

and lives upended. Tragically, over 200 people were killed, and the damage is estimated to be as much as \$300 billion.

During this dark moment, we have seen the incredible resilience of the people across the Southeast. Our brothers and sisters in western North Carolina are strong, united, and determined to rebuild.

However, we cannot wait any longer. Our communities need help now. Congress must act swiftly and pass a supplemental appropriations bill. We must ensure Federal resources are made available quickly and efficiently to support recovery efforts, whether for temporary housing, debris removal, or rebuilding infrastructure.

Together, we will emerge stronger for us to continue to move forward.

VIRGIN ISLANDS SUPREME COURT

(Ms. PLASKETT asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the importance of the Virgin Islands Supreme Court, the highest court in the Virgin Islands of the United States.

As a member of the bar of both New York and the Virgin Islands, as a former prosecutor, and a former political appointee at the Justice Department, I understand how important our courts are.

I congratulate Associate Justice Harold Willocks on his recent investiture to the Virgin Islands Supreme Court. He boasts a distinguished career of more than 40 years as a jurist, as both a prosecutor and public defender, and served in multiple roles within the Virgin Islands Superior Court.

I thank the Virgin Islands Supreme Court for their continued commitment to making decisions in the strictest fidelity to justice. The independence of our courts has never been more critical. Democracy relies upon judicial independence and the ability to deliver impartial, prompt decisions in accordance with the rule of law.

We must keep our courts free from political influence or pressures to ensure our judges can make decisions solely on the law and the facts of a case. The integrity of the courts will determine the future of our Nation.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 2 o'clock and 06 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1601

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS) at 4 o'clock and 1 minute p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or votes objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

The House will resume proceedings on postponed questions at a later time.

GRANT TRANSPARENCY ACT OF 2023

Mr. FRY. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5536) to require transparency in notices of funding opportunity, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5536

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 "Grant Transparency Act of 2023".

SEC. 2. NOTICES OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY TRANSPARENCY.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) AGENCY.—The term "agency"—

(A) has the meaning given the term "Executive agency" in section 105 of title 5, United States Code; and

(B) does not include the Government Accountability Office.

(2) COMPETITIVE GRANT.—The term "competitive grant" means a discretionary award (as defined in section 200.1 of title 2, Code of Federal Regulations) awarded by an agency—

(A) through a grant agreement or cooperative agreement under which the agency makes payment in cash or in kind to a recipient to carry out a public purpose authorized by law; and

(B) the recipient of which is selected from a pool of applicants through the use of merit-based selection procedures for the purpose of allocating funds authorized under a grant program of the agency.

(3) EVALUATION OR SELECTION CRITERIA.—The term "evaluation or selection criteria" means standards or principles for judging, evaluating, or selecting an application for a competitive grant.

(4) NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY.—The term "notice of funding opportunity" has the meaning given the term in section 200.1 of title 2, Code of Federal Regulations.

(5) RATING SYSTEM.—The term "rating system"—

(A) means a system of evaluation of competitive grant applications to determine how such applications advance through the selection process; and

(B) includes—

(i) a merit criteria rating rubric;

(ii) an evaluation of merit criteria;

(iii) a methodology to evaluate and rate based on a point scale; and

(iv) an evaluation to determine whether a competitive grant application meets evaluation or selection criteria.

(b) TRANSPARENCY REQUIREMENTS.—Each notice of funding opportunity issued by an agency for a competitive grant shall include—

(1) a description of any rating system and evaluation and selection criteria the agency uses to assess applications for the competitive grant;

(2) a statement of whether the agency uses a weighted scoring method and a description of any weighted scoring method the agency uses for the competitive grant, including the amount by which the agency weights each criterion; and

(3) any other qualitative or quantitative merit-based approach the agency uses to evaluate an application for the competitive grant.

(c) APPLICATIONS; DATA ELEMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Director of the Office of Management and Budget, in coordination with the Executive department designated under section 6402(a)(1) of title 31, United States Code, shall develop data elements relating to grant applications to ensure common reporting by each agency with respect to applications received in response to each notice of funding opportunity of the agency.

(2) CONTENTS.—The data elements developed under paragraph (1) shall include—

(A) the number of applications received; and

(B) the city and State of each organization that submitted an application.

(d) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—With respect to a particular competitive grant, nothing in this Act shall be construed to supersede any requirement with respect to a notice of funding opportunity for the competitive grant in a law that authorizes the competitive grant.

(e) NO ADDITIONAL FUNDS.—No additional funds are authorized to be appropriated for the purpose of carrying out this Act.

(f) EFFECTIVE DATE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—This Act shall take effect on the date that is 120 days after the date of enactment of this Act.

(2) NO RETROACTIVE EFFECT.—This Act shall not apply to a notice of funding opportunity issued before the date of enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. FRY) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PORTER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FRY. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on this measure.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, before serving in Congress, I served in the South Carolina State legislature. Now, here in Washington, I am passionate about ensuring that State, local, and Federal Governments all work together and work together well.

During my time in office, I have heard from many of our local governments, and particularly in my district in those rural communities, that applying for Federal grant money can be a complicated and often confusing process.

In big cities, you often have professional staff that do this. In a small town, it is the mayor or his spouse that is doing this.

