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FULL COMMITTEE
BUSINESS MEETING:
MARK-UP OF SEVERAL BILLS
AND POSTAL-NAMING
MEASURES

FOR THE
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OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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**FULL COMMITTEE BUSINESS MEETING:
MARK-UP OF SEVERAL BILLS AND
POSTAL-NAMING MEASURES**

—
Wednesday, April 10, 2024

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY,
Washington, D.C.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:07 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. James Comer [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Comer, Jordan, Gosar, Foxx, Grothman, Cloud, Palmer, Higgins, Sessions, Biggs, Mace, LaTurner, Fallon, Donalds, Perry, Timmons, Burchett, Greene, McClain, Boebert, Fry, Luna, Langworthy, Burlison, Waltz, Raskin, Norton, Lynch, Connolly, Krishnamoorthi, Khanna, Ocasio-Cortez, Porter, Bush, Brown, Stansbury, Garcia, Frost, Lee, Casar, Crockett, Goldman, Moskowitz, Tlaib, and Pressley.

Chairman COMER. The Committee will please come to order. A quorum is present.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess at any time.

Pursuant to Committee Rule 5(b) and House Rule XI, Clause 2, the Chair may postpone further proceedings today on the question of approving any measure or matter or adopting an amendment on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered.

The Committee will continue to use the electronic system for recorded votes on amendments and passage of the bills before the Committee. Of course, should any technical issues arrive, which I do not anticipate, we will immediately transition to traditional roll call votes. Any procedural or motion-related votes during today's markup will be dispensed with by a traditional roll call vote.

Our first item for consideration is **H.R. 7109**, the Equal Representation Act. The clerk will please designate the bill.

The CLERK. H.R. 7109, the Equal Representation Act, a bill to require a citizenship question on the decennial census, to require reporting on certain census statistics, and to modify apportionment of representatives to be based on United States citizens instead of all persons.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the bill should be considered as read and open for amendment at any point. Without objection, so ordered.

The Chair recognizes himself to offer an amendment in the nature of a substitute. The clerk will please designate the amendment.

The CLERK. An amendment in the nature of a substitute offered to H.R. 7109, as offered by Mr. Comer of Kentucky.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the amendment is considered as read, and the substitute will be considered as original text for the purposes of further amendment.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for a statement on the bill and the amendment.

H.R. 7109, the Equal Representation Act, does two simple things. First, the bill requires the Census Bureau to include a citizenship question on the decennial census questionnaire. Second, the bill directs that this information be used to ensure a fair representation by requiring only citizens be included in the apportionment base. My amendment in the nature of a substitute simplifies the citizenship question that would be asked on the census questionnaire: "Are you a citizen of the United States? Yes or no." That is it. By requiring this question, the U.S. Government will be able to collect accurate data on the makeup of our population.

The Census Bureau currently estimates the non-citizen population using survey data from the Census-administered American Community Survey, but that data is not based on the entire population. It is only an estimate and suffers from large margins of error. In the past, opponents of the citizenship question have raised concerns that such a question will discourage participation in the census, the theory being that some individuals will be reluctant to respond to the census, especially if they do not have a lawful immigration status. My amendment in the nature of a substitute does not require respondents to indicate what immigration status they have or any other related demographic information. We just want to know, very simply, are you a citizen or are you a non-citizen. It is an easy question. It is not confusing, and it does not reveal anything about an individual's specific immigration status.

Although the census will count and enumerate all individuals residing in the United States, H.R. 7109 would then ensure that only citizens are included in the apportionment base by which representation in Congress is allocated. According to American Community Survey estimates, there are over 22 million non-citizens residing in the United States and the District of Columbia. These are foreign nationals who have not naturalized and cannot vote in Federal elections. Non-citizens comprise nearly seven percent of the total population of the United States—seven percent—but non-citizens are not evenly distributed among the states, and some states end up with greater representation in Congress based on a higher concentration of non-citizens. This dilutes the one-person, one-vote principle for citizens in states with fewer non-citizens. It is clear that Congress can and should ensure a fair apportionment based on equal representation of citizens.

I want to thank Representative Edwards, a former Member of this Committee, for his leadership on this issue. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation. And I now recognize the Ranking Member for his opening statement.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, kindly, Mr. Chairman. The solar eclipse showed us this week the breathtaking marvels of our solar system, but this hearing brings us crashing back down to earth with definitive proof that when it comes to Congress, there is really nothing new under the sun. Ex-President Trump already tried to include a citizenship question on the decennial census in 2020, and the effort failed both administratively and legislatively, and for obvious reasons.

Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment states that the apportionment of seats in the House of Representatives is based on account of “the whole number of persons in each state,” “persons” being the all-encompassing category larger than that of voters or citizens, a point that was made clearly and emphatically by the unanimous Supreme Court in its 2016 decision in *Evenwel v. Abbott*.

Like this legislation itself, *Evenwel* involved a challenge to congressional apportionment based on a total count of the entire population instead of a total count of the voter population. But Justice Ginsburg held for the unanimous Court that Section 3 of the Fourteenth Amendment “retained total population as the congressional apportionment base.” She cited the speech made by Senator Jacob Howard upon introduction of Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868: “The basis of representation is numbers.”

The Committee adopted numbers as the most just and satisfactory basis, and this is the principle upon which the Constitution itself was originally framed, that the basis of representation should depend upon numbers. And such, I think, after all, is the safest and most secure principle upon which the government can rest—numbers, not voters; numbers, not property. This is the theory of the Constitution. Justice Ginsburg cited lots of decisive legislative authority like this, including the Floor statement of Representative James Blaine, who stated that “No one will deny that population is the true basis of representation, for women, children, and other non-voting classes may have as vital an interest in the legislation of the country as those who actually deposit the ballot.”

So, for all of you textualists out there, the plain reading of the text of the Constitution is clear. For all of the constitutional originalists out there, the original purposes have been carefully articulated and never rebutted. For all of you Members who like to follow precedent, well, every apportionment in the United States since 1990 has included every single person residing in the United States, not just those lucky enough to have been given the right to vote at different points. As the *Evenwel* Court noted, the Fourteenth Amendment contemplates that “Representatives serve all residents, not just those eligible to vote.”

Just yesterday, the Census Bureau released a report that estimated the number of foreign-born residents in United States is 46 million. Fifty-three percent of those residents are naturalized. That means this bill would leave more than 20 million U.S. residents potentially uncounted and ignored, a population that has a higher labor force participation rate than the native-born population. These people are paying taxes. They are contributing to the economic well-being of the Nation.

The constitutional meaning is indisputable, a point which settles this for those who want to follow the Constitution. We should recess and go get some real work done rather than waste time on another bill that will never pass the Senate or get signed by the President and is an affront to the great radical Republicans who wrote the Constitution. Their party, they wrote the Fourteenth Amendment. Their party was a pro-freedom, pro-union, pro-immigrant, and anti-Know-Nothing party.

The census is essential to democracy. Just as the framers endorsed Tom Paine's "Common Sense," they also endorsed a common census. But this bill would undermine the accuracy of the census, which may not be accidental. In the 2010 census, the undercount of Hispanics was 1.4 percent. In 2020, that number grew to five percent. Many observers credit that increase just to the Trump Administration's effort to add a citizenship question to the census and all of the intense publicity and rumors surrounding that effort.

The addition of a question about citizenship will deter many immigrants, not only undocumented, but persons with green cards and other forms of lawful status, from completing the census. Many non-citizen immigrants who are seeking asylum or are refugees will avoid responding because of uncertainty over their status and fear of arbitrary law enforcement action. Extensive research shows that many residents wrongly believe the Census Bureau shares personal responses with other Federal agencies. To be clear, it does not. The Federal law prohibits it, but that pervasive worry has prevented some individuals from answering questions about immigration status or responding at all.

Mr. Chairman, I oppose this legislation, which dishonors the Constitution and the values of our Nation, and I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, for 5 minutes.

Mr. HIGGINS. I thank the Chair. And let me respond to the Ranking Member's very eloquent writ, carefully read and prepared to be a part of the historical record as we debate this important bill. Let me say that the preservation of our representative republic is certainly not a waste of time. So please, allow me to respond unscripted from the heart of America to the very well and carefully scripted agenda speak of my colleagues and the Democrat Minority.

The census, as determined by this body, has efforted to avoid accurate definition of the population densities of illegal men and women, illegal persons that are present in United States. Yes, the census has to count every person. The problem is the level of illegal persons that now live within the continental borders of the United States has reached such a point that it thwarts the intended service of our representative republic in the House of Representatives, in the People's House.

Prior to the Biden Administration, it was well considered and well estimated that there were about 30 million illegals living within the United States. It took 240 years to get there. By the time President Biden leaves office, an additional, say, 15 million will have entered our country. Talking about 45 million people—America, pay attention to this—45 million illegals, that is 60 congressional seats. And where do you think those illegals are being drawn

to live? In sanctuary states and sanctuary cities, densities of populations which have advertised and welcomed and brought these illegal citizens there.

Why? Why do you think this has been one of the core tenets of agenda of the Democrat Party? It is to thwart the very essence of our representative republic by stacking the deck during the census, whereby apportionment for congressional representation will be permanently shifted to sanctuary states and cities. Forty-five million illegals. That is 60 seats, America. When have you ever seen a 60-seat majority in this body? This is the game plan, man. It is a decades-long agenda to permanently transform this body into an extension of the Democrat Party's policies and liberal agenda.

We must respond to this by using our congressional authority and mandating by law that, yes, we shall count every person during our census endeavors every 10 years. We shall fulfill our constitutional obligations as envisioned by the founders to count and document every person that lives within the United States of America, but we shall do so with accuracy and transparency and identify which of those persons living in our country are illegal. And we will adjust our apportionment laws to reflect the true intention of what apportionment was envisioned to be when our founders wrote the constitution. That would be that apportionment was reflective of American citizens living within the United States. Our representative republic is at risk, and I fully support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield.

Chairman COMER. Very good. The Chair recognizes Mr. Casar for 5 minutes.

Mr. CASAR. Thank you, Chairman. I am not a constitutional law professor like the Ranking Member is, but just reading the Fourteenth Amendment text, it says that, "Representatives shall be apportioned amongst the states according to their numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each state." That is what the Constitution says. So, Ranking Member, I would be interested in your continued thoughts. We could talk about precedent, we could talk about whether you are originalist, a textualist, but just reading the Fourteenth Amendment, it says the opposite of what this bill seems to say. It clearly says that apportionment shall be on the whole number of persons in the state. And my sense, from hearing you, is that in order for, for example, Confederate states that were rejoining the Union to not ignore women or those that were recently emancipated or children or immigrants, that the radical Republicans put in place this amendment to say, no, you have to count everyone. You have to count everyone for representation. Everyone deserves representation.

Mr. RASKIN. You have got that right. And, in fact, when the Constitution was first written, it was the Southern states themselves who were insisting upon a total count of everybody, regardless of whether or not they were a citizen or a voter. And very specifically, with respect to the population of enslaved people because of the Three-Fifths Compromise, they wanted to make sure that all of those people would count. The Three-Fifths Compromise said that basically 60 percent of the slave population would be counted for the purposes of inflating the population bases in the Southern states. So, after the first census and reapportionment took place in

1800, there were a dozen new Members who could be attributed in the South to the enslaved population.

Now, the northerners were saying, well, you cannot count them or we should not count them if they are not going to be given the right to vote and to run for office, but for these purposes, and these purposes only. The Southern states were saying, no, they should count, so we can, you know, arrive at this Three-Fifths Compromise, which of course was an infamous concession to slave power and one of the things that led to the Civil War.

Mr. CASAR. But at the end of the day, the Constitution clearly states the opposite of what this bill states. The Constitution already lays out how apportionment works and says you count the whole number of persons in each state.

Mr. RASKIN. The Supreme Court was unanimous on that point.

