

and court proceedings. Agencies would be required to provide information requested by the ACUS for the development of the database, but, importantly, the ACUS would be required to withhold information from the database if disclosure is prohibited by law or court order, the privacy that was just recently mentioned.

The Open Book on Equal Access to Justice Act ensures that agencies are operating under the watchful public eye and that taxpayer dollars are being spent properly.

Our Federal Government is too big, in my opinion, and I believe it needs to be downsized; but until we make that happen, transparency should be the minimum requirement. That is why H.R. 1033 is important. It is common sense, plain and simple. When the Federal Government is spending money, Congress needs to exercise oversight to ensure it is being done the way the law requires.

For most people who are facing a lawsuit against the Federal Government, it is a once-in-a-lifetime challenge and a daunting suit to undertake, even if they are completely in the right. It is only fair that when the court rules in favor of an American in litigation against a Federal agency, the American should be permitted to recoup their legal costs from that Federal agency.

This act gave Americans the power to take on our vast and sprawling bureaucracy by removing barriers to justice for those with limited access to resources. However, since the original reporting requirements were halted by Congress, information on these payments under law is severely lacking. This tracking will ensure the integrity and the purpose in which the Congress had set forth.

It is past time we shine light on this issue. We owe transparency to the taxpayers who are financing the law, and we owe it to the citizens, the small businesses, the veterans, and the Social Security claimants, who rely on the law.

H.R. 1033 represents a bipartisan agreement that transparency over payments that were made under the Equal Access to Justice Act needs to be restored. The Open Book on Equal Access to Justice Act will help ensure that taxpayer dollars are being spent as intended under this law. This will bring the transparency and accountability back to a program where it is sorely needed; and that is just as simple and plain as it can get. So I would urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Georgia has made a very powerful argument for a bipartisan push for transparency and accountability.

I yield such time as he may consume to the distinguished gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COHEN).

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the time, and I appreciate the kind words that Chairman GOODLATTE

and my friend, Mr. COLLINS, have tossed my way.

We do get along up here, amazingly enough. People think that we all just fight all the time and we have nothing no common. There are some big issues that do divide us, and that is why you have competitive elections with two parties and two different debates. But most folks up here get along, and are friends, and we do have legislation that we can work on, and this is one of those places where Mr. COLLINS and Mr. GOODLATTE and other members of the Judiciary Committee worked with me and others to bring this bill to the floor.

The Equal Access to Justice Act will allow Americans to recover attorneys' fees and costs when they win a lawsuit against the Federal Government. This will enable ordinary citizens, veterans, seniors, small business owners, advocates for clean air and clean water, et cetera, to fight unfair or illegal government actions without fear of having to pay court costs and without fear of having attorneys' fees that they otherwise might not be able to afford.

The law has been a success. However, in 1995, an important reporting requirement was removed from the law, and it made it harder for the public to see how much money the government had awarded. Our bill, H.R. 1033, the Open Book on Equal Access to Justice Act, restores the law's tracking and reporting requirements of payments awarded so the American people can have access to this important information. It will do this by requiring the group called ACUS, an acronym, which we have too many of up here, but this one is the Administrative Conference of the United States, a highly respected nonpartisan agency which was greatly championed by Justice Scalia, to post in an online database the fees and costs awarded in these cases. The database would also include the number and nature of the claims involved. The availability of this information will help keep the public informed and help Congress to conduct better oversight.

I thank my Judiciary Committee colleague, DOUG COLLINS from Georgia, for his partnership on the bill. I would like to thank Representatives SCHRADER and COLLIN PETERSON for their support for this bill on our side of the aisle, as well as JASON CHAFFETZ, LIZ CHENEY, PAUL GOSAR, and RAUL LABRADOR on the Republican side, as well as Chairman GOODLATTE.

And I would like to recall the work of our former colleague, Congresswoman Cynthia Lummis, who had this bill in the past, and we worked together to try to make it a bipartisan effort and pass it. She worked doggedly on the legislation for years, and I know that she will be pleased that we are building upon her efforts. And while she is no longer here, she is truly in a better place, Wyoming, I think it is, a nice place.

I urge the House to pass the Open Book on Equal Access to Justice Act. And I was pleased the Cats won.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I do not believe I have any speakers remaining.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to recognize my colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

As Mr. COHEN has pointed out, this legislation has been a model of bipartisan collaboration, and the work product shows the investment of both sides in it. So I want to salute everybody for their diligence in helping to craft this important legislation. The gentlemen from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS) and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COHEN), as well as our former colleague, the gentlewoman from Wyoming, Ms. Lummis, have cooperatively worked to effectuate a very effective, commonsense bill that will improve the accountability and the transparency of the Federal Government. This is a commendable accomplishment.

Accordingly, I would ask all of our colleagues to join us in supporting this legislation.

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

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the legislation.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1033.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 6:30 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 5 o'clock and 31 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1830

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. HOLDING) at 6 o'clock and 30 minutes p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, proceedings will resume on motions to suspend the rules previously postponed.

Votes will be taken in the following order:

H.R. 699, by the yeas and nays; and

H.R. 863, by the yeas and nays.

The first electronic vote will be conducted as a 15-minute vote. The second