

Ranking Member McCAUL and Representatives LIEU and BERA, two able members of the Foreign Affairs Committee for their hard work.

I am glad to support this measure, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of the Digital GAP Act of 2019, which I was proud to introduce with Ranking Member McCAUL and Representatives LIEU and BERA.

In our increasingly connected world, internet access is a tremendous driver of economic growth. But 60 percent of the world's population remains offline and out of reach of U.S. businesses, organizations, and educators—largely due to a lack of telecommunications infrastructure.

The Digital GAP Act will promote commonsense “build once” policies to help ensure that companies have opportunities to incorporate telecommunications into new infrastructure construction projects.

This will provide opportunities to the private sector and reduce the cost of bringing new communities online.

The bill also presses for the removal of onerous tax and regulatory barriers to Internet access, and calls on the State Department, USAID, and other government agencies, to partner with businesses to increase private investment in internet infrastructure in developing countries.

As we compete overseas with an increasingly aggressive China, we must make America's assistance and development strategies more effective.

Bills like the Digital GAP Act and the Championing American Business through Diplomacy Act, which passed 2 weeks ago, will do just that by strengthening the United States partnership with the private sector.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ENGEL. Madam Speaker, the internet is an incredible tool that has shaped the world in the last generation.

It allows entrepreneurs in emerging markets to sell their products in global markets. It allows citizens and journalists living under oppressive regimes or in war zones to get information out to the world.

This bill will establish that our foreign policy is to help advance these positive developments.

I urge its passage. It passed the House in the last Congress, and I hope the other body will take it up soon.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1359.

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.

□ 1630

INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT OF 2019

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1952) to amend the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000 to require the Secretary of State to report on intercountry adoptions from countries which have significantly reduced adoption rates involving immigration to the United States, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1952

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 “Inter-country Adoption Information Act of 2019”.

SEC. 2. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION TO BE INCLUDED IN ANNUAL REPORT ON INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS.

(a) REPORT ELEMENTS.—Section 104(b) of the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000 (42 U.S.C. 14914(b)) is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraphs:

“(9) A list of countries that established or maintained a significant law or regulation that prevented or prohibited adoptions involving immigration to the United States, regardless of whether such adoptions occurred under the Convention.

“(10) For each country listed under paragraph (9), the date on which the law or regulation was initially implemented.

“(11) Information on efforts taken with respect to a country listed under paragraph (9) to encourage the resumption of halted or stalled adoption proceedings involving immigration to the United States, regardless of whether the adoptions would have occurred under the Convention.

“(12) Information on any action the Secretary carried out that prevented, prohibited, or halted any adoptions involving immigration to the United States, regardless of whether the adoptions occurred under the Convention.

“(13) For each country listed pursuant to paragraph (12), a description of—

“(A) what policies, procedures, resources, and safeguards the country lacks, or other shortcomings or circumstances, that caused the action to be carried out;

“(B) what progress the country has made to alleviate those shortcomings; and

“(C) what steps the Department of State has taken in order to assist the country to reopen intercountry adoptions.

“(14) An assessment of the impact of the fee schedule of the Intercountry Adoption Accreditation and Maintenance Entity on families seeking to adopt internationally, especially low-income families, families seeking to adopt sibling groups, or families seeking to adopt children with disabilities.”.

(b) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF REPORT.—Section 104 of the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000 (42 U.S.C. 14914) is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(c) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF REPORT.—The Secretary shall make the information contained in the report required under subsection (a) available to the public on the website of the Department of State.”.

(c) PRIVACY CONCERNS.—In complying with the amendments made by subsections (a) and (b), the Secretary shall avoid, to the maximum extent practicable, disclosing any personally identifiable information relating to United States citizens or the adoptees of such citizens.

(d) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 104(a) of the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000 (42 U.S.C. 14914(a)) is amended by striking “International Relations” and inserting “Foreign Affairs”.