Mr. CASAR. And I do not know if and why they would have to rule on it. I mean, it just says that plainly there. Could we see any justification, any reason, any way that the Congress could legislate something that is directly opposite of what is in the Constitution?

Mr. RASKIN. Well, as I understand their bill, it might not directly contradict what the Supreme Court said because they are asking for a question, "Are you a citizen?" My good friend from Louisiana makes an eloquent pitch for the idea that we should want to know who is an illegal, but you know what? There is nothing even in their bill that would allow us to determine who is an illegal because it is just asking the question, "Are you a citizen?" It is not asking, you know, what your status is.

Mr. CASAR. Well, this might be a question then for the authors or its proponents. My understanding is the bill not only adds the citizenship question to the census, but actually does aim to change apportionment.

Mr. RASKIN. It does. Yes, and that part does violate directly the Constitution itself and everything the Supreme Court has said about it, you know, to the extent that it would change apportionment in addition to adding this question. It really violates the Constitution. And I would hope, at least that part of it, my friends would withdraw because the Supreme Court has been very clear, and I have always thought that both sides of the aisle want to try to adhere to what the Constitution clearly says.

Mr. CASAR. I am befuddled by this part because I do not even know how much the Supreme Court would even have to weigh in when it seems to be a sentence that a fourth grader could read in the Constitution.

Mr. RASKIN. You know, the reason why the founders of the Constitution were so adamant about it is that when the country started, of course, the franchise was left up to the states, but the vast majority of people could not vote. Not just enslaved people, but women could not vote, people without property could not vote, most people could not vote. And still, they felt that what counted—bless you, Mr. Chairman—I mean, what counted was who would be represented, so there would be equal numbers of people represented, even if not all of them could vote.

Mr. CASAR. Right. In each congressional district, you have to take care of a similar number of people. And I think what seems to be at the core of this, which Mr. Higgins laid out, was the idea

that Democrats, for some reason, are trying to “import voters or import people” to increase numbers, when the much more simple explanation is that we are all trying to manage the complexity of foreign policy, local policy, and immigration, and we are all trying to work on that. And I would hope that we actually, in good faith, try to talk about the fact that how do we deal with the fact that people are being displaced in massive numbers in the Western Hemisphere. How do we make sure that folks can migrate legally?

Those are the real questions we should be engaging in rather than putting up these grossly inflated numbers that I found absolutely no evidence behind that number of folks being present in the United States. And as those numbers continue to grow, it is really on Congress to deal with reducing those numbers by giving folks actually a pathway to citizenship and legal residency as President Reagan once did. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Biggs from Arizona for 5 minutes, and then we will go to Mr. Palmer.

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you so much. I appreciate that. So, just a brief discussion on Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment, which was so discussed just a moment ago by my friends across the aisle. “Representatives shall be apportioned among the several states according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each state, excluding Indians not taxed.” That is the provision, and I was told just a minute ago that every fourth grader could understand that.

So, my question would be, and it is just rhetorical here, so is every tourist that happens to be in your state, is every college student that happens to be in your state, do they go to the census so they could be apportioned? Does every business traveler who happens to pass through your state during that time of the decennial census, do they get counted? Because, I mean, it says the respective number, counting the whole number. So, how many times, if you are a business traveler and you are traveling during the decennial census taking time, like I do, like most of you do, how many states are you going to get counted in because you are in a plethora of states? So, the point is, you need to actually take a look at Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment as well, which talks about Congress’ duty to enforce by appropriate legislation. And I would suggest that this bill is appropriate legislation in trying to help us get a better grasp on the census.

And to that end, Mr. Chairman, I have three articles I would like to submit for the record: “Apportionment and the Census: Fundamental Fairness to U.S. Citizens and Democratic Process;” another one called, “Including Non-Citizens in Census;” and another one called, “The Foreign-Born Share Highest in History.”

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you. So, when we consider this—also we heard this discussion, oh no, nobody ever would suggest that you are OK with the open border because you are trying to recruit, you know, new voters. I cannot help but remember that during the 2010 decennial census period, I had a good friend—I use that loosely like we always do—my Latino friend, Democrat. I was in Senate leadership on my side, he was in Senate leadership on the other side, and

we were talking about the coming election. He said, Andy, enjoy it while you can because within 4 years, demographically, we will take over because of the Latino population coming from south of the border. We will take over. Everything is going to start getting reapportioned as well. Now, maybe that was a point of candor. That is the reason that I am not revealing his name, although I wrote his name down here, but that statement was made, and I never forgot that statement. When I hear people say, oh no, no, nobody makes that calculation, sure they do. Sure they do. At least in Arizona, they did.

So, what I would tell you is that I think this bill is so important, and if you live in a state like mine that sits on the border, and we have a real transitory populace as well, so that would be the interesting thing, too. The city of Yuma, for instance, it doubles in size for about 5 months out of the year. You know why? Very pleasant weather in the winter versus very harsh weather in Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota because that is where most of those people are coming down from. In my community, we pick up at least 100,000 plus, maybe 200,000 sometimes, of winter visitors coming down. So, when you say, well, we have to count the whole number? Yes, you have to count the whole number, but are you suggesting that they should be included in apportionment? Is that what you are suggesting because that is what it seems like you are suggesting.

But the reality is, it is much more complicated than just counting somebody and saying, yes, you know, they are going to be counted and we are going to include them in the apportionment in Arizona. I actually have friends that do nothing but travel around. I would not do it. I do not dig that, but that is what they like doing. Multiple states. Are you going to count them? No. So, what I would suggest to you is, Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment also allows us to regulate, and that is what this bill is getting at. It is a meaningful, thoughtful way to regulate the counting of persons in your respective states, which is essential because the very purpose of the census was reapportionment every 10 years. With that, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Palmer for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I always appreciate intelligent debate and think that this is an opportunity to have intelligent debate. First of all, the founders never anticipated admitting mass numbers of people in the United States illegally. As a matter of fact, it is a crime to enter the country illegally under Section 1325 in Chapter 8 of the U.S. Code. It is a misdemeanor to enter the country illegally. But the interesting part is that Section 1326, reentry after having been picked up and sent back, is a second-degree felony with imprisonment up to 2 to 20 years. And I want to go back to the Fourteenth Amendment and the fact that the compromise that was reached with our founders included not counting untaxed Indians as part of the census, but that was before the Fourteenth Amendment.

But in the Fourteenth Amendment, it says that anyone participating in a rebellion, which was clearly directed at those who fought for the South, or other crime, "The basis of representation therein shall be reduced in the proportion to which the number of

such male citizens shall have been involved, shall bear to the number.” So, my question is, should we count people who have committed a second-degree felony by reentering the country illegally for purposes of representation because, clearly, the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits that. They committed a crime.

And, again, I want to emphasize that our founders never anticipated bringing in mass numbers of illegals to improve a state’s representation in Congress. That would never have been considered a legal proposition by our founders. So, there are a number of issues here that I think are seriously not being considered. In the Compromise of 1787, the reason that we have two senators was because the smaller states were at a disadvantage in representation in government to the larger states. So, that is how we wound up with two senators for each state, to offset that. So, when you are admitting millions of people into the country illegally, some of whom who have committed and many of them who have committed second-degree felonies, and allowing states to declare themselves sanctuary states in violation of Federal law, by the way, that gives them a distinct advantage in representational opportunities.

So, I support this bill. I hate that it has come down to this, but I think that we are in a situation, like I said, unanticipated by our founders that we, as Members of Congress, for the long-term benefit of the Nation, need to address intelligently. And I think that recognizing the fact that we cannot allow people to continue to enter the country illegally is, long term, not the way we want to handle immigration. It is certainly not the way we want to consider how many Members of Congress each state can get by counting people who, as I said, millions of whom have committed second-degree felonies. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes Mr. Garcia for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARCIA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is, in my opinion, a horrific bill and effort. We know that a complete and accurate count of the census is incredibly important for our function of government and to support every single person in this country. We are hearing all sorts of, in my opinion, just backward arguments, arguments that are nearing talking about the Great Replacement Theory, and really, I think, undermining the value that immigrants and every person make in this country.

I just want to just make an important note. I served as mayor of my community for 8 years before coming to Congress, and having an accurate count of every single person that is in your community is critical to the services you provide all of those individuals. And we know that changing the census in this way would lead to massive undercounts in states like California, but in every state across the country. Census counts impact the healthcare and how you are able to provide it, it impacts funding for public schools, and just recently, it impacted how much support we got during the pandemic.

A census count basically impacts Federal dollars and how many dollars we get to take on Federal emergencies, how we respond to people that need healthcare during a pandemic. And so much of our public services are dependent on an accurate count from how kids learn, from how seniors access healthcare, from how many

emergency trucks come in and respond to a crisis, to how many shots and vaccines a community will get during a pandemic is all dependent on an accurate count from the census.

And so, this effort is nothing but a way to separate out people that need services, and really will lead to not counting every single person in this country, which we know is also unconstitutional. And so, I think it is really shameful that we have this effort. I think this moves our country backward. It certainly, in my opinion, is a direct attack, especially on undocumented people in this country. And I think this is all because, unfortunately, of the rhetoric that Donald Trump has really grown and infected across this country.

I also want to note just a couple of points. The Brookings Institute found that undercounting Latinos by just three percent could result in almost a billion dollar loss for Medicaid. This is real dollars for people that need our support across the country. A two-percent undercount of Latinos would result in \$20.5 million for SNAP and with more than 3,000 fewer households receiving SNAP benefits, which we know are incredibly important for people across this community. So, it is important to set the record straight. All people in this country should be counted, and this idea that somehow this is not going to impact the count is completely ridiculous. We also know that mixed families in this country would also have concerns about the way they are counted in the census, which would lead to an additional undercount of all people in this country.

And so, I strongly oppose this effort, as do groups across this country, and certainly, as would mayors and Governors in states across America that depend on an accurate count of all people to receive the services that they need for their community. With that, I yield back.

Mr. RASKIN. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. GARCIA. Yes, I will yield.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you for your strong statement. A congressional hearing, at the very least, should not be the source of confusion and misinformation. So, I want to clarify a few things based on questions or doubts that were raised by some of my colleagues.

First of all, college students who live in student housing are counted as being residents there rather than at their domicile. So, yes, if a student comes from Alabama but goes to Arizona State University—

Mr. BIGGS. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. RASKIN [continuing]. You are counted at college if that is where they are domiciled.

Mr. BIGGS. Would the gentleman yield for a question?

Mr. RASKIN. Yes. Well, sure.

Mr. BIGGS. Yes. That is if they are living on campus.

Mr. RASKIN. Correct.

Mr. BIGGS. And what about those who temporarily live off campus, such as at the University of Arizona, where more than half the students live off campus, or at Northern Arizona University, where more than half the students are not—

Mr. RASKIN. The rules of the census are that they are counted where they live and sleep most of the year. So, if they are living

there 9 months, they would be counted at the private apartment they are renting.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Jamie, can I—

Mr. RASKIN. That is the rule. So, yes.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. May I ask you a question?

Mr. RASKIN. Sure.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. So is your point, Ranking Member Raskin, that a person can only be counted once, namely in the place of their domicile?

Mr. RASKIN. Correct, and their answers to the various questions were raised. Someone who is a foreign business traveler is not counted as part of our census. Someone who is in prison is counted at the prison that they are in, which actually there is a study that showed that this inflates and increases—

Mr. BIGGS. Would the gentleman yield for just one more second?

Mr. RASKIN. Sure.

Mr. BIGGS. That kind of gets around the point I was making, which is that the gentleman was quoting the Fourteenth Amendment talks about every person is counted. And you are basically saying, now there are rules that prevent some people from being counted and that provide for others to be counted. That is what this bill is doing. I yield back.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. Yes.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. GARCIA. That makes, I mean, no offense, that makes no sense. I mean, you could count one time. So, you are not getting double counted to be—

Chairman COMER. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Donalds from Florida for 5 minutes.

