

REQUIRING SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY TO ESTABLISH A PROGRAM FOR THE ISSUANCE OF IDENTITY PROTECTION PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION NUMBERS

Mr. PAULSEN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5437) to require the Secretary of the Treasury to establish a program for the issuance of identity protection personal identification numbers, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5437

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

SECTION 1. IDENTITY PROTECTION PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION NUMBERS.

Not later than 5 years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Treasury or the Secretary's delegate (hereafter referred to in this section as the "Secretary") shall establish a program to issue, upon the request of any individual, a number which may be used in connection with such individual's social security number (or other identifying information with respect to such individual as determined by the Secretary) to assist the Secretary in verifying such individual's identity.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. PAULSEN) and the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. DELBENE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Minnesota.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. PAULSEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 5437, currently under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5437, legislation that I am coauthoring with my colleague, Congresswoman DELBENE from Washington State, that will tackle identity theft.

Each year the IRS processes over 240 million tax returns and issues more than \$400 billion in refunds. This makes tax season a prime target for identity thieves who steal billions of dollars from hardworking taxpayers by filing false returns. It is all too common.

More than 1.8 million people, including more than 13,000 Minnesotans were victims of tax identity theft in 2015, and in just the first 2 months of 2016, the filing season, the IRS identified more than 31,000 fraudulent returns with thousands more surely slipping through the cracks.

A Government Accountability Office report last year found that scammers attempted to claim \$14.5 billion in fraudulent tax returns in the 2015 tax season alone. For a criminal, the scam is simple and straightforward. You

steal a taxpayer's Social Security number; you file a fraudulent return in their name; and then you collect the refund.

While this is a tremendous theft of taxpayer dollars, it is also a nightmare for victims who then have to work to clear their name with multiple government agencies and wait longer to receive their own tax refund.

Our seniors, in particular, are very vulnerable to identity theft, as they then have to struggle to navigate a bureaucratic maze to clear their name and then file an authentic return. There is one tool available though to some taxpayers that makes this scam a lot harder to pull this off. It is called an identity protection PIN, or an IP PIN. It is a 6-digit number that is issued by the IRS to help the IRS then authenticate a tax return and validate the identity of the person who is filing it.

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Today, IP PINs are available only in a couple of States and the District of Columbia, as well as to certain taxpayers who might be at high risk of identity theft.

This legislation today which we are taking up would expand this program by giving all taxpayers access and the option of signing up for an IP PIN over the course of the next 5 years as they phase this in. This will give all taxpayers peace of mind by allowing them to proactively protect their own identity from tax scammers, and it will save taxpayer dollars by preventing fraud that puts refunds into the wrong hands.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join us in supporting this bipartisan bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5437, and I want to thank my colleague, Mr. PAULSEN, for all of his work to help advance this important measure. This is a pretty straightforward bill with a straightforward mission: protecting taxpayers from tax identity theft and fraud.

I am sure everyone is familiar with a scheme that some enterprising criminals came up with to file fraudulent tax returns so that they could collect money that didn't belong to them. I am sure it is safe to say constituents in every one of our districts went to file their taxes only to find that they had been filed already, and someone else had claimed their return and their identity.

In response, the IRS instituted a smart, commonsense program to assign PIN numbers to affected taxpayers, without which they could not file their taxes. These six-digit numbers would be reassigned each year, and electronic returns would not be accepted without them.

According to the American Coalition for Taxpayer Rights, it appears that

this program has helped protect taxpayers and reduce fraudulent returns. The number of tax returns with confirmed identity theft dropped 32 percent from 2016 to 2017, alone, and 57 percent during the 2015 to 2017 period. Yet tax identity thieves are still claiming millions of dollars in fraudulently obtained refunds.

By broadening the IP PIN program to all taxpayers instead of only making it available to identity theft victims and individuals in pilot project States, we can be proactive about keeping taxpayers' personal information and hard-earned dollars safe, and we can make further progress in reducing the instances of fraud during filing season.

While we can and must do more to outwit cybercriminals and perpetrators of fraud, this program is a no-brainer that gives a better level of protection than exists today. I look forward to seeing this instituted for all of our constituents and hope we can build on this progress to bring additional security measures and 21st century technology improvements to the IRS.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, again, this is a straightforward and simple bill that will protect taxpayers across the country, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, as a reminder, next year, taxpayers will enjoy a very simplified and streamlined tax filing process that allows all hardworking Americans to keep more of their own hard-earned dollars. However, there is still a lot that needs to be done to help protect taxpayers by cracking down on identity theft, which is becoming more and more prevalent. This is a very commonsense, straightforward bill that will help tackle identity theft.

I want to thank not only Chairman BRADY for his leadership on some of the IRS reform efforts, but also my colleague Congresswoman DELBENE for partnering up on this issue as well.

It is very common sense; it is bipartisan. By giving taxpayers who are at risk of identity theft the opportunity to request that PIN number, it will allow them to make sure that their tax return is safe, secure, and authentic.

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

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 5437.

This bill addresses one of the most popular issues raised during our Subcommittee's comment period.

H.R. 5437 is very simple. It would require the Treasury Secretary to establish a program that would issue identity protection personal identification numbers (IP PINs) to taxpayers.