(e) APPLICATION DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall apply with respect to reports required to be submitted under section 104 of the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000 (42 U.S.C. 14914) beginning on the date that is 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CASTRO) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. WRIGHT) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CASTRO).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 1952, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

First of all, I thank Mr. COLLINS and Mr. LANGEVIN for their hard work on this bill that would help ease some of the problems parents face when they are trying to adopt children from other countries.

Madam Speaker, the process of adopting a child is a tough one, especially when that child is overseas. It is expensive and often emotionally taxing for the parents. It is filled with legal twists and turns and often difficult requirements, but it is worth it for these loving parents who want to give children from faraway places a home and the chance to be part of a family and a good future.

What can make this process even more daunting is when foreign governments change their laws without any sort of notice or explanation. For parents who have to deal with this, it is like having the rug pulled out from under them.

In 2018, the number of intercountry adoptions to the United States declined by roughly 600. We saw a similar decline the year before. Part of the reason is that China and the Democratic Republic of the Congo changed their policies, for example.

I can't imagine the frustration and anxiety of parents who learned their adoption has been delayed or derailed. This bill helps to make things easier on those families.

It would require the State Department to stay up to date on laws and policies dealing with intercountry adoptions and make sure American

families get that information. This will make the adoption process safer and more transparent for both parents and children.

This is a good bill. It passed the House last Congress. After we pass it again today, I hope the other body, the Senate, will act quickly as well to pass it.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of the Intercountry Adoption Information Act authored by my friend from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS).

The world today is full of orphaned children, but it is also full of loving families who are ready and eager to adopt them. All too often, American families encounter policy obstacles that delay and prevent those adoptions. Some countries have halted adoption processing, suspended foreign adoptions, or banned adoption altogether.

This information doesn't always make it across the world to waiting American families. Many times, they are already midway through the difficult adoption process when these policy changes occur.

Without full information, they cannot understand the impact on their own cases. This leaves adoptive parents in wrenching situations, separated from their child and unsure how to proceed.

This bill ensures that American families are not left in the dark by requiring the State Department to publicly report on legal and policy changes other countries make that may impact the adoption process. It also requires the State Department to explain its efforts to resume stalled adoption proceedings so that American parents know what their country is doing to successfully bring their children to their new home.

As a father of three, I can say that there is no greater feeling than being a dad. I know other parents in this Chamber feel the same way. This bill is an opportunity for both parties to come together to do something positive for American families.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, we hear far too many gut-wrenching stories about American families who have trouble adopting children overseas. This legislation will help make that easier, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WRIGHT. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS), the lead Republican on the Judiciary Committee and the author of this bill.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Madam Speaker, I appreciate the two gentlemen from Texas, and I appreciate the kind words so far on this bill.

This is something, Madam Speaker, that we can definitely rise in support of, and I appreciate the kind words that have been spoken so far.

I rise in support my legislation, H.R. 1952, the Intercountry Adoption Information Act. This legislation is a critical step forward in ensuring American families have access to the information they need to pursue adoptions from a foreign country.

American families hoping to adopt internationally face many obstacles on the road to being united with their adoptive children. Too often, these challenges require parents to navigate confusing and complicated foreign adoption practices.

I have witnessed firsthand how families in my home State of Georgia have struggled to navigate shifting adoption policies and changing international standards.

In 2012, Pam and Mark Romano, a family in northwest Georgia, traveled to Russia in hopes of adopting a young boy named Bogdon. This was not a quick decision, but one that required months and months of thoughtful prayer and family discussion.

While overseas, the Romanos discovered that Bogdon had a brother, Yura. Although the boys were living separately, the family immediately felt a calling to welcome both boys into their home, and they began the process of adopting Yura as well.

The Romanos were in the midst of the adoption process when Russia instituted a ban on adoptions to the United States, tragically halting the Romanos from bringing both Bogdon and Yura home to Georgia.

The Romanos were, of course, left completely devastated. They had worked for months to be reunited with their sons, but they lacked concrete information about the intercountry adoption process and what was happening in Russia as well as diplomatically.

Since that time, Pam Romano has refused to give up on welcoming Yura and Bogdon into her family. Her boys' room is still furnished and ready for their arrival, and she won't stop fighting until her sons are home.