Mr. DONALDS. Thank you, Chairman. This is actually a pretty interesting debate. First of all, this is a good bill. We should support this measure for a number of reasons. No. 1, I am glad that the Members are bringing up the Fourteenth Amendment. This is actually quite critical because at the writing of the Fourteenth Amendment, even though its thought has been expanded to encapsulate many things in American society, the original premise of the Fourteenth Amendment was for black slaves who were no longer slaves and now are dual citizens of the United States. So, then, if you are going to now go toward the act of apportionment, yes, they have to be counted because now they are citizens of the United States because slavery was at an end. That is the purpose of the Fourteenth.

The issue we are facing in America today is not that you have people who have come to the United States, either, A) illegally or, B) through what I would call abuses of Federal law by President Biden, coming into the United States in massive amounts. If you count them for the apportionment base, they are not citizens of the United States. They do not have the legal authority to vote in our elections in the United States. Yet, we are going to count them for the purposes of setting congressional districts in the United States? That makes no sense. The bill is clear. People are still counted if they are not citizens, but they are not used in the calculation for setting apportionment, and that is a key distinction.

To my colleague on the other side who mentioned that inaccurate counts lead to things—they impact schools, they impact hospitals, they impact benefits in local communities and states all through the country—that is correct. Which is why we should not go down the pathway of importing millions of people into our country, either ignoring Federal law, flouting Federal law. We should not do that because it does impact the communities in our country in negative ways. There are young kids in the United States who are not getting the education they deserve because now you have other children in these classrooms, who have less education or no education, and do not even speak English, or in a lot of respects, even Spanish. They speak other languages. And so now, resources are having to be moved around from those kids who are United States citizens. These are major implications.

Mr. GARCIA. Sir, would you yield for a question?

Mr. DONALDS. Hold on. I got a couple of points to make, and I will yield to a question. You have Denver, Colorado. Five percent of Denver's population is now made up of illegal immigrants. They are overwhelming the hospital system in Denver, Colorado.

So, yes, when you have these actions from a chief executive who is not faithfully executing immigration and border security law—he is not. When that happens, there has to be a response from Congress, which is where Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment does come into play. This is a good piece of legislation because what we cannot have now is the precedent where you just have massive flows of people being brought to us by the drug cartels and by the coyotes—let us be honest about what is happening—and then we say we are now going to use that to be the basis for accounting and allowing for apportionment of congressional districts when the same people cannot vote. They cannot. So, this is a good bill. We should support this bill.

And what we should not do is, frankly, gaslight the American people into thinking that we are now somehow changing apportionment because even the framers of the Constitution or the writers of the Fourteenth Amendment would have never allowed for non-citizens to this massive amount to be counted for the purposes of setting congressional districts. And I would say the Ranking Member spoke to that when he did talk about the history of the Three-Fifths Compromise at the onset of the United States Constitution. I will yield to a question.

Mr. GARCIA. Thank you. Look, I think we can have a debate about immigration and what proposals are, and I agree, nobody wants just endless flows of folks that we cannot actually manage and control. Nobody is arguing for that. But we have to understand that, in this country, the counting of every single person impacts every single type of government service that is provided through the states and through cities. So, what you are really arguing about is that young kids in classrooms or seniors that are in hospital beds or people that are trying to recover from massive pandemics and emergencies would not get support because they would not be counted through the one system that our government uses to provide public services to all people in this country.

Mr. DONALDS. So, Mr. Garcia—

Mr. GARCIA. So, regardless of how a child may have—

Mr. DONALDS. Mr. Garcia, I got to reclaim my time because I got 15 seconds to respond. The bill allows for the count. You are just not counted in the base for apportionment.

Mr. GARCIA. Except that—

Mr. DONALDS. Hold on. And that is a clear delineation from the argument that you are making. We cannot make people fill out the census. We do not have the police power to do so.

Mr. GARCIA. And this would make less people feel that the census—

Mr. DONALDS. Mr. Garcia, I yielded to you, but—

Mr. GARCIA. Thank you, sir. You are right, you are right.

Mr. DONALDS. We do not have police powers to make people fill out the census. We have American citizens who do not fill out the census. We have to do the right thing when it comes to apportioning congressional districts because that does impact the representation of the American people, the voting population, the citizens of the United States. And frankly, people who are in our country illegally or do not have citizenship status do not also have the ability to impact the political nature of the United States. That flies in the face of the very basis of a representative republic and a representative democracy. I yield.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Krishnamoorthi from Illinois for 5 minutes.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. So, I just have a question of Ranking Member Raskin. So, does this bill basically say that apportionment would not happen even based on the number of non-citizens who might be here legally, such as green card holders or H1-B visa holders or others who contribute mightily to our country?

Mr. RASKIN. Yes, it does.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. So, my problem with this is, we are basically using this as a tool to prevent representation given to anyone, even if they are here legally, even if they are on the path to citizenship, even if they are contributing to our country, and even if they are Americans.

Mr. RASKIN. Yes. I mean, our colleagues, I am afraid to say, are evincing no familiarity with any of the relevant materials in this field. The Supreme Court has been very clear about this, and the founders were very clear. There are lots of people who are not voters, who get counted in the census. Start with children. Do we think children should not be counted in the census because they are not voters? That makes no sense. One of our colleagues said that the founders never anticipated that you would have huge numbers of people who could not vote or being counted. Of course, they did. The vast majority of Americans could not vote when the country started. In slave—

Mr. HIGGINS. That is not what my colleague said.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, then I stand corrected. What did he say?

Mr. HIGGINS. He said the founders never anticipated this volume of illegals.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. Well, I will take on—

Mr. HIGGINS. He did not say—do not twist my colleague's words.

Mr. RASKIN. Fair enough, that you are very valiant to rise to his defense. I will answer that misnomer on his part then. If what he said, they never anticipated that number of illegal people, there

was no immigration law when the Constitution was adopted at all. In fact, the only illegals in the country, at least according to the native population, were the people writing the Constitution.

Mr. HIGGINS. There was no Federal law at all.

Mr. RASKIN. Exactly.

Mr. HIGGINS. And the Ranking Member knows this. He is being cute.

Mr. RASKIN. No, no.

Mr. HIGGINS. There was no Federal law when the Constitution was passed.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Mr. Higgins, can I reclaim my time? I am sorry.

Mr. HIGGINS. Yes.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. The baton got passed a few times here. I want to reclaim my time. So, I cannot wait to introduce my bill with Congresswoman Mace. But I just want to close with one thing, which is, we have to remember that there are people here in our districts who may not be able to vote, but who matter.

Mr. RASKIN. Well——

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. They do not get counted, but they count.

Mr. RASKIN. They count not only to us, but they certainly count in the eyes of the founders. And look, every period of American history, there have been different periods of xenophobia and anti-immigrant fervor toward Germans, toward Irish, toward Mexicans, you name it, OK? So, there is nothing unusual about what we are going through where people want to whip up hysteria about the foreign born. And, in fact, you can find lots of periods in American history where there was a greater percentage of foreign-born people in the country than there are today. And it also stimulated the same kinds of political movements that some of our colleagues identify with——

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Mr. Raskin?

Mr. RASKIN. Yes.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. I am one of those people. I was born abroad. I am one of the few naturalized citizens in Congress. And so this is a personal issue to me when you say, or not you, but others say that my family would not have counted for purposes of political representation, even though we are fully part of the fabric of this country.

Mr. RASKIN. Yes. And I would add to that only that some of my colleagues would probably be stunned to find that the founder of their party, Abraham Lincoln, and lots of Republicans in the 19th century, believed in giving non-citizens the right to vote as a way to train them for complete citizenship. In fact, Lincoln was roundly denounced for defending non-citizen voting by Democrats in the 19th century. But the idea was basically give non-citizens the right to vote in local elections as a training ground for them to become citizens of the United States. So, they are just demonstrating their unfamiliarity with the actual history of their own party and the history of our country.

This is a Nation that was founded by people who are open to immigration. And Tom Paine said that America would become an asylum to humanity, not an insane asylum, but a place of refuge for

people fleeing from political and religious and economic oppression, seeking greater opportunity. And that is what America is.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. So, what do you think is really going on with this bill?

Mr. RASKIN. Well, I know that they have not read the relevant Supreme Court authorities. But basically, what they want to say is that non-citizens, I do not know where they are on children and other people who cannot vote, but they want to say that non-citizens, including lawful non-citizens, permanent residents, green card holders, should not be counted, which creates, as our colleague was saying, tremendous problems for understanding where the population is and how to serve programmatically the population.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you, and I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Sessions from Texas for 5 minutes.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Chair, thank you very much. Interesting dialog here. The bottom line is, is that we are trying to get to the point where we understand legality and who is going to be a citizen.

I would hope that the gentleman from California would not think that we were against his family voting if they were citizens, to be counted if they were citizens. But I would be less than candor if I did not say I believe that what is happening today comes a lot from taking advantage of this, politically, to bring 10 or 20 million people into this country to move them to areas that American citizens have moved away from because of their onerous way in which they legislate and tax and diminish those boundaries in political divisions, such as New York and other places, and to crowd 20 million people into these areas, just for the purpose of politics as opposed to the rule of law is, I think, really what this point is about. Mr. Chairman, I would like to yield the remaining time I have to the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Donalds.

Mr. DONALDS. I want to thank my colleague from Texas. I think that this debate is moving into an area typically where congressional debate goes into. Let us be very clear about what the bill does for the fifth time. The count of people in the country would still occur, whether you are on a green card status or whatever the status are, or even if you have no status. But for the purposes of apportioning congressional districts, non-citizens would not apply to forming congressional districts. Not the count, not getting the numbers in various jurisdictions that deal with grant programs, funding programs, *et cetera*, that come from the Federal Government or to help states plan accordingly for state budgets, or localities planning for local budgets. That would not change.

In the United States, we have no ability to force people to fill out the census. Like I said earlier, we do not have that ability. People fill it out because they choose to. Now, of course, we do ads during the Super Bowl and sporting events every single 10 years because we want people to fill out the census, but there are citizens who do not fill it out. It is unwise to count people for the purposes of setting representative districts in the House of Representatives, who do not have the capability to vote because they are not citizens of the country. That does not mean you do not count them for all the various things.

To a secondary point, it is actually the Republican Party that has always wanted to have legal immigration. What we do not want—and I find it interesting I have to make this comment constantly, but I will, and that is fine—what we do not want is what the President of the United States has foisted on the American people during his presidency, right now, Joe Biden. This is what we do not want because it is damaging, frankly, inner city communities more than any other portion of the country. And based upon the current makeup of Congress, most inner cities are not represented by Republicans. They are represented by Democrats. And that is where the vast majority of the issue set around funding not being able to now meet the need because of massive illegal immigration by ignorance of the law of the President of the United States.

Last thing I will say, with respect to what President Lincoln might have wanted, with respect to allowing non-citizens to vote in local elections, it is OK to disagree with a former Republican President. I disagree with that, with President Lincoln. I do not think that is wise. I think that the only people who should be able to make political decisions within the framework of a representative government are the citizens of that government of that Nation.

Mr. CASAR. Would the gentleman yield for a question?

Mr. DONALDS. I do not vote in Mexico if I was going to be in Mexico. I do not vote in Spain if I was going to be in Spain. And they would not want me to vote there because I am not a citizen of those countries. That is not xenophobia. That is common sense.

Mr. CASAR. May I ask a question with the remaining time?

Mr. DONALDS. No, I yielded before. I am not yielding now, but thank you. What has happened to the debate around immigration, border security, around now apportionment and the census is that, if you have a legitimate point about how the business of the United States should run that is different from the current Democratic party's vote, you are now xenophobic and do not care about immigrants. That is a lie.