An IP PIN helps prevent tax-related identity theft and tax refund fraud. The IRS currently makes IP PINs available to a limited group of taxpayers. If an IP PIN is not included for this group, the IRS system will automatically reject an electronically filed tax return. It is an additional layer of protection for these taxpayers.

H.R. 5437 would expand this program. This bipartisan bill would require the IRS to make an IP PIN available to any and all taxpayers. It does not matter where they live or work; every taxpayer will be able to request an IP PIN.

I would like to thank our colleagues—the Gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. PAULSEN) and the Gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. DELBENE) for their good work and support of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of our colleagues to support H.R. 5437.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. PAULSEN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5437, 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.

PROVIDING FOR A SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT FOR TAX-RELATED IDENTITY THEFT VICTIMS

Mr. RENACCI. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5439) to provide for a single point of contact at the Internal Revenue Service for the taxpayers who are victims of tax-related identity theft, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5439

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

SECTION 1. SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT FOR TAX-RELATED IDENTITY THEFT VICTIMS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of the Treasury (or the Secretary's delegate) shall establish and implement procedures to ensure that any taxpayer whose return has been delayed or otherwise adversely affected due to tax-related identity theft has a single point of contact at the Internal Revenue Service throughout the processing of the taxpayer's case. The single point of contact shall track the taxpayer's case to completion and coordinate with other Internal Revenue Service employees to resolve case issues as quickly as possible.

(b) SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—For purposes of subsection (a), the single point of contact shall consist of a team or subset of specially trained employees who—

(A) have the ability to work across functions to resolve the issues involved in the taxpayer's case, and

(B) shall be accountable for handling the case until its resolution.

(2) TEAM OR SUBSET.—The employees included within the team or subset described in paragraph (1) may change as required to meet the needs of the Internal Revenue Service, provided that procedures have been established to—

(A) ensure continuity of records and case history, and

(B) notify the taxpayer when appropriate.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RENACCI) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. RENACCI. Mr. 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 H.R. 5439, currently under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I believe that modernizing the IRS' ability to administer our Tax Code is a critical next step following the passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. I am pleased that today we are considering H.R. 5439, which creates a single point of contact at the IRS for identity theft victims.

I introduced this legislation with my good friend, Representative JOHN LEWIS. He and I have worked tirelessly over the last few years to protect the identity of taxpayers, having introduced legislation that has passed the House and was signed into law in 2015 that took steps to help reduce identity theft.

I was proud to reintroduce with him this Congress the Stolen Identity Refund Fraud Prevention Act that has nearly 20 bipartisan cosponsors and which included the provision that we are considering today.

Identity theft has become a growing concern in Ohio and across the United States. Unfortunately, it seems as if there is now constant news of individuals having their identities stolen due to massive data breaches. It is one of the most costly crimes to consumers and businesses, and it is the fastest growing white-collar crime in America according to the Federal Trade Commission.

As many of my colleagues on the Ways and Means Committee have heard, I, myself, was also the victim of identity theft not too long ago. I understand the frustration, fear, and sense of helplessness that many feel when learning that a criminal has stolen their identity.

In 2016, a criminal stole my personal information and filed a return with my name, my wife's name, our Social Security numbers, and other personal information. The thieves even had a W-2 from the U.S. Congress that contained a fake version of my information. I didn't learn about this fraud until I received an IRS notice questioning a return I had filed—even though I had not yet filed.

Each year, thousands of families trying to resolve this same sort of headache have to prove to the Federal Government that they are who they say they are. That included me, right along with everyone else, creating this tremendous call volume the IRS receives on a given day. I had to go through that same process.

People thought: Wow, you had to go through the same process trying to get through to the IRS?

I said: Yes, I did. I had to reexplain my story every time I called.

This commonsense legislation will simply require the IRS to establish a single point of contact at the IRS for taxpayers who have been impacted by identity theft. This will help everyday Americans who have had to deal with the stress and inconvenience of having their identity stolen get the service they deserve from the IRS.

I thank Chairman BRADY, Ranking Member NEAL, and the Ways and Means Committee staff for moving this legislation forward, and I encourage my colleagues to support its final passage.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 5439. I believe that this is one of my favorite bills.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to join my friend, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RENACCI), in introducing this commonsense bill, and I want to thank the gentleman for it.

The gentleman from Ohio and I share a passion and a commitment to this issue. Two years ago we introduced the Stolen Identity Fraud Prevention Act. We both believe that taxpayers should receive the help and support that they need and deserve, and I am proud to join him again today in sponsoring this bill.

In recent years, I also included this commonsense policy in the Ways and Means Oversight Subcommittee Democratic bill, the Taxpayer Protection Act.

H.R. 5439 responds to a frequent, ongoing concern of many of our citizens. This bill will help ease the frustration that victims of tax-related identity theft feel, and it addresses a top IRS casework issue in my congressional district.

H.R. 5439 establishes a single point of contact within the Internal Revenue Service for any taxpayer who is the victim of identity theft. As a result of this bill, the taxpayer will not need to start again from scratch every time they try to get an update on their case. Instead, the single point of contact would work with other IRS units to solve the taxpayer issue as quickly as possible.

This good, commonsense bill will help taxpayers across our country. For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I urge all of our colleagues to support H.R. 5439.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, this commonsense legislation is a strong step forward in ensuring that the American people receive the customer service that they