Pam and her family have been tireless advocates for their sons but also for families across the country who are facing similar threats. They have also taken up their cause.

Today, American families like the Romanos are still in need of the most accurate and up-to-date information as they labor to bring their adoptive children into loving homes. Changing foreign practices can leave the adoptive parents heartbroken and desperately seeking answers as they pursue intercountry adoption.

The Intercountry Adoption Information Act takes steps to shrink this information gap by ensuring families pursuing intercountry adoptions are equipped with a more thorough outlook on the status of intercountry adoptions in specific countries and on the State

Department's actions to resume adoptions that currently remain stalled.

Madam Speaker, I thank Chairman ENGEL and Ranking Member McCAUL of the Foreign Affairs Committee for moving this critical bill forward. I also thank my cosponsors, Representatives LANGEVIN, FITZPATRICK, LAMBORN, LYNCH, SMITH, and others for their steadfast commitment to advocating on behalf of these loving families and innocent children in need of homes.

Most importantly, I would like to recognize my constituents, Pam and Mark Romano, and the entire Romano family for their advocacy not only for their own sons but for children all across the world who are waiting to be welcomed home.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the many American families who would greatly benefit from a consistent, reliable source of information as they seek to welcome some of the world's most vulnerable children into loving homes and support the Intercountry Adoption Information Act.

This is something we have done before. This is something that brings us together, and the families who are brought together by this make a lasting impact in the world in which we live.

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers. I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I again thank Representative COLLINS for this bill. American parents ought to know how foreign policy decisions impact their lives. They also deserve to know what our government is doing to help unite them with their children.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Madam Speaker, this is a bipartisan bill, and I urge support from all Members.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1952, the Intercountry Adoption Information Act, and thank my colleague from Georgia, Representative COLLINS, for his partnership on this bipartisan effort. I would also like to thank Chairman ENGEL and Ranking Member McCAUL for working together to ensure its expeditious consideration by their committee and by the full House.

Whether adopting at home or abroad, every family should have the information they need to navigate the process successfully. Yet, families hoping to adopt from foreign countries can be unaware of political and legal obstacles that may prevent them from doing so.

Russia's adoption ban in 2012 and the Democratic Republic of Congo's intercountry adoption ban in 2013 are just two examples of policies that left families in limbo while they were already in the process of adopting.

More recently, more than 200 American families and Ethiopian children with pending adoptions were stuck in heartbreaking uncertainty—unable to unite their families—when

the Ethiopian government halted all foreign adoption processing.

As countries like Russia and Ethiopia change intercountry adoption processes, or ban adoptions to the United States altogether, families must have up-to-date information regarding policies that could make the adoption process difficult, or even impossible. No family members should be left in the dark, oceans away from each other, wondering if they'll ever be united.

Under the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000, the State Department is required to provide an annual, public report on intercountry adoptions. H.R. 1952 is simple. It would ensure that this report also includes information on policies that may prevent or prohibit adoptions to the United States.

This information would help families navigate the adoption process successfully. I'm proud to lead this effort with Congressman COLLINS, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CASTRO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1952, 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. CASTRO of Texas. Madam 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.

GLOBAL ELECTORAL EXCHANGE ACT OF 2019

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 753) to promote international exchanges on best election practices, cultivate more secure democratic institutions around the world, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 753

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 "Global Electoral Exchange Act of 2019".

SEC. 2. SENSE OF CONGRESS.

It is the sense of Congress that—

(1) recent elections globally have illustrated the urgent need for the promotion and exchange of international best election practices, particularly in the areas of cybersecurity, results transmission, transparency of electoral data, election dispute resolution, and the elimination of discriminatory registration practices and other electoral irregularities;

(2) the advancement of democracy worldwide promotes American interests, as stable democracies provide new market opportunities, improve global health outcomes, and promote economic freedom and regional security;

(3) credible elections are the cornerstone of a healthy democracy and enable all persons

to exercise their basic human right to have a say in how they are governed;

(4) inclusive elections strengthen the credibility and stability of democracies more broadly;

(5) at the heart of a strong election cycle is the professionalism of the election management body and an empowered civil society;

(6) the development of local expertise via peer-to-peer learning and exchanges promotes the independence of such bodies from internal and external influence; and

(7) supporting the efforts of peoples in democratizing societies to build more representative governments in their respective countries is in the national interest of the United States.

