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(Original Signature of Member)

117TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

**H. R.** \_\_\_\_\_

To improve cybersecurity practices and improve digital literacy among veterans, and for other purposes.

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IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Ms. SLOTKIN introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**A BILL**

To improve cybersecurity practices and improve digital literacy among veterans, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Empowering Veterans  
5 Against Cyberthreats Act of 2022”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

8 (1) Adversaries from Russia, China, and Iran  
9 are using information warfare to influence democ-

1 racies across the world, and extremist organizations  
2 often use digital communications to recruit mem-  
3 bers. Influence campaigns from foreign adversaries  
4 reached tens of millions of voters during the 2016  
5 and 2018 elections with racially and divisively tar-  
6 geted messages. The Unites States can fight these  
7 influences by ensuring that citizens of the United  
8 States possess the necessary skills to discern  
9 disinformation and misinformation and protect  
10 themselves from foreign influence campaigns.

11 (2) Researchers have documented persistent,  
12 pervasive, and coordinated online targeting of mem-  
13 bers of the Armed Forces, veterans, and their fami-  
14 lies by foreign adversaries seeking to undermine  
15 United States democracy in part because of public  
16 trust placed in these communities.

17 (3) A 2017 report by the University of Oxford's  
18 Graphika Institute, titled "Social Media  
19 Disinformation Campaigns Against US Military Per-  
20 sonnel and Veterans", concluded that "The pubic  
21 tends to place trust in military personnel and vet-  
22 erans, making them potentially influential voters and  
23 community leaders. Given this trust and their role in  
24 ensuring national security, these individuals have the  
25 potential to become particular targets for influence

1 operations and information campaigns conducted on  
2 social media. There are already reports of US serv-  
3 ice personnel being confronted by foreign intelligence  
4 agencies while posted abroad, with details of their  
5 personal lives gleaned from social media.”.

6 (4) The Select Committee on Intelligence of the  
7 Senate found in its investigation of the interference  
8 in the 2016 election that social media posts by the  
9 Internet Research Agency (IRA) of Russia reached  
10 tens of millions of voters in 2016 and were meant  
11 to pit the people of the United States against one  
12 another and sow discord. Volume II of the Commit-  
13 tee’s investigation found that the Internet Research  
14 Agency’s Instagram account with the second largest  
15 reach used the handle “@american.veterans” and  
16 was “aimed at patriotic, conservative audiences, col-  
17 lected 215,680 followers, and generated nearly 18.5  
18 million engagements.”.

19 (5) A 2019 investigative report by the Vietnam  
20 Veterans of America (VVA) titled “An Investigation  
21 into Foreign Entities who are Targeting Troops and  
22 Veterans Online”, found that the Internet Research  
23 Agency targeted veterans and the followers of sev-  
24 eral congressionally chartered veterans service orga-  
25 nizations with at least 113 advertisements during

1 and following the 2016 election and that “this rep-  
2 represents a fraction of the Russian activity that tar-  
3 geted this community with divisive propaganda.”.  
4 The report also found that foreign actors have been  
5 impersonating veterans through social-media ac-  
6 counts and interacting with veterans and veterans  
7 groups on social media to spread propaganda and  
8 disinformation. To counter these acts, Vietnam Vet-  
9 erans of America recommended that the Department  
10 of Veterans Affairs “immediately develop plans to  
11 make the cyber-hygiene of veterans an urgent pri-  
12 ority within the Department of Veterans Affairs.  
13 The VA must educate and train veterans on per-  
14 sonal cybersecurity: how to mitigate vulnerabilities,  
15 vigilantly maintain safe practices, and recognize  
16 threats, including how to identify instances of online  
17 manipulation.”.

18 (6) The Cyberspace Solarium Commission, a bi-  
19 cameral and bipartisan commission, established by  
20 section 1652 of the John S. McCain National De-  
21 fense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 (Pub-  
22 lic Law 115–232), concluded in its finished report  
23 that the “U.S. government should promote digital  
24 literacy, civics education, and public awareness to  
25 build societal resilience to foreign, malign cyber-en-



1 such manner, and containing such information as the Sec-  
2 retary may require, including, at a minimum the following:

3 (1) A description of the activities the eligible  
4 entity intends to carry out with the grant funds.

5 (2) An estimate of the costs associated with  
6 such activities.

7 (3) Such other information and assurances as  
8 the Secretary may require.

