of veteran-specific scams, such as improving a VA loan, taking advantage of little-known government programs for vets or paying for a back, knee or arm brace because of one's military service. Nearly (22%) of veterans report receiving 10 or more suspicious phone calls per week. Nearly all veterans (97%) have received at least one scam attempt in the past five years.

Currently, there are about 21 million veterans of the United States military—men and women who selflessly served our Nation and in theaters of war, from the Second World War, Korea, and Vietnam to more recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, many of our veterans—as a result of their service—have physical and mental scars. There are well over 1 million American veterans with service-connected disabilities.

In addition, veterans are more likely than non-veterans to become homeless. They comprise 17% of our homeless population. On any given night, an estimated 50,000 veterans are sleeping on America's streets.

In recognition of the extreme sacrifice by our veterans and the hardships many of them continue to face after their military service, it is our duty to provide, to the best of our ability, an appropriate measure of compensation for them, particularly for those in need.

For instance, we provide disability payments to those with service-connected disabilities, pensions for veterans with limited incomes, education and training under the GI Bill, and also various life insurance benefits.

This is the least we can do and it is still not enough. There continue to be issues with the medical care we provide our veterans, and problems about some benefits never being processed and paid because of the loss of claims by the Veterans Benefits Administration.

That is why we must prohibit any schemes to defraud a veteran of his or her veteran's benefits. Anyone convicted of such crime could be fined, imprisoned, or be subject to both penalties.

Those who defraud veterans, or their surviving spouses or dependents, endanger our system of veterans' benefits not only by harming the victims, but also by diminishing resources required to pay the claims and fund the programs that are needed to help those who have served their country.

Accordingly, I support H.R. 506 and I commend the bill's sponsors, Representative TOM ROONEY and Representative TED DEUTCH, for their work on this important issue.

Mr. Speaker, we must do everything we can to protect our Veterans who have given so much of themselves to keep us all safe. We must ensure that the benefits they have earned are safeguarded against criminal acts.

We ask our veterans to lay their lives on the line so that we can enjoy the freedom, which is at the heart of this great country. We owe them much. Surely we can and should repay our gratitude whenever we can.

Protecting their veterans' benefits is one way of expressing our appreciation, and it is the right and just thing to do.

For reasons, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this bill.

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

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. THOMAS J. ROONEY), who is the author of the bill.

Mr. THOMAS J. ROONEY of Florida. Mr. Speaker, my district is home to over 75,000 veterans, and I am proud to represent an area that has one of the highest concentrations of veterans in the country.

With that distinction comes a duty to fight on their behalf to ensure that the VA is functioning and funded at levels deserving of their sacrifice. As a member of the Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies, I am proud that we have secured increases in funding for VA programs that are important to my constituents.

On a daily basis, my staff and Members of Congress' staff across this country try to help veterans navigate the VA bureaucracy. It is no secret that the claims process at the VA is far too slow, so we all try to help veterans with their claims and expedite the process when possible. We have won countless battles against the system, and we have helped constituents far and wide to get the care and benefits they deserve.

One of our responsibilities as Members of Congress is to listen to these veterans when they tell us there is still more work to be done to help fix the system. In 2016, a group of veterans brought a disturbing problem to my attention concerning individuals who were deliberately stealing money from veterans and the VA without fear of criminal punishment. I started to hear story after story about people advertising their so-called services to veterans, claiming that, for a fee, they can help veterans obtain certain VA benefits or expedite existing claims with the VA.

□ 1530

There are two problems with this. Number one, it is illegal for anyone who isn't approved by the VA to charge fees for helping veterans with their claims or appeals; and two, often times these promises of assistance are empty and never followed through with. Unfortunately, there are no penalties for breaking this law.

One local VSO explained to me at length how these scammers specifically target senior veterans in low-income housing communities, almost as a rule, because they consider those veterans to be the most vulnerable and most likely to fall victim to their schemes. I have heard countless accounts of these con artists going into assisted living facilities, rounding up all the veterans and coercing them all to apply for benefits they don't even qualify for.

