

ASSESSMENT OF TRANS-ATLANTIC SUBMARINE FIBER OPTIC CABLE

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1737) to direct the Secretary of Commerce to submit to Congress a report containing an assessment of the value, cost, and feasibility of a trans-Atlantic submarine fiber optic cable connecting the contiguous United States, the United States Virgin Islands, Ghana, and Nigeria.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1737

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

SECTION 1. ASSESSMENT OF TRANS-ATLANTIC SUBMARINE FIBER OPTIC CABLE.

(a) REPORT.—Not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in consultation with the heads of other Federal departments and agencies as necessary, shall submit to the Committee on Energy and Commerce of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate a report containing an assessment of the value, cost, and feasibility of a trans-Atlantic submarine fiber optic cable connecting the contiguous United States, the United States Virgin Islands, Ghana, and Nigeria, to enhance the national security of the United States.

(b) ELEMENTS.—The report required by subsection (a) shall include an assessment of—

(1) the digital security, national security, and economic opportunities associated with a trans-Atlantic submarine fiber optic cable described in subsection (a);

(2) the lifespan of submarine fiber optic cables currently connecting the United States Virgin Islands to the contiguous United States;

(3) the current security of telecommunications between the contiguous United States and the United States Virgin Islands;

(4) the readiness of telecommunications infrastructure in the United States Virgin Islands to support a trans-Atlantic submarine fiber optic cable described in subsection (a);

(5) the potential for engagement with trusted entities in the deployment of a trans-Atlantic submarine fiber optic cable described in subsection (a), and the associated geopolitical and economic advantages;

(6) the potential connectivity opportunities to maximize investments in the United States economy through the use of a trans-Atlantic submarine fiber optic cable described in subsection (a);

(7) the value, cost, and feasibility of establishing a data center and high-security cloud services facility, with independent power generation, in the United States Virgin Islands for communications of the United States Africa Command, communications of the United States Special Operations Command, and national security communications;

(8) the state of submarine fiber optic cables connected to United States telecommunications infrastructure; and

(9) any other related matters the Secretary determines are appropriate.

(c) NO MANDATORY DATA COLLECTION.—The Secretary may not require any entity to provide data for purposes of preparing the report required by subsection (a).

(d) FORM.—The report required by subsection (a) shall be submitted in unclassified form without any designation relating to dissemination control, but may include a classified annex.

(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) NOT TRUSTED.—The term “not trusted” means, with respect to an entity, that the entity is determined by the Secretary to pose an unacceptable risk to the national security of the United States, or the security and safety of United States persons, based solely on one or more determination described under paragraphs (1) through (4) of section 2(c) of the Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Act of 2019 (47 U.S.C. 1601(c)).

(2) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Commerce, acting through the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information.

(3) TRUSTED.—The term “trusted” means, with respect to an entity, that the Secretary has not determined that the entity is not trusted.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material in the RECORD on the bill.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of H.R. 1737. I am advocating for this particular bill. The bill would direct the Secretary of Commerce to submit a report on the value, cost, and feasibility of developing a transatlantic submarine cable connecting the United States, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Ghana, and Nigeria.

Submarine cables are critical components of communications infrastructure, carrying data traffic across oceans. There are more than 600 active and planned submarine cable systems that keep the world connected, but there is no cable connecting the United States to the continent of Africa.

Mr. Speaker, a transatlantic submarine cable could provide national security benefits to the United States, given Africa's strategic importance, and it is an important issue to study, in my opinion.

I thank Delegate PLASKETT and Representative FULCHER for their leadership on this particular bill, and I urge my colleagues to join me in voting in favor of H.R. 1737.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 1737, a bill requiring the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, or NTIA, to assess the value, cost, and feasibility of a transatlantic submarine fiber optic

cable connecting the United States, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Ghana, and Nigeria, and to submit a report to Congress with its findings.

The bill also directs NTIA to report to Congress on the current state of telecommunications connecting the U.S. Virgin Islands and the United States, including an assessment of the lifespan and security of telecommunications infrastructure linking the two.

This legislation will provide Congress with vital information on the strength and resiliency of communications infrastructure in the U.S. Virgin Islands. It will also help us determine whether American interests can be served by connecting the U.S. and the African Continent with undersea cable infrastructure by way of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

This bill is an important step to enhance American communications security and competitiveness around the world.

In recent years, Mr. Speaker, the United States and many allies have recognized the threat posed by untrusted Chinese telecommunications equipment to our national security. Thanks to the work of the Energy and Commerce Committee and Congress, we have taken steps to remove suspect equipment and software from American communications networks to protect against sabotage and undue influence by our adversaries.

Much of this work has been done on a bipartisan basis. One noteworthy example is the legislation Congress passed to force the divestment of TikTok from ownership by companies controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, which passed overwhelmingly with hundreds of Democratic and Republican votes.

That is why I was frustrated to learn last week that President Trump again unlawfully granted TikTok an extension, allowing China to infiltrate American networks for another 90 days. President Trump's disregard for the law is well known at this point, but I was more disappointed that none of my Republican colleagues had the courage to call on the President to enforce the law.

Trump's stall tactics are allowing China to continue to collect massive amounts of information on Americans. There are American companies that want to buy TikTok. It is long past time for Trump to get this done.