9 (c) ACTIVITIES.—An eligible entity shall use the  
10 amount of a grant awarded under the program required  
11 by subsection (a) to carry out one or more of the following  
12 activities to improve cyber-hygiene and increase digital  
13 and media literacy among veterans:

14 (1) Develop competencies in cyber-hygiene.

15 (2) Develop media literacy and digital citizen-  
16 ship competencies by promoting veterans’—

17 (A) research and information fluency;

18 (B) critical thinking and problem solving  
19 skills;

20 (C) technology operations and concepts;

21 (D) information and technological literacy;

22 (E) concepts of media and digital represen-  
23 tation and stereotyping;

24 (F) understanding of explicit and implicit  
25 media and digital messages;

1 (G) understanding of values and points of  
2 view that are included and excluded in media  
3 and digital content;

4 (H) understanding of how media and dig-  
5 ital content may influence ideas and behaviors;

6 (I) understanding of the importance of ob-  
7 taining information from multiple media  
8 sources and evaluating sources for quality;

9 (J) understanding how information on dig-  
10 ital platforms can be altered through algo-  
11 rithms, editing, and augmented reality;

12 (K) ability to create media and digital con-  
13 tent in civically and socially responsible ways;  
14 and

15 (L) understanding of influence campaigns  
16 conducted by foreign adversaries and the tactics  
17 employed by foreign adversaries for conducting  
18 influence campaigns.

19 (d) REPORTING.—

20 (1) REPORTS BY GRANT RECIPIENTS.—Each re-  
21 cipient of a grant under the program required by  
22 subsection (a) shall, not later than one year after  
23 the date on which the recipient first receives funds  
24 pursuant to the grant, submit to the Secretary a re-  
25 port describing the activities the recipient carried

1 out using grant funds and the effectiveness of those  
2 activities.

3 (2) REPORT BY THE SECRETARY.—Not later  
4 than 90 days after the date on which the Secretary  
5 receives the last report the Secretary expects to re-  
6 ceive under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall sub-  
7 mit to Congress a report describing the activities  
8 carried out under this section and the effectiveness  
9 of those activities.

10 (e) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-  
11 gress that the Secretary should—

12 (1) establish and maintain a list of eligible enti-  
13 ties that receive a grant under the program required  
14 by subsection (a), and individuals designated by  
15 those eligible entities as participating individuals;  
16 and

17 (2) make that list available to those eligible en-  
18 tities and participating individuals in order to pro-  
19 mote communication and further exchange of infor-  
20 mation regarding sound digital citizenship and  
21 media literacy practices among recipients of grants  
22 under the program required by subsection (a).

23 (f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is  
24 authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section

1 \$20,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2022, 2024, and  
2 2026.

3 (g) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

4 (1) CYBER-HYGIENE.—The term “cyber-hy-  
5 giene” means practices and steps that users of com-  
6 puters and other internet connected devices take to  
7 maintain and improve online security, maintain the  
8 proper functioning of computers devices, and protect  
9 computers and devices from cyberattacks and unau-  
10 thorized use.

11 (2) DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP.—The term “digital  
12 citizenship” means the ability to—

13 (A) safely, responsibly, and ethically use  
14 communication technologies and digital infor-  
15 mation technology tools and platforms;

16 (B) create and share media content using  
17 principles of social and civic responsibility and  
18 with awareness of the legal and ethical issues  
19 involved; and

20 (C) participate in the political, economic,  
21 social, and cultural aspects of life related to  
22 technology, communications, and the digital  
23 world by consuming and creating digital con-  
24 tent, including media.

1           (3) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible enti-  
2           ty” means—

3                   (A) a civil society organization, including  
4                   community groups, nongovernmental organiza-  
5                   tions, nonprofit organization, labor organiza-  
6                   tions, indigenous groups, charitable organiza-  
7                   tions, professional associations, and founda-  
8                   tions; and

9                   (B) congressionally chartered veterans  
10                  service organizations.

11           (4) MEDIA LITERACY.—The term “media lit-  
12           eracy” means the ability to—

13                   (A) access relevant and accurate informa-  
14                   tion through media in a variety of forms;

15                   (B) critically analyze media content and  
16                   the influences of different forms of media;

17                   (C) evaluate the comprehensiveness, rel-  
18                   evance, credibility, authority, and accuracy of  
19                   information;

20                   (D) make educated decisions based on in-  
21                   formation obtained from media and digital  
22                   sources;

23                   (E) operate various forms of technology  
24                   and digital tools; and

1 (F) reflect on how the use of media and  
2 technology may affect private and public life.

3 (5) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means  
4 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.