After putting time and effort into filling out a competitive grant application, applicants are left wondering why

they were not chosen to be awarded Federal grant money, especially if they met all of the criteria listed when applying. This leads to grant applicants feeling as though the decisions are made behind closed doors. I think we can all agree that navigating the bureaucratic labyrinth known as Washington, D.C., can be complicated for local governments and for organiza-

tions. Grant writers and applicant staff may even be unaware of which selection criteria are weighted more heavily when filling out applications.

The Grant Transparency Act requires Federal Government agencies to shine a light on their decisionmaking process when awarding competitive Federal grant money. With this legislation, Federal Government agencies would be required to disclose their selection methods when awarding competitive grants.

Specifically, the bill requires that notice of funding opportunities for all Federal competitive grants to have: one, a description of any rating system, evaluation, and selection criteria the agency uses to assess the grant application; two, a statement on whether the agency uses a weighted scoring method and a description of that method; and, three, any other qualitative or quantitative merit-based approach the agency may use to evaluate applications.

State and local governments across South Carolina's Seventh Congressional District and nationwide compete for Federal grant money on a continual basis. Federal grant money allows investment to come to our communities and improve the daily lives of our constituents, ranging from sewer and wastewater systems to airports, fire stations, and recreational facilities.

These are all things that Americans rely on and utilize in their daily lives. The Grant Transparency Act would help out our local governments and organizations when they fill out applications to compete for that funding. They deserve this transparency from their Federal Government.

Today, let's empower grant applicants to put their best foot forward and bring those Federal dollars home. I thank my Oversight Committee colleague JASMINE CROCKETT for co-leading on this bill. This simple bill has the potential to make a very meaningful impact in countless communities and nonprofits nationwide.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this straightforward, bipartisan bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. PORTER. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 5536 and applaud Representatives RUSSELL FRY and JASMINE CROCKETT for their bipartisan leadership on this bill.

H.R. 5536 aims to increase transparency in the Federal grantmaking review and award process. It does so by

strengthening agency compliance with title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations, which describes the contents that notices of funding opportunities must include.

It requires that each notice of funding opportunity for a competitive Federal grant to include specific information about how applications will be assessed, providing all applicants with greater access to the information they need to submit competitive applications.

The Biden-Harris administration has taken important steps to strengthen transparency in and improve accessibility to the Federal grantmaking process.

For example, in April 2024, the Office of Management and Budget announced significant updates to the Uniform Grants Guidance, which governs how agencies make grants and provide other forms of financial assistance. The updates focused on reducing compliance costs, removing barriers to entry and accessibility, and making Federal funds easier to track.

H.R. 5536 is aligned with these goals, and I urge my colleagues to support it today.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FRY. Madam Speaker, I encourage all my colleagues to support this commonsense and bipartisan bill to make the application process for competitive grants much more transparent on our local governments and nonprofits.

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

Ms. PORTER. Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. FRY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5536, 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.

VOTE BY MAIL TRACKING ACT

Mr. FRY. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5658) to amend title 39, United States Code, to require mail-in ballots to use the Postal Service barcode service, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5658

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 "Vote by Mail Tracking Act".

SEC. 2. MAIL-IN BALLOTS AND POSTAL SERVICE BARCODE SERVICE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Title 39, United States Code, is amended by inserting after chapter 30 the following new chapter:

CHAPTER 31—ELECTION MAIL

"Sec.

"3101. Trackable election mail.

"§ 3101. Trackable election mail

"(a) IN GENERAL.—No entity of government shall furnish a ballot envelope for the purpose of being carried or delivered by mail unless such envelope—

"(1) contains a Postal Service barcode (or successive service or marking) that enables tracking of each individual ballot consistent with parameters that the Postal Service may promulgate by regulation;

"(2) satisfies requirements for ballot envelope design that the Postal Service may promulgate by regulation;

"(3) satisfies requirements for machineable letters that the Postal Service may promulgate by regulation; and

"(4) includes the Official Election Mail Logo (or any successor label that the Postal Service may establish for ballots).

"(b) APPLICATION.—Subsection (a) does not apply to a Federal write-in absentee ballot under section 103 of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (52 U.S.C. 20303).

"(c) INFORMATION.—Not later than June 1 of each calendar year, the Postmaster General shall provide, to the entities described in the matter preceding paragraph (1) of subsection (a), the information necessary to comply with the requirements of this subsection, including how to access Postal Service tools to assist in generating the barcode or successive marking required by subsection (a)(1)."

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of chapters for part IV of title 39, United States Code, is amended by adding after the item relating to chapter 30 the following:

"31. Election Mail 3101".

(c) APPLICATION.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply to any election for Federal office occurring in 2026 and any succeeding year.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. FRY) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PORTER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FRY. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on this measure.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5658, the Vote by Mail Tracking Act.

Every American citizen who votes deserves to know that their vote has been counted and their voice has been heard.

This bill, the Vote by Mail Tracking Act, would ensure that this is the case. H.R. 5658 requires that all ballots for Federal election mailed within the United States to or from a voter contain a Postal Service barcode. This barcode would allow voters to track the status of their ballot in the United States Postal Service system, allowing voters to know in real time when their