When I hear people are taking advantage of these heroes and making a quick buck off of them, it makes me sick, as I am sure it makes all of us

sick, because it is wrong and it needs to stop.

The reality is that this isn't just happening in my backyard. It is happening in every one of our districts. These con artists are getting away with it. I refuse to let this fraudulent scheme against some of the most respectable people in our Nation continue.

Without a Federal criminal penalty, we have been unable to prevent these financial predators from preying on our veterans and defrauding the VA.

My friend and fellow Congressman, Democrat TED DEUTCH from south Florida, joined me in introducing this bipartisan bill to penalize these scammers who make their living stealing from our veterans. Our bill would give prosecutors and law enforcement the tools they need to appropriately penalize these predators by imposing a hefty fine, imprisoning them for up to 5 years, or both.

I urge my colleagues to join me in support of this commonsense, bipartisan bill, and I hope that the Senate will act quickly to send it to the President's desk.

These criminals need to pay the price for these actions. Our veterans have done everything to protect us and our way of life. Now it is our duty in Congress to make sure that they are protected as well.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Florida (Mr. DEUTCH), the coauthor of this legislation.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Texas for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, many veterans face extraordinary obstacles when they return home, especially in retirement.

Too often, one of the obstacles to a safe and secure retirement for our veterans are so-called pension poachers. These are people who create high-pressure sales pitches that directly target older veterans. They make big promises, knowing they have no intention of ever delivering on them.

These are criminals who not only prey on our veterans, they prey on every American taxpayer who wants to do right by those who have served our country. They prey on the fact that we try to take good care of our veterans. They try to do it for financial gain. It is despicable, and we need to take action to stop it and make them pay for it. It is our job to ensure that they can't get away with it.

That is why I am proud to have partnered with my colleague, fellow Floridian, a veteran and my friend, Mr. ROONEY, to draft the Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act. This bill will give Federal prosecutors the tools they need to target criminals who actively work to avoid current mail and wire fraud statutes, all while targeting our veterans. It is time to crack down on pension poachers and fraudsters.

I am thankful for Chairman GOODLATTE, Ranking Member NADLER, and my Judiciary colleagues for their support in helping to get this bill to the

floor. I thank every Member of this House who voted unanimously to pass this legislation in the last Congress.

Finally, I would like to thank Veterans Service Officer Greg Dover from Palm Beach County, Florida, who has helped to alert my office of these schemes and has worked tirelessly on behalf of our veterans to stand up for their rights and the benefits they deserve.

I ask all of my colleagues to support our veterans and to vote “yes” on the Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 506 creates a new section, 1352, in chapter 63, title 18, to penalize fraudsters that knowingly execute or attempt to execute a scheme or artifice to defraud a veteran of his or her benefits—that is a dastardly act—or in connection with obtaining that veteran’s benefits by imposing a fine, imprisonment of up to 5 years, or both.

Under current law, you can be an agent or attorney and meet certain standards and you can help a veteran. But there are many who were not licensed, not connected, or had the approval of various States or local governments, and they were fraudulently taking precious resources from our veterans. There was no criminal or financial penalty for breaking the law.

So, H.R. 506 provides that penalty because, in recent years, financial predators across the country have targeted easy targets, who are veterans. Many, as we have said, have been physically or mentally maimed in their service to this Nation. Many of them are also elderly and live in low-income housing.

This bill is long in coming. I thank Mr. ROONEY and Mr. DEUTCH, working with the members of the Judiciary Committee, for moving this legislation forward.

We ask our veterans to lay their lives on the line so that we can enjoy freedom, which is at the heart of this great country. We owe them much. Surely, we can repay our gratitude whenever we can. Protecting their veterans’ benefits is one way of expressing our appreciation, and it is the right and just thing to do.