SEC. 3. GLOBAL ELECTORAL EXCHANGE.

(a) GLOBAL ELECTORAL EXCHANGE.—The Secretary of State is authorized to establish and administer a Global Electoral Exchange Program to promote the utilization of sound election administration practices around the world.

(b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of the Global Electoral Exchange Program described in subsection (a) shall include the promotion and exchange of international best election practices, including in the areas of—

- (1) cybersecurity;
- (2) results transmission;
- (3) transparency of electoral data;
- (4) election dispute resolution;
- (5) the elimination of discriminatory registration practices and electoral irregularities;

(6) equitable access to polling places, voter education information, and voting mechanisms (including by persons with disabilities); and

(7) other sound election administration practices.

(c) EXCHANGE OF ELECTORAL AUTHORITIES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of State may, in consultation, as appropriate, with the United States Agency for International Development, make grants to any United States-based organization described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and exempt from tax under section 501(a) of such Code with experience in and a primary focus on foreign comparative election systems or subject matter expertise in the administration or integrity of such systems that submits an application in such form, and satisfying such requirements, as the Secretary may require.

(2) TYPES OF GRANTS.—An organization described in paragraph (1) may receive a grant for one or more of the following purposes:

(A) To design and implement programs bringing election administrators and officials, including government officials, poll workers, civil society representatives, members of the judiciary, and others who participate in the organization and administration of public elections in a foreign country that faces challenges to its electoral process to the United States to study election procedures in the United States for educational purposes.

(B) To design and implement programs taking the United States or another country's election administrators and officials, including government officials, poll workers, civil society representatives, members of the judiciary, and others who participate in the organization and administration of public elections to study and discuss election procedures for educational purposes.

(3) LIMITS ON ACTIVITIES.—Activities administered under the Global Electoral Exchange Program may not—

(A) include observation of an election for the purposes of assessing the validity or legitimacy of that election;

(B) facilitate any advocacy for a certain electoral result by a grantee when participating in the Program; or

(C) be carried out without proper consultation with State and local authorities in the United States that administer elections.

(4) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that the Secretary of State should establish and maintain a network of Global Electoral Exchange Program alumni, to promote communication and further exchange of information regarding sound election administration practices among current and former program participants.

(5) FURTHER LIMITS.—A recipient of a grant under the Global Electoral Exchange Program may use such grant for only the purpose for which such grant was awarded, unless otherwise authorized by the Secretary of State.

(6) NOT DUPLICATIVE.—Grants made under this subsection may not be duplicative of any other grants made under any other provision of law for similar or related purposes.

SEC. 4. CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT.

Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act and in each of the following two years thereafter, the Secretary of State shall provide to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate a briefing on the status of any activities carried out pursuant to this Act during the preceding year, which shall include, among other information, the following:

(1) A summary of all exchanges conducted under the Global Electoral Exchange Program, including information regarding grantees, participants, and the locations where program activities were held.

(2) A description of the criteria used to select grantees under the Global Electoral Exchange Program.

(3) Any recommendations for the improvement of the Global Electoral Exchange Program, based on the purpose specified in section 3(b).

SEC. 5. NO ADDITIONAL FUNDS AUTHORIZED.

No additional funds are authorized to be appropriated to carry out the requirements of this Act. Such requirements shall be carried out using amounts otherwise authorized to be appropriated.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CASTRO) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. WRIGHT) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CASTRO).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 753.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 753, the Global Electoral Exchange Act of 2019. I would first like to thank my colleague Representative MARK MEADOWS for his important work on this measure that he and I introduced.

We passed this bill last Congress, and I urge my colleagues to do the same