Let me also say, I would add that my current colleagues on the other side of the aisle, they have forgotten what their Party actually used to stand for when it came to illegal immigration and immigration writ large because they actually did believe in secure borders and only a legal process and not massive amounts of illegal immigration, and that has changed fundamentally from where the Democratic party was even 2 decades ago.

Mr. RASKIN. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. DONALDS. Well, my time is up. I cannot yield anymore. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Ms. Mace from South Carolina for 5 minutes.

Ms. MACE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really cannot believe this is the debate that we are having today, that all simply that we want to do is, when we are doing the census, find out if we are polling citizens or non-citizens. We even watered it down not to offend the left and say, "are you illegal?" That is not what we are asking here. And when our districts are drawn at the Federal level for congressional districts, you all know that it is based on population. You all know, handily, that you get an advantage when you are in-

cluding illegal aliens, illegal immigrants, and non-citizens in the population census.

We also know that the left wants illegals to vote in our elections. We have seen legislation drafted as such at the Federal and state level. We have seen court rulings that would allow illegals to vote in our elections. That is what this is about, and you guys just want to sit here and, you know, not put our citizens first. I mean, the fact that this is the debate we are having today and you guys are going to vote against this bill overwhelmingly is just so shocking to me.

I think when we are doing the census, we should absolutely know and count citizens versus non-citizens. We should only be drawing district maps based on who are citizens in our country. That is the fairest way to move forward, and I think it should be truly nonpartisan. With that, Mr. Chairman, I am going to yield back. Thank you.

Chairman COMER. The gentlelady yields back. Do any other Members wish to be heard?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The question is now on the amendment in the nature of a substitute.

All those in favor signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[Chorus of noes.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it. The amendment is agreed to.

The question is now on favorably reporting H.R.—

Mr. RASKIN. I would like to ask for a recorded vote, if I could, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. Yes. OK. That was the ANS. We will do the bill now.

The question is now on favorably reporting H.R. 7109, as amended.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[Chorus of noes.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it. The bill is favorably reported, as amended.

Mr. RASKIN. I would like to request a recorded vote, please.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman from Maryland requests a recorded vote. A recorded vote is ordered. As previously announced, further proceedings on the question will be postponed.

Our next item for consideration is **H.R. 7868**, the FEHB Protection Act. The clerk will please designate the bill.

The CLERK. H.R. 7868, the FEHB Protection Act, a bill to require the Director of the Office of Personnel Management to take certain actions with respect to the health insurance program carried out under Chapter 89 of Title 5, and for other purposes.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the bill should be considered as read and open for amendment at any point.

Without objection, so ordered.

The Chair recognizes himself to offer an amendment in the nature of a substitute. The clerk will please designate the amendment.

The CLERK. An amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 7868, as offered by Mr. Comer of Kentucky.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the amendment is considered as read, and the substitute will be considered as original text for the purposes of further amendment.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for statement on the bill and the amendment.

The Federal Employee Health Benefits program provides quality health insurance coverage for nearly 8 million Federal employees, retirees, and their family members. With nearly \$60 billion in combined annual premiums paid by the government and enrollees, this Committee has a vested interest in ensuring the program is free of waste, fraud, and abuse.

In 2022, the GAO released a report that found ineligible family members enrolled in Federal health plans. According to the Office of Personnel Management's Inspector General, the enrollment of ineligible family members may cost as much as \$3 billion dollars in improper or fraudulent payments annually. This bill incorporates solutions from GAO's report to better prevent, identify, and reduce fraud, waste, and abuse resulting from enrolling ineligible family members in the Federal health plan.

First, this bill requires employing offices to verify the eligibility of family members receiving coverage to better ensure those who are added to the rolls are legally eligible. Second, the bill requires OPM to audit the documentation and ranks of the enrollees to identify those who may have slipped through the cracks. Further, the bill requires disenrollment or removal of ineligible individuals from coverage. And finally, the bill requires OPM to incorporate a review of ineligible family members in their fraud risk assessment of the plan to better inform the scope of the problem and identify additional solutions.

I want to thank the sponsor of the bill, Mr. Waltz, for his leadership on this issue, and I now yield the remainder of my time to Mr. Waltz from Florida.

Mr. WALTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this markup today and allowing me to speak in support of my bill.

As you mentioned, the Office of Personnel Management administers the largest employer-sponsored healthcare program in the country known as the Federal Employees Health Benefits program, the FEHB. Among others, FEHB Program provides health insurance benefits to Federal employees, retired Federal employees, and their family members. In Fiscal Year 2021, the FEHB program provided benefits to over 8.2 million individuals at the cost of approximately \$59 billion. And given the magnitude of the program cost to the American taxpayer annually, one would expect—I think you would expect, Mr. Chairman, I certainly would—that OPM would conduct regular oversight to minimize fraud within this program. However, and here is the headline, Mr. Chairman, since its implementation in 1960, OPM has never, I repeat, never, conducted a comprehensive audit of the FEHB Program.

Further, only in 2021 did OPM begin even requiring Federal employing offices across the whole Federal Government to review the supporting documentation during new hire enrollment, things like qualifying life events to verify family member eligibility. Unfortunately, OPM is still unable to ensure employing offices are executing basic verification requirements, and it is unacceptable.

The American people deserve to know that their tax dollars that they earned are being spent appropriately, free from fraud or waste. And in its current form, this program is susceptible to fraud and abuse, as demonstrated by the numerous cases of individuals enrolled in and receiving coverage through the program, even though being ineligible for that coverage. This is why I have introduced the FEHB Protection Act to combat fraud and abuse within the program. It implements, Mr. Chairman, a couple of common-sense changes.

One, it requires the Federal agencies to verify that when an employee adds a family member to their health plan, the family member is legally eligible to receive those benefits. These are common-sense changes, Mr. Chairman. I do not think we should have to legislate that OPM should do it, but apparently we need to. Second, it would require OPM to review the risk of ineligible individuals receiving benefits when conducting risk assessments. Third, it requires a comprehensive audit and review of verification documents. And finally, it will require OPM to disenroll individuals currently enrolled in the program if they are determined to be ineligible.

Comprehensive auditing and enrollment verification for benefit programs is not new. In fact, at least 25 states have conducted audits of their state-run benefit programs. In my home state of Florida, a 2018 audit of the State Health Benefits found that a large number of enrollees in the program, three percent of the overall program, were ineligible to receive coverage resulting in over \$20 million in savings. One can only imagine, with the magnitude of the Federal program, what we would save the taxpayers. The OPM's Inspector General estimates the annual cost associated with ineligible enrollees in this program to be about \$250 million to \$3 billion. With the potential to save the American taxpayers \$3 billion, I think passing this bill is a no-brainer.

I want to thank my friend and colleague, Senator Rick Scott, for working with me on this companion bill in the Senate. I thank the Chairman and your staff to bring this critical legislation to the Committee for markup, and I urge my colleagues' support. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Raskin for 5 minutes.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for bringing this bill to markup, and thank you, Mr. Waltz, for your hard work on it.

FEHBP is the largest employer sponsored healthcare program in the country with 8 million employees participating. In December 2022, the GAO issued a report that estimated that ineligible family members could be costing FEHBP approximately a billion dollars a year. The OPM Inspector General has estimated the cost of ineligibles at somewhere between \$250 million to \$3 billion a year. While OPM is responsible for administering this program, it relies

on over 160 different employing offices to enroll and then verify the eligibility of members.

In recent years, OPM has put in place certain procedures to verify the eligibility of family members for qualifying life events, like marriage, divorce, birth of a child, and so on. OPM does not have and does not plan to have a monitoring process for verifying the eligibility of family members of existing FEHBP members. So this act would require Federal agencies to verify that an employee is eligible to add a family member to their health coverage plan. The bill also requires OPM to consider coverage of ineligible individuals while conducting fraud risk assessments of the FEHBP system. The bill further requires OPM to conduct a comprehensive audit of employee family members currently enrolled, including a review of eligibility verification documentation, like marriage certificates and birth certificates. Finally, the bill requires OPM to disenroll or remove from enrollment any ineligible person found to be receiving coverage.

Several states conduct similar audits, like California, Florida, and Kansas. California requires re-verification of enrollees every 3 years. Its audit saved the state in 2015 nearly \$122 million. In 2018, Florida's audit avoided more than \$20 million in costs. These states made upfront investments in oversight that reaped a lot of savings downstream. This bill is well meaning and would improve our bipartisan goal of combating improper payments and fraud, but I do believe it should include funding to conduct the required audit. This audit will include examining every FEHBP participant to determine eligibility across the whole enterprise of the government, and I plan to offer an amendment on this point at the appropriate point today, Mr. Chairman. And I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. Do any other Members wish to speak on the Waltz bill?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Seeing none, the gentleman from Maryland has an amendment.

Mr. RASKIN. I have an amendment at the desk.

Chairman COMER. Will the clerk please report?

The CLERK. Amendment to the amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 7868, as offered by Mr. Raskin of Maryland.

Mr. RASKIN. So, my amendment addresses—

Chairman COMER. Hold on. Without—

Mr. RASKIN. Oh, sorry.

Chairman COMER. I am sorry. Without objection, the amendment is considered as read.

I reserve a point of order. The Ranking Member is now recognized for 5 minutes to explain his amendment.

Mr. RASKIN. It will not take that long, Mr. Chairman. It is very simple. It addresses the only real shortcoming in this bill that I identified in my opening remarks. There is no funding to conduct the audit that is mandated by the bill that will actually make the bill a meaningful cost saving for the people, and I have heard different estimates about what the audit could cost. OPM's estimate is \$150 million, which is almost 3 times the budget for the entire Health Insurance Office here. It is clear that some additional resources will be required for the audit, and that should not be a con-

cern because OPM estimates that the savings will be more than a billion dollars. So, my amendment would create a great return on investment value.

And so, with that, I hope all of my colleagues will embrace this amendment to make the bill fully effective and I urge everyone to support it, and I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. I now recognize myself. I thank the Ranking Member for his amendment, but I, unfortunately, must oppose it. While I agree with the underlying purpose of the amendment to ensure that the Office of Personnel Management has the resources necessary to audit the eligibility of Federal employee family members enrolled in the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program, this amendment conflicts with the Majority Leader's Floor protocols for the 118th Congress. The Floor protocols rightly explicitly prohibit the use of such sums as necessary appropriations authorization language.

And I do want to reiterate that the audit this bill requires, which will certainly require an investment, has the potential, according to the Government Accountability Office and the OPM Inspector General, to save the Federal Government over \$1 billion a year. I rarely have the opportunity to say this with confidence, but this is a worthy investment.

With that said, this bill should contain a specific figure rather than an open-ended spending authorization, and the Committee is still in the process of determining what the actual cost of the required OPM audit would be. Once we have secured a complete CBO score of the bill's cost and potential savings, we will be in a better position as a Committee to determine the best way to address the cost of this necessary audit before consideration by the full House. But for now, I oppose this well-intentioned amendment and recommend Committee Members do the same so we can advance the important provisions in the underlying bill to address waste, fraud, and abuse in the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program.

Do any other Members wish to speak on the Raskin amendment?
[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Seeing none, the question is now on the amendment offered by Mr. Raskin.

All those in favor of the Raskin amendment, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[Chorus of noes.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the noes have it and the amendment is not agreed to.

Mr. RASKIN. Could I request a recorded vote on that?

Chairman COMER. The gentleman from Maryland has requested a recorded vote. A recorded vote is ordered. As previously announced, further proceedings on the question will be postponed.

Our next item for consideration is **H.R. 7524**, the GSA Technology Accountability Act. The clerk will please designate the bill.

The CLERK. H.R. 7524, the GSA Technology Accountability Act, a bill to require the submission of reports on certain information

technology services funds to Congress before expenditures may be made, and for other purposes.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the bill should be considered as read and open for amendment at any point.

Without objection, so ordered.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes himself to offer an amendment in the nature of a substitute. The clerk will please designate the amendment.

The CLERK. Amendment in the nature of a substitute offered to H.R. 7524, as offered by Mr. Comer of Kentucky.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the amendment is considered as read, and the substitute will be considered as original text for the purposes of further amendment.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for a statement on the bill and the amendment.

I am happy to support H.R. 7524, the GSA Technology Accountability Act. The General Services Administration Technology for Transformation Services, or TTS, manages several government technology projects and initiatives. These projects and initiatives are mostly funded through two funds, the Citizens Services Fund and the Acquisition Services Fund. There is little transparency, however, into how money from these funds is allocated and what TTS is doing with its resources.

This bill requires the Administrator of GSA to submit an annual report to Congress regarding each program funded by the Citizen Services Fund and some programs funded by the Acquisition Services Fund. This annual report will include information about funded programs, projects, and initiatives and reimbursements associated with each program. This bill provides much needed transparency into TTS programs and technology-related projects. I want to thank Mr. Sessions, our Chairman of the Subcommittee of Government Operations and the Federal Workforce, for his outstanding work on this legislation. I encourage my colleagues to support this commonsense bill. It will increase transparency and provide additional oversight of taxpayer dollars. I now yield to the Ranking Member for his opening statement.

Mr. RASKIN. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I thank you, and I thank our friend Chairman Sessions and your staffs for your partnership and collaboration on the bill. I am very pleased to support it in this updated form. The bill would bring increased transparency to some of the GSA's leading programs. As GSA continues to make the technological advances that allow the American people to securely access public services, this bill will allow Congress to fulfill its vital oversight responsibilities. I thank my colleagues for working with us to address GSA's concerns about the original bill and ensure that this one allows for increased transparency without creating unnecessary and duplicative administrative burdens. I urge my colleagues to support the bill, and I yield back.

Chairman COMER. I now recognize the sponsor of the bill, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Government Operations, Mr. Sessions from Texas for 5 minutes.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much, and I want to, with a genuine friendship, also acknowledge that the gentleman, Mr. Raskin, and I believe at least one or two other Mem-

bers of the Democratic Party on this Committee will be supporting this. That comes directly from a GSA report, the Inspector General at GSA, about what they see in the operation and the need for this.

Mr. Chairman, this is straightforward legislation that would bring basic transparency to technology projects from the General Services Administration. As it stands now, the government's internal technology consultancy is mostly opaque in its operation, resulting in a lack of competition and a few instances of serious failures of GSA projects and products. Last year, the GSA Inspector General reported that *Login.gov*, a GSA product that was intended to be a sign-on solution for the Federal Government, intentionally misled Federal agencies about its technical capabilities and ability to authenticate users. So, this is what internally they have recognized.

I think we held hearings last year that were, on a bipartisan basis, very productive. This is legislation that follows from that, and I want to thank my colleagues on the other side of the aisle for not only recognizing this, but trying to correct things that is seen by everyone as a problem. Mr. Chairman, I yield back my time.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. Do any other Members wish to speak on the bill?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Seeing none, the question is now on the amendment in the nature of a substitute.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it. The amendment is agreed to.

The question is now on favorably reporting H.R. 7524, as amended.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[No response.]

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Chairman?

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it.

The Chair recognizes Mr. Sessions.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Chairman, I ask for a recorded vote.

Chairman COMER. A recorded vote has been requested by Mr. Sessions. A recorded vote is ordered. As previously announced, further proceedings on the question will be postponed.

Our next item for consideration is **H.R. 7887**, the Allowing Contractors to Choose Employees for Select Skills Act. The clerk will please designate the bill.

The CLERK. H.R. 7887, the Allowing Contractors to Choose Employees for Select Skills Act, a bill to amend Title 41 to prohibit experience or educational requirements for proposed contractor personnel in certain contracts solicitations, and for other purposes.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the bill should be considered as read and open for amendment at any point. Without objection, so ordered.

The Chair recognizes himself to offer an amendment in the nature of a substitute. The clerk will please designate the amendment.

The CLERK. An amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 7887, as offered by Mr. Comer of Kentucky.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the amendment is considered as read. The substitute will be considered as original text for the purposes of further amendment.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes to discuss the bill.

The Federal Government relies heavily on contract employees. Unfortunately, Federal solicitations sometimes include unnecessary degree requirements mandating that individuals who perform the work hold certain education credentials. Training for many jobs in fields like IT and building construction is available through non-degree pathways, such as apprenticeships and bootcamps. That is why private sector employers have pared back degree requirements in hiring in recent years. We should not prohibit those with the right technical skills from performing Federal contract work just because they lack a traditional degree. And the companies who employ them, those that offer apprenticeships and engage in skills-based hiring, should be encouraged to compete for government contracts, not be excluded from competition.

This bill helps ensure that Federal contractors are eligible to hire qualified professionals in the necessary knowledge, skills, and drive, even if they lack a traditional 4-year degree. The bill does this by prohibiting contract officers from stipulating education and experience requirements for contract employees unless the contracting officer can justify in writing that they are necessary to meet the needs of the agency. I urge my colleagues to support this timely, necessary, and bipartisan bill. I want to thank Ms. Mace, Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and Government Innovation, for her great work on this very important reform.

I now recognize the Ranking Member for his opening statement.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The ACCESS Act is intended to address degree inflation or the growing trend of college grads filling jobs that actually do not require college degrees. This practice leads to reduced earnings for college degree holders, reduced employment opportunities for non-degree holders, and an overall drag on the economy. Committee Democrats are supportive of efforts to eliminate minimum education and experience requirements for jobs that do not actually require such associated skills for successful performance, expanding opportunity for the more than 62 percent of the population age 25 and older who do not hold a bachelor's degree.

However, the ACCESS Act would create a blanket reporting requirement that could be unnecessarily burdensome for Federal agencies in the many instances in which minimum educational or experience requirements are commonly understood to be necessary. This bill would prohibit Federal agencies from specifying any minimum experience or educational requirements for contractor personnel in solicitations unless the solicitation also includes a written justification explaining why such requirements are necessary. Moreover, contracting officers would be required to determine, jus-

tify, and review each education or experience requirement separately.

There certainly are jobs for which some minimum education or experience requirements are necessary. For example, approximately 39 percent of postings for construction managers require a college degree, as do 52 percent of web developer postings and 34 percent of distribution manager postings. This suggests that these roles are frequently performed successfully without a degree and that the requirement is more about the preference of the employer than the demands of the job. So, it would make sense for agency contracting officers to have to provide a written justification for choosing to require that contractors hire only college degree holders for such jobs, as this bill would require.

However, there are also an array of jobs for which some minimum education or experience requirements are always necessary. For example, in 2022, the Federal Government spent almost \$30 billion on medical services contracts and another \$29 billion on engineering and technical support service contracts. Do we really want our contracting officers to have to provide a written explanation every time they put out a solicitation that requires healthcare and engineering professionals to have advanced degrees? That, to me, seems unduly burdensome.

I will vote for this bill today, but I would ask the Chairman and Chairwoman Mace, my friend, to work with us before this bill goes to the Floor to find a more tailored approach that creates accountability when warranted without imposing an impractical hurdle in the already complex contracting process. Thank you, and I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. I now recognize the gentlelady from South Carolina and a very prolific bill passer on the Oversight Committee, Ms. Mace, for 5 minutes.

Ms. MACE. Hopefully, we are doing one per markup or we haze the staff. Just kidding. Just jokes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the Ranking Member as well. I also want to thank Congressman Krishnamoorthi for joining me on this piece of legislation.

When I was in college, I taught myself to code. I did not get a degree in computer programming. And my first job was as a computer programmer for Anderson Consulting—and I am dating myself—which is now Accenture. This is back in the late 90s, Y2K, *et cetera*. I learned like six programming languages, not at school, but on the job. And it is not just computer programming, but there are so many opportunities for contracts with Federal agencies where a 4-year degree is just completely unnecessary. And so, I see this as a great opportunity for a lot of different agencies, a lot of different departments, a lot of different people who do not need those burdensome and expensive 4-year degree requirements when they can do those jobs without them and they can do them very, very well. In fact, I have got a member of my family who makes more than we all do in this room, again, in technology. I would love to see a person like that in the Federal work force. Never stepped foot on college campus, I mean, just an amazing talent. We want that talent in the Federal work force with these contractors. So, I want to

ensure that the government is not denying work opportunities to skilled, qualified Americans just because they lack a 4-year degree.

It is the same reason that I sponsored the MACE Act, the Modernizing the Acquisition of Cybersecurity Experts Act, last fall, which was adopted by the full House last year. While the MACE Act removes unneeded degree hurdles to Federal IT jobs, the ACCESS Act now takes down similar barriers, similar burdens that keep people from performing Federal contract work. We have many Americans, about half the country almost, that do not have 4-year degrees. They have alternative training. They have certificates. They go to apprenticeships, bootcamps, *et cetera*. And these alternatives are becoming more attractive as college tuition, because of government subsidies, becomes much more difficult to afford.

That is why many of our Nation's largest employers, including Walmart, IBM, Google, have dramatically reduced degree requirements in their job postings. These companies are now hiring individuals for many occupations based on their relevant job skills, not on 4-year degrees. But when these companies do contract work for the Federal Government, they sometimes find their skilled and successful non-degreed employees simply are not allowed to take part. Ironically, these are often IT and cybersecurity contracts, as I mentioned earlier, areas where the government struggles to hire internally and relies heavily on outside help. In fact, there are a combined 700,000 unfilled cybersecurity positions within the Federal Government today and across the private and public sector.

Too few degreed cyber professionals exist to fill the shortage, yet at a Cybersecurity, IT and Government Innovation Subcommittee hearing that I held in this room in January, an IBM witness testified the, "Federal contractors are rarely able to place an individual without a 4-year degree on a technology services contract regardless of their qualifications." This hearing was the impetus for this bill because that is where I learned that this was a huge problem. And here we are today in a bipartisan way, Democrats and Republicans coming together. It is not perfect, but it is better than it was, and it is something that we should be working on together in a nonpartisan fashion.

So this, of course, makes no sense. We want to make sure that required educational credentials are fully justifiable. We want a doctor to have a medical degree, for instance, but only a fraction of Federal contract work is performed by licensed professionals. So, the bottom line is it should be a high bar for Federal officials to deny individuals the opportunity to compete to do work for the government. That is why we need this bill, and under this bill, OMB will ensure agencies follow this new protocol and it will provide them guidance on how alternative certifications, industry-recognized credentials, and work-based learning programs, such as apprenticeships, may satisfy educational requirements. And finally, the bill provides additional accountability and transparency with the GAO. The GAO will review and report to Congress on agency compliance under this law.

So, I want to thank Congressman Krishnamoorthi for joining me in this effort today. I want to thank the Chairman and the Ranking Member for their support during this bill today during markup, and I urge all Members on both sides of the aisle to support this

desperately needed legislation. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Krishnamoorthi from Illinois for 5 minutes.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member Raskin. Thank you, Congresswoman Mace for highlighting this very important issue. And we have talked about it many times, which is, you know, two-thirds of Americans do not have a 4-year college degree, as the Ranking Member mentioned, but, unfortunately, they are often barred from opportunities for which they possess the skills and the qualifications to do the work. And when you bar them from doing those jobs or prevent them from doing those jobs, guess what? You have higher costs and lower access. And so this aptly named bill, the ACCESS Act, Allowing Contractors to Choose Employees for Select Skills Act, allows our tax dollars to create the most expansive opportunities possible for the American work force.

Overreliance on educational requirements does not enhance the quality of services we receive. On the contrary, as I mentioned, those limits likely lead to less competition and higher costs. Ensuring that we tear the so-called “paper ceiling” and end hiring discrimination has long been a priority of mine. In 2018, working with Republican G.T. Thompson, I helped, with him, author the landmark bill called the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, which revolutionizes career and technical education and skills-based education by prioritizing skills based in non 4-year college career tracks for additional resources. This Congress, I introduced the bipartisan Opportunity to Compete Act, which would fight discrimination by large employers against hiring those without 4-year college degrees.

Blanket degree filters and rigid formulas do not work. I am very pleased to join with my Republican colleague Nancy Mace in a bipartisan manner, who, by the way, I did not know knows how to code in so many languages. I hope that comes in handy in this Congress. I am pleased to work with her in helping to break the barriers that, unfortunately, hold too many people back in this country, which are minimum education and minimum experience requirements, which do not adequately allow people to gain access to the opportunities to participate in Federal contracting. Again, I want to thank the Ranking Member. I want to thank Chairman Comer for allowing us to pass this bill on a bipartisan basis, and I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. Do any other Members wish to be recognized?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Seeing none, the question is now on the amendment in the nature of a substitute.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it and the amendment is agreed to.

The question is now on favorably reporting H.R. 7887, as amended.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it.

Ms. MACE. Mr. Chairman, may I request a recorded vote?

Chairman COMER. A recorded vote has been requested by Representative Mace. A recorded vote is ordered. As previously announced, further proceedings on the question will be postponed.

Our next item for consideration is **H.R. 7867**, the Renewing Efficiency in Government by Budgeting Act. The clerk will please designate the bill.

The CLERK. H.R. 7867, the Renewing Efficiency in Government by Budgeting Act, a bill to amend the Unfunded Mandate Reform Act of 1995 to require the Director of the Office of Management and Budget to establish a limit for the total amount of additional unfunded regulatory costs that may be imposed in a fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the bill should be considered as read and open for amendment at any point.

Without objection, so ordered.

The Chair recognizes himself to offer an amendment in the nature of a substitute. The clerk will please designate the amendment.

The CLERK. An amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 7867, as offered by Mr. Comer of Kentucky.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the amendment is considered as read and the substitute will be considered as original text for the purposes of further amendment.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for a statement on the bill and the amendment.

Over the past several decades and through changing administrations, the total cost of Federal regulations has ballooned to over \$3 trillion dollars, trillion with a "T." For context, that is larger than the gross domestic product of all but five of the largest national economies in the world. The burden of these costs is shouldered by businesses of all sizes, which ultimately pass along these costs to consumers in the form of higher prices. Small businesses are often the most directly impacted and frequently do not have the resources at their disposal to fund regulatory compliance teams.

H.R. 7867, the REG Budgeting Act, addresses this growing issue by requiring the Director of the Office of Management and Budget to set governmentwide limits as well as agency-specific limits on the total amount of additional unfunded regulatory costs new agency rules can impose each fiscal year. Originally pioneered by the Trump Administration, the use of budgeting to rein in excessive regulatory cost is proven to work. That includes the bill's net zero approach, which precludes OMB from allowing growth in overall cost unless Congress approves it.

This will hold the line on growth in total cost or even help reduce costs by incentivizing agencies to offset the cost of new regulations by rescinding old ones. Using this approach, the Trump Adminis-

tration produced an overall reduction of nearly \$280 billion in regulatory costs, a win for both businesses and consumers across the country. As families and businesses continue to experience ongoing economic hardships, Congress has the responsibility to reevaluate how the existing regulatory system can work better for the American people.

A report by the National Association of Manufacturers found that in 2022, Federal regulations cost businesses approximately \$12,800 per employee and even higher amounts for small businesses. Under the Biden Administration, the total number of pages of regulations totaled over 90,000 by the end of 2023. Furthermore, the American Action Forum found that the Biden Administration, by the start of February this year, had added \$451 billion in costs and over 286 million paperwork hours. Congress should alleviate unnecessary regulatory burdens and ensure the U.S. maintains a competitive economic advantage globally.

I thank my colleague, Mr. Fallon, Chairman of the Economic Growth and Energy Policy and Regulatory Subcommittee for diligent work on this necessary bill, and urge my colleagues to support this bill. I now recognize the Ranking Member for his opening statement.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I cannot support this bill in its current form. Ironically, in the name of opposing bureaucracy, the bill imposes an onerous and duplicative process that would severely restrict Federal rule-making with wholly arbitrary bureaucratic directives. The Unfunded Mandates Reform Act already requires Federal agencies to publish detailed statements and cost-benefit analyses prior to issuing a notice of proposed rule-making that would cost state, tribal, or local governments more than \$100 million annually. This bill follows the GOP Majority's continued efforts to undermine meaningful regulatory authority and roll back rules carried out by the Biden-Harris Administration to make our cars and roads safer, our workplaces free from toxic hazards, our bank accounts safe from fraud and manipulation, and our environment free from poisoning and contamination. This bill only focuses on the costs of rules without considering the corresponding benefits of the rules. It also creates duplicative and onerous new administrative hurdles in the rule-making process.

The Federal rule-making process has profound effects on American life, and I agree that that regulatory process should be continually modernized and revised. I am proud of President Biden's efforts to direct the OMB to evaluate and reform the regulatory review process. Then President Obama's Executive Order 13563 is also still in place, directing agencies to conduct periodic retrospective reviews of their rules so they can consider more effective alternatives. I believe that greater transparency and modernization within the rule-making process could help ensure that executive actions are made with fairness and democratic values in mind, but this bill is totally the wrong way to go about doing that.

The REG Budgeting Act would establish an extremely burdensome cost limit on new regs promulgated by the Federal Government to state, tribal, and local governments as well as the private sector, and would prohibit a swath of new regs from going into effect unless Congress approves it. This bill would tie the hands of

Federal agencies from carrying out programs and policies pursuing statutory purposes. I encourage my GOP colleagues to work with the Administration on finding effective and productive ways to modernize the rule-making process without stymieing agency activities in the interim. I urge my colleagues to oppose this bill, and I yield back to you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the sponsor of the bill, the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Fallon.

Mr. FALLON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, it is about really, philosophically, do you support more government or less? Do you want limited government, low taxes, reasonable regulation? Because I certainly do. And I think the American people have been crying for this for quite some time where, at the end of the day, do you support more rules and regulations at the Federal level or do you want less? Do you want a more powerful bureaucracy, or do you want more power given to the actual American people? Because as regulatory costs continue to grow at an alarming rate, bipartisan action is needed by Congress to rein in costs that are imposed by agencies during the rule-making process. A powerful way to do this is with regulatory budgeting.

Under Executive Order 13771, the Trump Administration put into place regulatory budgeting measures, setting an annual regulatory cost cap of net zero increases. Agencies complied with this cap by rescinding old regulations to offset the cost of new ones. One in, two out was how it was referred to. The result was absolutely powerful, a reduction of almost \$280 billion, with a “B,” \$280 billion in regulatory costs. That lifted a significant Federal regulatory burden from the backs of the American people and in particular small business. Building on this proven success, our bill, the Renewing Efficiency in Government by Budgeting Act, or REG Budgeting Act, makes regulatory budgeting a permanent feature of the regulatory system, finally placing a statutory—you know, putting some brakes on these runaway regulatory costs. And I believe this bill is truly commonsense, and I would hope it would get bipartisan support.

If we are to succeed in creating a more competitive economy, we must reform our regulatory system so that the United States and our businesses are not exhausting time and resources to comply with inefficient, duplicative, and unnecessarily burdensome regulations. It is tough to be an entrepreneur, particularly in a global economy, and we need to take the shackles off the folks that are taking risks to create jobs and opportunity and prosperity for our country.

In Texas, you know, oftentimes people say, Mr. Chairman, people vote with their feet. That is why I do not think it is a coincidence that the state of Texas, their population is growing, that the state of Florida’s population is growing, and you can see states like California losing an electoral vote for the first time and Illinois bleeding opportunity in jobs. New York, New Jersey, *et cetera*. So, allowing folks to come and relocate current compliance funds toward employee compensation and hiring and investment in R&D and sales and marketing is the way to go. And enhancing competitiveness and improving a return on investment is, again, commonsense. The

bottom line here is Congress needs to stop the way we have been doing business and step up and be accountable for any increases in total regulatory costs

I would like to thank my colleagues, Chairman Comer and Dr. Foxx, for co-leading this legislation with our office, and I urge all Members of our Committee to support the bill. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. Do any other Members wish to be recognized to speak on the bill?

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Chairman, I have a UC request.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Raskin.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you kindly. I have got a letter from the Leadership Conference on H.R. 7109 and a letter from the Coalition for Sensible Safeguards on H.R. 7867.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Chairman COMER. The question is now on the amendment in the nature of a substitute.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[Chorus of noes.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it. The amendment is agreed to.

The question is now on favorably reporting H.R. 7867, as amended.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[Chorus of noes.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it and the bill is ordered favorably, as amended.

Mr. RASKIN. I request a recorded vote.

Chairman COMER. The Ranking Member requests a recorded vote. A recorded vote is ordered. As previously announced, further proceedings on the question will be postponed.

Our next item for consideration is **H.R. 272**, the Astronauts Safe Temporary Ride Options Act. The clerk will please designate the bill.

The CLERK. H.R. 272, the Astronaut Safe Temporary Ride Act, a bill to authorize the expenditure of Federal funds for transportation of government astronauts returning from space for the performance of medical research, monitoring diagnosis, or treatment, or other official duties prior to receiving post-flight medical clearance to operate a motor vehicle.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the bill should be considered as read and open for amendment at any point.

Without objection, so ordered.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes himself to offer an amendment in the nature of a substitute. The clerk will please designate the amendment.

The CLERK. An amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 272, as offered by Mr. Comer of Kentucky.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the amendment is considered as read and the substitute will be considered as original text for the purposes of further amendment.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for a statement on the bill and the amendment.

H.R. 272, the ASTRO Act, will streamline a burdensome administrative process regarding governmentwide transportation for astronauts returning from space flight. When astronauts return from space flight, NASA provides them with home-to-work transportation so that the Agency can monitor, evaluate, diagnose, and provide these brave men and women with medical treatment until they are medically cleared to drive. Under existing statute, NASA's authorization of this transportation for the astronauts must include a contemporaneous report to Congress with details about the transportation, including the name and title of the employee. Reporting in this manner can be challenging to NASA as it can make it difficult to maintain up-to-date authorizations as crew members are replaced or reassigned to different missions.

The ASTRO Act will amend current law to enable NASA to authorize the use of official transportation between residence and worksite without the contemporaneous reporting requirement. The bill also provides transparency by requiring NASA to provide Congress with an annual report on its use of this new authorization. While it may sound like a mundane problem, the underlying need for this bill is anything but that. We owe it to these courageous women and men, who leave behind families and friends to spend months in space, to cut through the red tape and take care of them upon their return.

I thank the sponsor of the bill, Congressman Babin, for his work. I also thank the Science Committee for its work to favorably report the bill out during last month's markup by a 35 to zero vote. I urge my colleagues to do the same and support this bill. I now recognize the Ranking Member for his statement.

Mr. RASKIN. Thanks, Mr. Chair, and I support this bill. I figure if we can get our astronauts back from the moon for free, we can also afford to drop them off at their house, and I yield back.

Chairman COMER. Do any other Members wish to be heard?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The question is now on the amendment in the nature of a substitute.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it. The amendment is agreed to.

The question is now on favorably reporting H.R. 272, as amended.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of—the Chair recognizes Mr. Grothman.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Request a recorded vote.

Chairman COMER. A recorded vote has been requested. A recorded vote is ordered. As previously announced, further proceedings on the question will be postponed.

Our next item for consideration is **H.R. 3019**, the Federal Prison Oversight Act. The clerk will please designate the bill.

The CLERK. H.R. 3019, the Federal Prison Oversight Act, a bill to establish an inspections regime for the Bureau of Prisons, and for other purposes.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the bill should be considered as read and open for amendment at any point.

