

from Illinois (Mr. LAHOOD) to introduce and move ahead, is key to ensuring that the right workers get these job-finding supports. Even a week or two of getting a paycheck instead of an unemployment benefit makes a difference for a household budget.

I hope this bill is just the first effort to provide commonsense help so that Americans can work and support their families. A good next step would be to enact universal paid family and medical leave and guaranteed childcare. It is an embarrassment that some continue to block enactment of these essential supports that all other developed countries provide.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with my colleagues to support workers and enact this bipartisan bill before the end of the year. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LAHOOD), the chairman of our Work and Welfare Subcommittee.

Mr. LAHOOD. Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman SMITH for his leadership on this bill.

I rise today in strong support of our bill, H.R. 5861, the BRIDGE for Workers Act. This bipartisan bill demonstrates our joint commitment in Congress to supporting American workers.

Unemployment insurance is meant to help people without a job get through a rough patch and find new opportunity to support themselves and their families.

Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment grants allow States to provide services to recipients of unemployment benefits who are identified as those who could return to work more quickly. These grants are used for job skills training, resume preparation, English as a second language classes, and career exploration to connect unemployed workers to in-demand jobs.

Reemployment services have been demonstrated to improve employment outcomes and reduce the number of weeks that participants receive unemployment benefits. In addition, the program strengthens program integrity by ensuring claimants are complying with eligibility rules.

The bill before us today would make a technical correction to clarify that reemployment services provided through these Federal grants can be provided to all unemployment insurance claimants, not just those most likely to exhaust their benefits, as has been interpreted by the Department of Labor.

I thank my bill's co-lead and fellow Illinoisan and friend, DANNY DAVIS, the ranking member of the Work and Welfare Subcommittee, for his work on this bill, which passed out of the Committee on Ways and Means with unanimous bipartisan support.

This legislation provides the permanent flexibility States need to make reemployment services a successful

tool for those who have lost their job through no fault of their own. This really is a bridge to help workers. I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

This bipartisan legislation will help more Americans in a rough patch get back on their feet quickly and back into the workforce.

Communities across the country are currently in the middle of a multiple-year labor shortage. We know this from the companies of all sizes and in all industries that have warned what the lack of available workers is doing to their business. Some are cutting hours of operation or increasing customer wait times, while businesses forfeit opportunities to expand and grow because of the lack of labor.

This shortage makes business less productive, slows down our economy, and adds to our national debt. Ultimately, families pay the highest price when able-bodied workers can't or don't find new employment.

This bill takes steps to tackle the labor shortage by expanding needed job placement services to individuals receiving unemployment. This bipartisan bill is an easy, commonsense win for America's workers and small businesses.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to vote to advance this legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5861, as amended.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

TAXPAYER DATA PROTECTION ACT

Mr. SMITH of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 8292) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to increase penalties for unauthorized disclosure of taxpayer information, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 8292

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Taxpayer Data Protection Act".

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN PENALTIES FOR UNAUTHORIZED DISCLOSURES OF TAXPAYER INFORMATION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Paragraphs (1), (2), (3), (4), and (5) of section 7213(a) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 are each amended by striking "\$5,000, or imprisonment of not more than 5

years" and inserting "\$250,000, or imprisonment of not more than 10 years".

(b) DISCLOSURES OF RETURN INFORMATION OF MULTIPLE TAXPAYERS TREATED AS MULTIPLE VIOLATIONS.—Section 7213(a) of such Code is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(6) DISCLOSURES OF RETURN INFORMATION OF MULTIPLE TAXPAYERS TREATED AS MULTIPLE VIOLATIONS.—For purposes of paragraphs (1), (2), (3), (4), and (5), a separate violation occurs with respect to each taxpayer whose return or return information is disclosed in violation of any such paragraph."

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall apply to disclosures made after the date of the enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SMITH) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri.

GENERAL LEAVE

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

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

There was no objection.

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Mr. SMITH of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in favor of the Taxpayer Data Protection Act. When Americans file their taxes, they expect their personal data and tax information are confidential.

Between 2017 and 2021, Charles Littlejohn, who worked as a contractor for the IRS, stole taxpayer information, and he stole a lot of it. He gave it to The New York Times and ProPublica, who published articles containing that confidential tax information about President Trump and other notable figures. Mr. Littlejohn then destroyed evidence and obstructed law enforcement investigations.

Despite his efforts to cover up his crimes, Mr. Littlejohn admitted that he was "aware of the potential consequences" and, in fact, made his decision "with the full knowledge that [he] would likely end up in a courtroom."

Current law failed to deter Mr. Littlejohn from stealing and leaking private and sensitive taxpayer information. Moreover, the Department of Justice only charged Mr. Littlejohn with a single count of unauthorized disclosure of private tax information.

Given this lackluster charge, Republicans wrote the judge urging the court to sentence Mr. Littlejohn to the maximum sentence for the crimes he committed, particularly given the number of taxpayers impacted by his actions.

Mr. Littlejohn ultimately received the maximum sentence available, but the court was limited to the single count that the Department of Justice brought charges on.

This bipartisan bill ensures that the punishment fits the crime. Current law states that any violation shall be a felony punishable by a fine in any amount not to exceed \$5,000 or imprisonment of not more than 5 years or both.

This bill increases the maximum penalty for the unauthorized disclosure of returns and return information to include a fine of up to \$250,000 or imprisonment of not more than 10 years or both. It also ensures that prosecutors can consider each taxpayer impacted by a disclosure to support a separate and distinct violation of the law.

Increasing the punishment for this crime will result in better deterrence for potential criminals and fewer crimes of this sort being committed.

I urge all my colleagues to support this legislation and send a very clear message that Congress will not tolerate the theft and leak of taxpayer information.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 8292, the Taxpayer Data Protection Act. I am proud to vote for this bill that will enhance criminal penalties for the unlawful disclosure of taxpayer information.

Under Section 6103 of the tax code, tax returns and return information are confidential and may only be disclosed by the Internal Revenue Service and its employees, agents, or contractors if an exception applies.

Any unauthorized disclosure of tax information is a felony punishable by a maximum fine of \$5,000 or imprisonment up to 5 years or both.

This bill significantly increases the maximum penalty to \$250,000 and imprisonment of up to 10 years. It also makes clear that each taxpayer disclosed is treated as a separate violation subject to the maximum penalty.

This bill responds to one of the largest leaks of taxpayer information in the history of the IRS. While working at the IRS, a former contractor, Charles Littlejohn, unlawfully accessed and stole confidential tax information of the former President and thousands of wealthy taxpayers and disclosed it to two news organizations, including ProPublica. These news organizations then published a series of articles using the confidential tax information they were provided.

Earlier this year, