

Washington should be held to that very same standard, especially at a time when our national debt is inching toward \$400 trillion. However, instead of accountability, we get boondoggles.

Take Governor Newsom's high-speed rail in California. It was supposed to cost \$33 billion and connect Los Angeles to San Francisco by 2020. Today, it is more than \$95 billion over budget and years behind schedule.

After more than a decade and billions of taxpayer dollars, they are only now beginning to lay track, and the promised line between Los Angeles and San Francisco is nowhere in sight. What the people were promised and what they got are two very different things.

However, it is not just California. In Honolulu, a rail project is \$4.8 billion over budget, with its completion slipping from 2020 all the way to 2031. In Columbus, a corridor project is 19 years behind schedule. The Federal Reserve's renovation ballooned to nearly \$2.5 billion. Air Force One is billions over budget and years behind. The VA's electronic health records system, meant to serve our veterans, tripled from \$16 billion to nearly \$50 billion.

Madam Speaker, these are not rounding errors. These are betrayals of the people who have paid for them.

That is why I introduced the Billion Dollar Boondoggle Act. It is simple. It requires the Federal Government to publicly disclose any taxpayer-funded project that is more than \$1 billion over budget or more than 5 years behind schedule. No more hiding and no more burying the failures where no one can find them. Sunlight, as they say, is the best disinfectant.

Here is the truth: The American people have a right to know where their money goes. Every dollar Washington wastes is a dollar taken from a farmer in Iowa, a nurse working a double shift, or a young family trying to get ahead.

I did not come to Washington to protect its comfortable habit of wasting taxpayer money. I came here to defend the people who pay the bills. This bill puts them front and center where they belong.

I thank Senator ERNST once again for her partnership, and I urge all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this commonsense legislation.

The people of Iowa are watching. The people of America are watching. Let's give them the transparency they deserve.

Mr. SUBRAMANYAM. Madam Speaker, I am prepared to close. I thank the sponsor of the bill. I urge my colleagues to support it, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BURLISON. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this important bipartisan and bicameral government reform bill that will ensure the necessary oversight of the over-budget and behind-schedule Federal projects that take place.

Only when Congress and the public have better visibility into these mismanaged government projects will we be able to avoid such boondoggles in the future.

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 Missouri (Mr. BURLISON) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1722, 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. BURLISON. Madam Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

EXPANDING WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTIONS FOR CONTRACTORS ACT OF 2026

Mr. BURLISON. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5578) to ensure that whistleblowers, including contractors, are protected from retaliation when a Federal employee orders a reprisal, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5578

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 "Expanding Whistleblower Protections for Contractors Act of 2026".

SEC. 2. DEFENSE CONTRACTOR EMPLOYEES: PROTECTION FROM REPRISAL FOR DISCLOSURE OF CERTAIN INFORMATION.

Section 4701 of title 10, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—

(A) in paragraph (1)—

(i) in the matter preceding subparagraph (A)—

(I) by striking "An employee" and all that follows through "services contractor" and inserting "A protected individual"; and

(II) by striking "disclosing" and all that follows through "evidence of"; and

(ii) by striking subparagraphs (A), (B), and (C) and inserting the following subparagraphs:

"(A) Refusing to obey an order that would require the protected individual to violate a law, rule, or regulation related to any contract, subcontract, grant, or subgrant.

"(B) Disclosing to a person or body described in paragraph (2) information that the protected individual reasonably believes is evidence of the following:

"(i) Gross mismanagement of any Department of Defense contract or grant, any gross waste of Department funds, any abuse of authority relating to any Department contract, subcontract, grant, or subgrant, or any violation of law, rule, or regulation re-

lated to any Department contract or subcontract (including the competition for or negotiation of a contract or subcontract) or grant or subgrant.

"(ii) Gross mismanagement of any National Aeronautics and Space Administration contract or grant, any gross waste of Administration funds, any abuse of authority relating to an Administration contract, subcontract, grant, or subgrant, or any violation of law, rule, or regulation related to any Administration contract or subcontract (including the competition for or negotiation of a contract or subcontract) or grant or subgrant.

"(iii) A substantial and specific danger to public health or safety."; and

(B) in paragraph (3)—

(i) in subparagraph (A), by striking "an employee" and inserting "a protected individual"; and

(ii) by striking subparagraph (B) and inserting the following subparagraph:

"(B) it shall not be within the authority of an executive branch official to request that a contractor, subcontractor, grantee, or subgrantee engage in a reprisal prohibited by paragraph (1).";

(2) in subsection (c)—

(A) in paragraph (1), by adding at the end the following subparagraph:

"(E) Propose appropriate disciplinary action against any executive branch official for any request made of a contractor, subcontractor, grantee, or subgrantee that subjected the complainant to a reprisal prohibited by subsection (a)."; and

(B) by striking paragraph (8) and inserting the following paragraph:

"(8) CLARIFICATION FOR SCOPE OF WAIVER RESTRICTIONS.—The rights, forum, and remedies provided for in this section may not be waived by any public or private agreement, policy, form, or condition of employment, including by any predispute arbitration agreement.";

(3) in subsection (f)—

(A) by striking "an employee" and inserting "a protected individual"; and

(B) by striking "the employee" and inserting "the protected individual"; and

(4) in subsection (g), by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(8) The term 'protected individual' means—

"(A) a contractor, subcontractor, grantee, or subgrantee of the Department of Defense or the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, including—

"(i) the government of each of the several States, the District of Columbia, an Indian tribe or authorized tribal organization, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or any other territory or possession of the United States; and

"(ii) the government of any political subdivision of, agency of, or instrumentality of, a government listed in clause (i);

"(B) an employee of a contractor, subcontractor, grantee, or subgrantee of the Department of Defense or the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, or a former employee of such contractor, subcontractor, grantee, or subgrantee whose protected disclosure or engagement in any activity protected against reprisal under this section occurred prior to termination, including an employee of—

"(i) the government of each of the several States, the District of Columbia, an Indian tribe or authorized tribal organization, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or any other territory or possession of the United States; and

“(ii) the government of any political subdivision of, agency of, or instrumentality of, a government listed in clause (i); or

“(C) a person performing personal services for the Department of Defense or the National Aeronautics and Space Administration pursuant to a contractual agreement for the performance of personal services, including a personal services contract or personal services agreement, and who engages in an activity for which any reprisal is prohibited under subsection (a), including a person performing personal services pursuant such a contractual agreement for—

“(i) the government of each of the several States, the District of Columbia, an Indian tribe or authorized tribal organization, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or any other territory or possession of the United States; and

“(ii) the government of any political subdivision of, agency of, or instrumentality of, a government listed in clause (i).”.

SEC. 3. ENHANCEMENT OF NON-DEFENSE CONTRACTOR PROTECTION FROM REPRISAL FOR DISCLOSURE OF CERTAIN INFORMATION.

Section 4712 of title 41, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—

(A) by striking paragraph (1) and inserting the following paragraph:

“(1) IN GENERAL.—A protected individual may not be discharged, demoted, or otherwise discriminated against as a reprisal for the following:

“(A) Refusing to obey an order that would require the protected individual to violate a law, rule, or regulation related to any contract, subcontract, grant, or subgrant.

“(B) Disclosing to a person or body described in paragraph (2) information that the protected individual reasonably believes is evidence of the following:

“(i) Gross mismanagement of any Federal contract or grant, any gross waste of Federal funds, any abuse of authority relating to any Federal contract, subcontract, grant, or subgrant, or any violation of law, rule, or regulation related to any Federal contract or subcontract (including the competition for or negotiation of a contract or subcontract) or grant or subgrant.

“(ii) A substantial and specific danger to public health or safety.”; and

(B) in paragraph (3)—

(i) in subparagraph (A), by striking “an employee” and inserting “a protected individual”; and

(ii) by striking subparagraph (B) and inserting the following subparagraph:

“(B) It shall not be within the authority of an executive branch official to request that a contractor, subcontractor, grantee, or subgrantee engage in a reprisal prohibited by paragraph (1).”;

(2) in subsection (c)—

(A) in paragraph (1), by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

“(E) Propose appropriate disciplinary action against any executive branch official for any request made of a contractor, subcontractor, grantee, or subgrantee that subjected the complainant to a reprisal prohibited by subsection (a).”; and

(B) by striking paragraph (7) and inserting the following paragraph:

“(7) RIGHTS, FORUM, AND REMEDIES NOT WAIVABLE.—The rights, forum, and remedies provided for in this section may not be waived by any public or private agreement, policy, form, or condition of employment, including by any predispute arbitration agreement.”;

(3) in subsection (e)—

(A) by striking “an employee” and inserting “a protected individual”; and

(B) by striking “the employee” and inserting “the protected individual”;

(4) in subsection (g), by inserting after paragraph (2) the following new paragraph:

“(3) The term ‘protected individual’ means—

“(A) a contractor, subcontractor, grantee, or subgrantee of the Federal Government, including—

“(i) the government of each of the several States, the District of Columbia, an Indian tribe or authorized tribal organization, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or any other territory or possession of the United States; and

“(ii) the government of any political subdivision of, agency of, or instrumentality of, a government listed in clause (i);

“(B) an employee of a contractor, subcontractor, grantee, or subgrantee of the Federal Government or a former employee of such contractor, subcontractor, grantee, or subgrantee whose protected disclosure or engagement in any activity protected against reprisal under this section occurred prior to termination, including an employee of—

“(i) the government of each of the several States, the District of Columbia, an Indian tribe or authorized tribal organization, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or any other territory or possession of the United States; and

“(ii) the government of any political subdivision of, agency of, or instrumentality of, a government listed in clause (i); or

“(C) a person performing personal services for the Federal Government pursuant to a contractual agreement for the performance of personal services, including a personal services contract or personal services agreement, including a person performing personal services pursuant to such a contractual agreement for—

“(i) the government of each of the several States, the District of Columbia, an Indian tribe or authorized tribal organization, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or any other territory or possession of the United States; and

“(ii) the government of any political subdivision of, agency of, or instrumentality of, a government listed in clause (i).”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. BURLISON) and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. SUBRAMANYAM) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BURLISON. 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 this measure.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, every person employed by the Federal Government

should have adequate protection from retaliation for speaking out against fraud, waste, or abuse of taxpayer dollars.

However, contractors with the Federal Government have different whistleblower protections than typical government employees.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of the Inspector General found that a lack of whistleblower protections for contractors discouraged them from coming forward. This isn't surprising. It is a difficult decision for someone to come forward and risk their job and their livelihood.

The Expanding Whistleblower Protections for Contractors Act would address this by strengthening whistleblower protections for Federal contractors by prohibiting reprisals for certain actions.

Such actions could include disclosure of information the protected individual believes is evidence of mismanagement, waste, abuse, or a substantial and specific danger to public health and safety related to a contract or grant.

I thank House Oversight Committee Ranking Member GARCIA for his work on this important bill with Chairman COMER and recognize Senators GARY PETERS and CHUCK GRASSLEY for their steadfast leadership on these necessary reforms.

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

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

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5578, the Expanding Whistleblower Protections for Contractors Act.

Whistleblowers are crucial to our ability to conduct congressional oversight. They are key to identifying and stopping waste, fraud, corruption, and abuse of power.

Millions of workers performing critical jobs for the U.S. Government are contractors, not Federal civil servants, but they don't have the same whistleblower protections as civil servants right now. As a result, contractors are less likely to report wrongdoing, especially since they fear retaliation or mistreatment.

This bill would strengthen protections for contractors. It protects them from retaliation for refusal to participate in illegal activity. It also ensures that contractors are legally able to disclose waste, fraud, abuse, and dangers to public health and safety.

This bill will help us do our job to uncover abuses of power. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this bill.

I thank the ranking member for his leadership on this issue. Especially at a time when a lot of folks in Federal civil service and Federal contractors are concerned about coming forward, we need to protect whistleblowers more than ever.

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

Mr. BURLISON. Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this important whistleblower reform bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. BURLISON) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5578, 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.

□ 1720

NUCLEIC ACID STANDARDS FOR BIOSECURITY ACT

Mr. BABIN. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3029) to amend the Research and Development, Competition, and Innovation Act to support nucleic acid screening, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3029

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 “Nucleic Acid Standards for Biosecurity Act”.

SEC. 2. SUPPORTING NUCLEIC ACID SCREENING.

Section 10221 of the Research and Development, Competition, and Innovation Act (42 U.S.C. 18931; enacted as part of title II of division B of Public Law 117-167) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)(1)—

(A) in subparagraph (C), by striking “and” after the semicolon;

(B) by redesignating subparagraph (D) as subparagraph (E); and

(C) by inserting after subparagraph (C) the following new subparagraph:

“(D) best practices, guidelines, and technical standards for risk management associated with engineering biology and biomanufacturing, including risks associated with the use of artificial intelligence; and”;

(2) by redesignating subsections (b) and (c) as subsections (c) and (d), respectively; and

(3) by inserting after subsection (a) the following new subsection:

“(b) NUCLEIC ACID SYNTHESIS SCREENING TOOLS AND STANDARDS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—The Director, in consultation with heads of Federal agencies the Director considers appropriate, shall carry out measurement research to support the development and improvement of best practices and technical standards for biosecurity measures related to nucleic acid synthesis, including the following:

“(A) Testing to improve the accuracy, efficacy, and reliability of screening for nucleic acid synthesis.

“(B) Best practices, including security and access controls, for operational security and managing sequence-of-concern databases to support such screening.

“(C) Technical implementation guidance to ensure such screening is effective and secure.

“(D) Conformity-assessment best practices and technical standards.

“(E) Methods to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the implementation of subparagraphs (A) through (D).

“(2) CONSORTIUM.—In carrying out this subsection, the Director shall convene a consortium of stakeholders, including industry, institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, and customers to carry out the following:

“(A) Develop and periodically update consensus priorities and best practices, as appropriate, for synthetic nucleic acid procurement screening mechanisms.

“(B) Develop roadmaps to inform the activities carried out under paragraph (1).

“(3) REPORT.—Not later than 18 months after the first meeting of the consortium under paragraph (2), the Director shall submit to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate and the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology of the House of Representatives a report summarizing the findings of the consortium.

“(4) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—Of the funds authorized to be appropriated for the National Institute of Standards and Technology pursuant to this section for scientific and technical research and services laboratory activities, there is authorized to be appropriated \$5,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2027 through 2031 to carry out this subsection.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BABIN) and the gentlewoman from Oregon (Ms. SALINAS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BABIN. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 3029, the bill now under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3029, the Nucleic Acid Standards for Biosecurity Act, introduced by Representative SALINAS of Oregon, along with Representative MCCORMICK of Georgia.

This bill is about protecting two things we all care about: American leadership in the life sciences and the security of the American people.

Today, an American company or university laboratory can legally order made-to-order DNA, the basic building blocks of biology, and have it delivered in a matter of days. This technology powers new medicines and vaccines, stronger crops, and advanced manufacturing. It is a real source of American strength.

However, the same technology that lets us build the biology of the future could, in the wrong hands, potentially be used to assemble the genetic material of a dangerous pathogen.

Responsible providers already guard against this. They screen incoming orders against sequences of concern and verify the identities of their customers.

However, as this field continues to advance rapidly, the lack of common technical standards and best practices for screening presents an emerging biosecurity risk.

That is exactly the kind of work the National Institute of Standards and Technology, NIST, was built to do. NIST is our Nation's measurement and standards laboratory. It does not regulate industry. It provides industry with the tools and benchmarks and the best practices needed to get this right.

H.R. 3029 directs NIST to carry out the measurement research needed to make this screening more accurate and reliable by improving screening tools, securing databases of concerning sequences, and developing ways for providers to demonstrate that their screening systems work as intended.

It also directs NIST to convene a consortium of the people who actually do this work, including industry, universities, and nonprofit organizations, to develop consensus best practices and a roadmap for the future.

This legislation does not create a new regulatory regime for American biotechnology. It strengthens our biosecurity while safeguarding the innovation that keeps us ahead of our competitors, and it passed the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee on a bipartisan basis.

I thank Representatives SALINAS and MCCORMICK for their work on this bill, I urge my colleagues to support it, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SALINAS. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Madam Speaker, American biotech companies are leading a scientific revolution that is transforming our economy. In recent years, we have seen breakthroughs that have delivered promising new treatments for Alzheimer's, new biological alternatives to pesticides, and plastic-eating bacteria, just to name a few.

These innovations are making Americans healthier, driving a more sustainable economy, and supporting good jobs. However, while America leads the world in these emerging technologies, our competitors are close behind. If we want to ensure American industry stays on top, then American consumers must have confidence in the safety and reliability of our advancements.

One of the key ways American companies produce these breakthroughs is by producing synthetic nucleic acids, like DNA and RNA, for use in biotech research. These are an important tool though that allows scientists to study gene function, develop novel vaccines, improve diagnostic tests, and pursue countless other life-changing discoveries. Companies like Twist Bioscience in my district are pushing the envelope to accelerate and scale-up production, which, in turn, will facilitate faster discoveries.

As this field advances, particularly with the development of AI systems to design nucleic acid sequences, we need to double down on efforts to ensure the