Mr. Speaker, for these reasons, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, our Nation’s veterans have sacrificed. They have given us so much. They have protected us.

In his second inaugural address, President Lincoln reminded us of our solemn duty “to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan.”

By doing this today, we keep that promise of so long ago: the promise to give back, as appropriate, and to protect that by giving back to the widows, the orphans, and the veterans them-

selves, because our values don’t just say we write a check. We also protect to make sure that check gets to the true beneficiary. This enforcement will do just that.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to, on a bipartisan basis, which this bill has been from day one, support it and to move it to the Senate.

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 California (Mr. ISSA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 506, 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.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Lasky, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed with an amendment in which the concurrence of the House is requested, a bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 1207. An act to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 306 River Street in Tilden, Texas, as the “Tilden Veterans Post Office”.

The message also announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 2286. An act to amend the Peace Corps Act to provide greater protection and services for Peace Corps volunteers, and for other purposes.

PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS GRANT PROGRAM AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2017

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3249) to authorize the Project Safe Neighborhoods Grant Program, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3249

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 “Project Safe Neighborhoods Grant Program Authorization Act of 2017”.

SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

For the purposes of this Act—

(1) the term “criminal street gangs” has the meaning given such term in section 521 of title 18, United States Code;

(2) the term “gang crime” means a felony or misdemeanor crime, under State or Federal law, committed by one or more persons who are a member of, or directly affiliated with, a criminal street gang;

(3) the term “transnational organized crime group” has the meaning given such term in section 36(k)(6) of the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956 (22 U.S.C. 2708(k)(6));

(4) the term “transnational organized crime” has the meaning given such term in

section 36(k)(5) of the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956 (22 U.S.C. 2708(k)(5)); and

(5) the term “firearms offenses” means an offense under section 922 or 924 of title 18, United States Code.

SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT.

The Attorney General of the United States is authorized to establish and carry out a program, to be known as the “Project Safe Neighborhoods Block Grant Program” or, in this Act, as the “Program”, within the Office of Justice Programs at the Department of Justice.

SEC. 4. PURPOSE.

The purpose of the Project Safe Neighborhoods Block Grant Program is to foster and improve existing partnerships between Federal, State, and local agencies, including the United States Attorney in each Federal judicial district, to create safer neighborhoods through sustained reductions in violent crimes by—

(1) developing and executing strategic plans to assist law enforcement agencies in combating gang crimes, including the enforcement of gun laws and drug interdiction; and

(2) developing intervention and prevention initiatives, including juvenile justice projects and activities which may include street-level outreach, conflict mediation, and the changing of community norms, in order to reduce violence.

SEC. 5. RULES AND REGULATIONS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Attorney General shall, not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, make rules to create, carry out, and administer the Program in accordance with this section.

(b) FUNDS TO BE DIRECTED TO LOCAL CONTROL.—Amounts made available as grants under the Program shall be, to the greatest extent practicable, locally controlled to address problems that are identified locally

(c) REGIONAL GANG TASK FORCES.—30 percent of the amounts made available as grants under the Program each fiscal year shall be granted to established Regional Gang Task Forces in regions experiencing a significant or increased presence of, or high levels of activity from, transnational organized crime groups posing threats to community safety in terms of violent crime, firearms offenses, human trafficking, trafficking and distribution of illegal opioids and heroin, and other crimes.

SEC. 6. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS; CONSOLIDATION OF PROGRAMS.

(a) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated for the Program under this Act \$50,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2019 through 2021.

(b) CONSOLIDATION OF PROGRAMS.—For each of fiscal years 2019 through 2023, no funds are authorized to be separately appropriated to the Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs for—

(1) competitive and evidence-based programs to reduce gun crime and gang violence;

(2) an Edward Byrne Memorial criminal justice innovation program;

(3) community-based violence prevention initiatives; or

(4) gang and youth violence education, prevention and intervention, and related activities.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) and the gentleman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.