Without objection, so ordered.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes himself to offer an amendment in the nature of a substitute. The clerk will please designate the amendment.

The CLERK. An amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 3019, as offered by Mr. Comer of Kentucky.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the amendment is considered as read, and the substitute will be considered as original text for the purposes of further amendment.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for a statement on the bill and the amendment.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons operates 122 facilities nationwide. Conducting meaningful oversight with an organization of this size can be challenging. The Department of Justice's Office of the Inspector General handles criminal complaints on behalf of incarcerated people and Bureau staff. However, this office is overwhelmed with non-criminal complaints from incarcerated people, their friends and family, and the Bureau of Prisons staff. Examples of common complaints include poor prison conditions and civil rights violation. While these complaints often do not rise to the level of criminal misconduct, they are still very important and warrant investigation to determine if reforms are necessary.

The Federal Prison Oversight Act addresses this issue by ensuring that the incarcerated people, their families, and Bureau staff have a reliable mechanism to file complaints. First, the bill requires the Office of Inspector General to conduct inspections of Bureau prison facilities and provide recommendations to address each facility's shortcoming. The Office of the Inspector General will assign each facility a risk score, and high-risk facilities will receive more frequent inspections. Additionally, the bill creates an independent ombudsman within the Department of Justice to investigate issues that impact the health and safety of incarcerated individuals and staff. The ombudsman can initiate an investigation after receiving a complaint from an incarcerated person, their family, Bureau of Prisons staff, or others. If the investigation of these complaints finds significant harm, the ombudsman must report their findings to the Attorney General and Congress. The bill also ensures that both the inspector general and the ombudsman have access to all the Bureau-operating facilities and are authorized to conduct unannounced inspection visits. The bill encourages the Bureau to fund these investigations with between 0.2 and 0.5 percent of their annual appropriations.

The bill is endorsed by the Council of Prison Locals, representing nearly 30,000 correctional officers, along with public safety and civil rights organizations. The following organizations also endorsed the bill: the Council of Prison Locals, Families Against Mandatory Minimums, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Conservative Political Action Coalition, National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, Americans for Prosperity, Justice Action Network, Due Process Institute, Right On Crime, and the Faith and Freedom Coalition.

I would like to thank Senators Jon Ossoff, Mike Braun, and Richard Durbin for their work drafting this bill. I would also like to acknowledge Representatives Lucy McBath and Kelly Armstrong, a former Member of this Committee, for introducing this companion bill in the House. I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan bill to increase transparency of the Federal prison system and provide much needed recourse for incarcerated persons experiencing abuse. I now recognize the Ranking Member for his statement.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I strongly support the Federal Prison Oversight Act, which would strengthen oversight of our prisons and improve conditions for people who reside and work in them. I congratulate the bill's House leaders, Representatives Lucy McBath and Kelly Armstrong, as well as Senators Ossoff and Braun and Senate Majority Whip, Dick Durbin, for their bipartisan work on this legislation. The bill has won the support of a wide array of advocacy groups, including the ACLU, Americans for Prosperity, the Conservative Political Action Committee, Families Against Mandatory Minimums, and many more, including the Council of Prison Locals, which represents 30,000 correctional officers.

Federal prisons have long experienced systemic problems that threaten the health, the safety, and the civil rights of incarcerated people and the people who work with them. For example, last year, NPR reported that more than 4,950 incarcerated people died in facilities operated by the Bureau of Prisons in the last 10 years, and many either experienced delayed care or postponed care for serious medical problems. This February, the DOJ IG issued a scathing report of BOP-operated prisons, which found that systemic policy violations and failures contributed significantly to the problem of inmate suicide.

Bureau of Prisons facilities are responsible for more than 158,000 incarcerated people and more than 34,000 correctional officers and staff. As documented by GAO in congressional hearings, the Bureau of Prisons has consistently struggled with staffing shortages. According to the Council of Prison Locals, BOP has lost 20 percent of its employees since 2016 and only employs around 13,000 correctional officers today, despite receiving appropriations to fund more than 20,000. As of 2023, staffing levels for healthcare workers at BOP facilities was at only 69 percent capacity, and nearly 20 percent of the facilities do not have a healthcare program onsite at all to provide for routine and preventative healthcare services. Staffing shortages have contributed to disturbing and, at times, fatal delays in healthcare services for the incarcerated, and facilities are still

recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated disruptions to patient care.

GAO has also reported on BOP's challenges in upholding its responsibilities to help inmates prepare for successful release and reintegration, including full implementation of the First Step Act of 2018 to lower the risk of recidivism. Additionally, BOP has systemically struggled to make prudent use of resources due to a failure to effectively monitor and then evaluate its programs. Taken together, all these challenges led GAO to add the management of the Federal prison system to its 2023 high risk list, indicating the severity of the problem.

H.R. 3019 would take important steps by requiring the Department of Justice OIG to periodically inspect, evaluate, and report on policies and activities at BOP-operated facilities, with higher-risk facilities required to go through more frequent inspection. Such inspections may include reviews of confinement conditions, working conditions, policies and procedures related to housing confinement and other restrictive housing, healthcare programs, and complaints of violence and abuse against the incarcerated. The bill would also establish an ombudsman within DOJ that would be charged with receiving complaints related to issues at facilities that threaten the health, safety, welfare, or rights of inmates or staff. Misconduct, mismanagement, abuse, and negligence have no place in Federal Government operations, especially those dealing with people who are at their most vulnerable point and are most in need of a pathway back to society.

To make our community safer, uphold our values, and reduce recidivism, it is imperative that we bring increased transparency, accountability, and humanity to our prisons. The Federal Prison Oversight Act is an important step forward, and I urge my colleagues to support it today. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. Do any other Members seek recognition?

The Chair recognizes Mr. Higgins from Louisiana.

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

Chairman COMER. Will the clerk please report?

The CLERK. Amendment to the amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 3019, as offered by Mr. Higgins of Louisiana.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the amendment is considered as read.

I reserve a point of order.

The gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, is recognized for 5 minutes to explain his amendment.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today, I offer an amendment to H.R. 3019. The Federal Prison Oversight Act is a bipartisan piece of legislation that will enhance the safety and security of our Nation's Federal correctional facilities. This amendment, grounded in the principles of operational integrity and the well-being of our dedicated prison staff and the inmate population, seeks to direct the Bureau of Prisons to implement hiring requirements outlined in past years appropriations laws. By requiring the implementation of these hiring requirements, we are taking steps toward ensuring that our correctional facilities are properly staffed at the levels necessary to handle the complexities of the prison en-

vironment. This is not merely a policy adjustment. It is a measure to protect those who work within the walls of our prisons and those who reside there during their sentences.

By voting in favor of this amendment, we reaffirm our commitment to the safety of correctional officers and inmates alike, ensuring that the overarching goal of H.R. 3019, to improve security and safety conditions in our prisons, is met with clear and actionable steps in line with conditions found in current law. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment. It is a step forward in our ongoing efforts to reform our correctional system and reflects our dedication to the safety of those who serve our communities and those within the walls of our Federal prisons. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes himself to speak on the Higgins Amendment. I want to thank Mr. Higgins for his amendment. I appreciate your concern for the Bureau of Prisons staffing levels. Adequately staffing prisons is essential for the safety of both incarcerated individuals and the Bureau staff. However, as we discussed last night, that due to the subject matter of the underlying bill, there is an issue of germaneness to make this amendment to H.R. 3019, but I do concur with your goal of ensuring that Federal prisons are adequately staffed. I will say this publicly—if the gentleman is willing to withdraw his amendment, I will commit to working with you to find a path forward for this language either before House Floor action or in the Senate.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your commitment to getting this important provision added to the bill in some manner. I appreciate your commitment, and I withdraw my amendment.

Chairman COMER. I want to thank the gentleman for withdrawing his amendment and look forward to working with you on this bill before it goes to the Floor to make it better and to address your rightful concern.

Do any other Members seek recognition to speak on the bill or to offer amendments?

Mr. CLOUD. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

Chairman COMER. Will the clerk please designate the amendment?

The CLERK. Amendment to the amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 3019, as offered by Mr. Cloud of Texas.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the amendment is considered as read. I reserve a point of order.

The gentleman from Texas, Mr. Cloud, is recognized for 5 minutes to explain his amendment.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will not need 5 minutes. I just wanted to clarify and to firm up the term “gender-appropriate healthcare” in the bill to “sex-specific healthcare.” Lately, there has been a lot of discussion to redefine the word “gender” to refer to self-declared gender identity rather than to the biological reality of being a male or female. I understand this language is intended to ensure that female inmates receive the needed healthcare, but given the radical actions lately to promote gender ideology in Federal prisons, it is important that we define this term very clearly.

Recent data from the Wisconsin Department of Corrections found that over half of males in the prison system who identify as transgender have been convicted of at least one count of sexual assault or sexual abuse. We should not have any ambiguity in this bill when it comes to protecting the women who are in our prison system. This amendment would move any ability for any administration to reinterpret this provision to push the idea that inmates have the right to taxpayer-funded gender transition procedures on the taxpayers' dime. Thank you. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the Ranking Member.

Mr. RASKIN. Will the gentleman yield for a question?

Mr. CLOUD. I have already yielded to the Chairman.

Mr. RASKIN. Oh, OK. I would like to ask the gentleman if he would yield to a question on my time.

Mr. CLOUD. Sure.

Mr. RASKIN. Yes. To understand the genesis of this amendment, you are reading something in the bill that would provide for gender surgery or medical procedures?

Mr. CLOUD. I want to make sure that this does not get interpreted by anyone in the Bureau of Prisons or an agency to mean that otherwise. I tried to get it in report language, but I have been told there will be no report language for this bill, and so all that is left to me is the amendment process, so.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. And will you just read to me the passage that you think could be misinterpreted in that way?

Mr. CLOUD. The amendment—and I think I have the page numbers wrong here, but it simply strikes “gender-appropriate” and inserts “sex-specific” before “healthcare.”

Mr. RASKIN. OK. All right. Thank you for yielding for the question. I am afraid I do not see the problem that this amendment is attempting to address, and I think we should stick with the original language that is in the bill, and I yield back to you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. Do any other Members seek recognition?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Seeing none, the question is on the amendment offered by Mr. Cloud from Texas.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[Chorus of noes.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it and the amendment is agreed to.

Mr. RASKIN. I would like to ask for a recorded vote on that.

Chairman COMER. A recorded vote is ordered. As previously announced, further proceedings on the question will be postponed.

For what purpose does the gentleman from Texas seek recognition? Do you have any other amendments?

Mr. CLOUD. No, sir. Thank you.

Chairman COMER. OK. All right. Our next item for consideration is **H.R. 7869**, the CBPO Retirement Technical Corrections Act. The clerk will please designate the bill.

The CLERK. H.R. 7869, the CBPO Retirement Technical Corrections Act, a bill to correct the inequitable denial of enhanced retirement and annuity benefits to certain U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officers.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the bill should be considered as read and open for amendment at any point.

Without objection, so ordered.

The Chair recognizes himself to offer an amendment in the nature of a substitute. The clerk will please designate the amendment.

The CLERK. An amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 7869, as offered by Mr. Comer of Kentucky.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, the amendment is considered as read and the substitute will be considered as original text for the purposes of further amendment.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for a statement on the bill and the amendment.

In 2007, Congress authorized enhanced retirement benefits for Customs and Border Protection officers to align with benefits provided to other Federal law enforcement agencies. As a condition of receiving the enhanced benefits, officers hired on or after July 6, 2008 effective date were subjected to a maximum start and end of service age 36 and 57, respectively, and minimum service requirement of 20 years. Existing officers received the enhanced benefits without the maximum age and minimum service requirements for service time after the effective date. A small group of officers who had received tentative offers of employment before the effective date but had not yet begun service were incorrectly told by CBP that they would be treated like existing officers, meaning they were told they would receive enhanced retirement benefits without age and service requirements for service time after the July 6, 2008 effective date. Unfortunately, the guidance provided to this small group of officers at the time was ultimately incorrect. It was not until 2021 when CBP discovered their mistake that those officers were notified that they were actually subject to the maximum age and minimum service requirements.