There is also still work to be done because network security does not end at the water's edge. For decades, China and other adversaries have spent considerable time and money to deploy suspect telecommunications equipment and infrastructure across the African Continent. The assessment required in this bill is an important step to understand the cost of securing the connection between the United States and our African allies and how best to ensure a critical global communications channel is protected from the prying eyes of our adversaries.

I thank Delegate STACEY PLASKETT of the U.S. Virgin Islands for her leadership on this bill, and I thank Representative FULCHER, as well, for this effort.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to refrain from engaging in personalities toward the President.

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

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. PLASKETT).

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, I thank Ranking Member PALLONE, this body, and my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for recognizing the national security interest of this legislation, H.R. 1737, to direct the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information to submit to Congress a report containing an assessment of the value, cost, and feasibility of developing this transatlantic submarine fiber optic cable that has been discussed.

Today, hundreds of undersea fiber optic cables connect North America to Europe, South America, and Asia, but not a single cable directly links North America to the African Continent. This represents both a strategic vulnerability and a missed economic opportunity.

The diaspora link act represents an opportunity to establish a high-speed, secure telecommunications data connection to Africa from American soil to facilitate deepened economic connections and aid American regional security assistance. This link will allow America to establish a direct digital presence on the African Continent, both to capitalize on emerging economic opportunities and to protect our Nation against cyber and military threats.

The study will examine Lagos, Nigeria, and Accra, Ghana, as potential African landing points. Both cities serve as established telecommunications hubs with existing undersea cable infrastructure linking West Africa to Europe and South America. The presence of American embassies in both locations offers critical security benefits for cable operations.

Our adversarial nations are rapidly expanding their influence across the African Continent, and a direct American telecommunications link to the continent is a strategic necessity.

China has systematically expanded its telecommunications and military presence across Africa. The Chinese multinational Huawei has constructed roughly 70 percent of Africa's information technology infrastructure. China is pursuing the same strategy in the Caribbean, where at least 10 nations have signed Belt and Road agreements that open their nations to Chinese investment and influence.

China's expansion into Africa and the Caribbean makes establishing our own direct telecommunications link to these regions a strategic necessity.

Russia, as well, has destabilized Africa through disinformation campaigns and mercenary operations, positioning itself as an alternative to Western partnerships while fueling antidemocratic sentiment. This strategy has made Africa a flash point in the global strategic competition between Russia and the West. Moscow's support for authoritarian governments includes backing multiple coups in Nigeria, Mali, Sudan, Guinea, and Burkina Faso that directly threaten democratic progress.

Our adversaries are systematically exploiting Africa's vast mineral wealth while we lack direct access. Russia and China are extracting critical resources across the continent: uranium from Niger, the world's seventh largest producer; gold and lithium from Mali's extensive deposits; cobalt from the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and bauxite and phosphate from Burkina Faso. These materials are essential to technology as well as defense industries. We cannot afford to remain on the sidelines.

Additionally, there are many African countries that want to engage with us, that want to do business with us. Burkina Faso and Angola have reached out to our country to engage more, and this is an additional way for us to do that.

Additionally, let's look at the populations. Africa has almost a billion individuals under the age of 30. The United States has only 100 million. The entire European Union has 140 million. These young people represent a growing economic as well as potential allyship for the United States, and we all know that social media and internet commerce is the mechanism by which we are able to engage them.

An undersea cable linking the American East Coast to Africa via the United States Virgin Islands would create both a critical national security asset and a digital commerce expressway to strengthen America's global political, economic, and military positions. Such undersea cable development would leverage the Virgin Islands' already existing telecommunications infrastructure, which already connects the territory to South America and the mainland in the United States and facilitates additional regional links.

The diaspora link act enables the United States to counter Chinese influence and global telecommunications while leveraging our existing strategic assets. The U.S. Virgin Islands not only hosts established cable infrastructure but maintains a National Guard installation on St. Croix with an adjacent military support airport, assets that could directly support and secure these telecommunications operations.

The Virgin Islands, the most southern point of the United States, sits at

the crossroads of centuries-old transit routes, and we now have a chance to transform this strategic location into a cornerstone of American telecommunications infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Energy and Commerce Committee for its unanimous support of this legislation through regular order. This bill passed the House in the 118th Congress with bipartisan support and identical text.

I thank my colleague, Congressman FULCHER, for his continued partnership to advance America's telecommunications as well as military and national security.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this critical measure. Congress must protect American security interests in the Caribbean and strengthen our partnership across the Atlantic with our African partners.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, obviously, from what you are hearing from the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. PLASKETT), this is an important bill in terms of not only the Virgin Islands but strengthening our links, communications, and economy with Africa, as well.

For all those reasons, I urge that we support the bill.

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

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I commend the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. PLASKETT) for offering this very important bill, and I encourage a "yes" vote on this particular bill.

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 Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1737.

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.

ROMANCE SCAM PREVENTION ACT

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2481) to require online dating service providers to provide fraud ban notifications to online dating service members, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2481

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 "Romance Scam Prevention Act".

SEC. 2. ROMANCE SCAM PREVENTION.

(a) FRAUD BAN NOTIFICATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—An online dating service provider shall provide to a member of the online dating service a fraud ban notification if