Since this small group of officers had planned their retirements and their lives and careers around the incorrect guidance given to them by CBP, this bill corrects the misunderstanding by providing enhanced benefit to this small group in the same way as existing officers, as they were told at the time. This bill also directs a GAO report to ensure proper management of this benefit at CBP to prevent any similar mistakes from occurring. I am pleased this bill provides an opportunity to right a wrong for American CBP officers while providing accountability measures to protect against similar mistakes from happening again. I urge my colleagues to support this commonsense bill, which is identical to the Senate-passed bill and I recognize the Ranking Member for his statement.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to commend Representative Fitzpatrick for introducing the bill. I am a proud cosponsor along with our colleague, Mr. Lynch.

In 2008, the CBP told approximately 1,200 applicants that they would be eligible for an enhanced retirement benefit package. They received a job offer before the enhanced benefit took effect on July

6, 2008, but they started their jobs after July 6. Over a decade later, CBP finally realized its retirement policy toward this group of officers did not align with the law. It rescinded these officers' eligibility for the enhanced benefits in 2021. This bill directs CBP to reinstate those benefits. A decades-long error should not mean that 1,200 Customs and Border Patrol officers are denied the retirement benefits that they were promised. The bill would ensure that these officers receive the benefits that they actually deserve. Recognizing mistakes and working to correct them, as this legislation aims to do, is clearly the right thing, and I yield back to you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. Do any other Members seek recognition on the bill?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The question is now on the amendment in the nature of a substitute.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it. The amendment is agreed to.

The question is now on favorably reporting H.R. 7869, as amended.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it and the bill is ordered favorably reported, as amended.

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Chairman?

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes Mr. Higgins.

Mr. HIGGINS. A recorded vote.

Chairman COMER. A recorded vote has been requested by Mr. Higgins. A recorded vote is ordered. As previously announced, further proceedings on the question will be postponed.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Chairman, I had requested a vote on Mr. Cloud's amendment, and I want to withdraw my request for that vote.

Chairman COMER. OK. The request for a recorded vote on the Cloud Amendment has been withdrawn.

Without objection, so ordered.

Pursuant to the previous order, the Chair declares the Committee in recess subject to the call of the Chair. We will plan to reconvene at 3 p.m. sharp.

The Committee stands in recess.

[Recess.]

Chairman COMER. The Committee will come to order.

While everyone is waiting to get seated, I have a couple of things I would like to enter into the record. I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record an article from the Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy, which offers perspective on E.O. 13771 and the U.S. Federal regulatory budget.

Without objection, so ordered.

Chairman COMER. I also ask unanimous consent to enter the following letters of support into the record: a joint letter of support from Families Against Mandatory Minimums, the National District Attorneys Association, Prison Fellowship, Justice Action Network, Due Process Institute, and Arnold Ventures, a joint letter of support from the Conservative Political Action Coalition and the Faith and Freedom Coalition, and a letter of support from Right On Crime.

Without objection, so ordered.

The question now is on favorably reporting H.R. 7109. Members will record their votes using the electronic voting system. The clerk will now open the vote on favorably reporting H.R. 7109.

[Voting.]

Ms. CROCKETT. Mr. Chair? Mr. Chair, a parliamentary inquiry. I am curious to know if it was brought out earlier that the state of Texas was able to gain two new seats in Texas because of the number of Latinos they had—

Chairman COMER. What is your parliamentary inquiry?

Ms. CROCKETT. That was my inquiry.

Chairman COMER. Sorry. Out of order.

Mr. SESSIONS. I will be glad to answer that.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Chairman? Mr. Chairman, a parliamentary inquiry.

Chairman COMER. State your—

Mr. RASKIN. Would it be appropriate to suggest that because this is one divided vote among many, where we are agreed, that we could proceed to do the other votes and return to this vote in the event that there are too many Members of the Majority who are missing right now? Just—

Chairman COMER. We have two Members on the way. It should be handled within a matter of seconds.

Mr. RASKIN. OK.

Chairman COMER. I apologize for the inconvenience. For the record, I was waiting for Mr. Mfume, but—

[Laughter.]

Mr. RASKIN. OK.

Chairman COMER. Does any other Member wish to vote?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The clerk will close the vote and report the vote total.

The CLERK. Mr. Chairman, on this vote the ayes are 22. The nays are 20.

Chairman COMER. The ayes have it and the bill is ordered favorably reported.

Without objection, the motion to reconsider is laid on the table.

The Committee will now resume consideration of H.R. 7868, the FEHB Protection Act. The question is now on the previously postponed amendment in the nature of a substitute, offered by the gentleman from Maryland. This is the Raskin Amendment. Members will record their votes using the electronic voting system. The clerk will now open the vote on the amendment of H.R. 7868, on the Raskin Amendment.

[Voting.]

Chairman COMER. Have all Members been recorded who wish to be recorded?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Does any Member wish to change their vote?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The clerk will close the vote and report the vote total.

The CLERK. Mr. Chairman, on this vote the ayes are 20. The nays are 23.

Chairman COMER. The noes have it, and the Raskin Amendment is not agreed to.

The question is now on the amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 7868.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it. The amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 7868 is agreed to.

The question is on favorably reporting H.R. 7868. Members will record their votes using the electronic voting system. The clerk will now open the vote on favorably reporting H.R. 7868.

[Voting.]

Chairman COMER. Have all Members been recorded who wish to be recorded?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Does any Member wish to change their vote?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The clerk will close the vote and report the vote total.

The CLERK. Mr. Chairman, on this vote the ayes are 37. The nays are 6.

Chairman COMER. The ayes have it, and the bill is ordered favorably reported.

Without objection, the motion to reconsider is laid on the table.

The question is now on favorably reporting H.R. 7524. Members will record their votes using the electronic voting system. The clerk will now open the vote on favorably reporting H.R. 7524.

[Voting.]

Chairman COMER. Have all Members been recorded who wish to be recorded?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Does any Member wish to change their vote?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The clerk will close the vote and report the vote total.

The CLERK. Mr. Chairman, on this vote the ayes are 43. The nays are zero.

Chairman COMER. The ayes have it, and the bill is ordered favorably reported.

Without objection, the motion to reconsider is laid on the table.

The question is now on favorably reporting H.R. 7887. Members will record their votes using the electronic voting system. The clerk will now open the vote on favorably reporting 7887.

[Voting.]

Chairman COMER. Have all Members been recorded who wish to be recorded?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Does any Member wish to change their vote?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The clerk will close the vote and report the vote total.

The CLERK. Mr. Chairman, on this vote the ayes are 43. The nays are zero.

Chairman COMER. The ayes have it, and the bill is ordered favorably reported.

Without objection, the motion to reconsider is laid on the table.

The question is on favorably reporting H.R. 7867. Members will record their votes using the electronic voting system. The clerk will now open the vote on favorably reporting H.R. 7867.

[Voting.]

Chairman COMER. Have all Members been recorded who wish to be recorded?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Does any Member wish to change their vote?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The clerk will close the vote and report the vote total.

The CLERK. Mr. Chairman, on this vote the ayes are 24. The nays are 19.

Chairman COMER. The ayes have it, and the bill is ordered favorably reported.

Without objection, the motion to reconsider is laid on the table.

The question is now on favorably reporting H.R. 272. Members will record their votes using the electronic voting system. The clerk will now open the vote on favorably reporting H.R. 272.

[Voting.]

Chairman COMER. Have all Members been recorded who wish to be recorded?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Does any Member wish to change their vote?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The clerk will now close the vote and report the vote total.

The CLERK. Mr. Chairman, on this vote the ayes are 42. The nays are zero.

Chairman COMER. The ayes have it, and the bill is ordered favorably reported.

Without objection, the motion to reconsider is laid on the table.

The question is now on the amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 3019.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it. The amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 3019 is agreed to.

The question is now on favorably reporting H.R. 3019. Members will record their vote using the electronic voting system. The clerk will now open the vote on favorably reporting H.R. 3019.

[Voting.]

Chairman COMER. Have all Members been recorded who wish to be recorded?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Does any Member wish to change their vote?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The clerk will close the vote and report the vote total.

The CLERK. Mr. Chairman, on this vote the ayes are 41. The nays are 1.

Chairman COMER. The ayes have it, and the bill is ordered favorably reported.

Without objection, the motion to reconsider is laid on the table.

The question is now on favorably reporting H.R. 7869. Members will record their votes using the electronic voting system. The clerk will now open the vote on favorably reporting H.R. 7869.

[Voting.]

Chairman COMER. Have all Members been recorded who wish to be recorded?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Does any Member wish to change their vote?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The clerk will close the vote and report the vote total.

The CLERK. Mr. Chairman, on this vote the ayes are 41. The nays are zero.

Chairman COMER. The ayes have it, and the bill is ordered favorably reported.

Without objection, the motion to reconsider is laid on the table.

OK. Before moving on to the next matter, I want to discuss an update to the Committee's markup process. Today, the en bloc postal namings will be dispensed with by a traditional voice vote and, if requested, a recorded vote.

Pursuant to notice, I now call up the following en bloc postal-naming bills, which were distributed in advance on this markup: H.R.s 1555, 3354, 5867, 7180, 7199, 7385, 7423, 7417, 6633, 1823, 7606, and 7607.

Without objection, the bills are considered read.

If any Member would like to speak on any of the measures, they may do so now.

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Chairman?

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes Mr. Higgins from Louisiana.

Mr. HIGGINS. Today, Mr. Chairman, I would like to speak briefly in support of H.R. 7423, a bill that honors the memory of Luke Letlow, a devoted public servant and a true son of Louisiana, by designating the post office in Rayville, Louisiana as the Luke Letlow Post Office Building.

Luke's journey was one of dedication, service, and an unwavering commitment to the people of Louisiana's 5th congressional District. Although he was tragically taken from us before he could serve in this House, his legacy endorsed through the impactful work he accomplished through his family and the lives he touched. It is also a testament to the strength and resilience of his family that his wife, Congresswoman Julia Letlow, now serves the very constituents Luke was elected to represent. Her presence in Congress is a daily reminder of Luke's vision and his dedication to public service.

By naming the post office in Rayville after Luke, we not only honor his memory and contributions, but we also reaffirm our own commitment to the values he stood for: community service, God, and family. I urge my colleagues to support 7423 to ensure Luke Letlow's legacy is appropriately honored and remembered for generations to come. Let us pay tribute to a life well lived and a mission carried forward by those he loved. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield.

Chairman COMER. Thank you. The gentleman yields back. Any other Members seek recognition?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The question is now on favorably reporting the en bloc package.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. All those opposed, signify by saying no.

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it.

OK. A recorded vote has been requested. Members will record their vote using the electronic voting system. The clerk will now open the vote on favorably reporting the en bloc package.

[Voting.]

Chairman COMER. Have all Members been recorded who wish to be recorded?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Does any Member wish to change their vote?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Have all Members been recorded?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. The clerk will close the vote and report the vote total.

The CLERK. Mr. Chairman, on this vote the ayes are 37. The nays are 1.

Chairman COMER. The ayes have it, and the bill is ordered favorably reported.

Without objection, the motion to reconsider is laid on the table.

Pursuant to House Rule XI, Clause 2, I ask that Committee Members have the right to file with the clerk of the Committee supplemental additional, Minority, and dissenting views.

Without objection.

Additionally, the staff is authorized to make necessary technical and conforming changes to the bills reported today, subject to the approval of the Minority.

Without objection, so ordered.

If there is no further business before the Committee, without objection, the Committee stands adjourned.
[Whereupon, at 3:39 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

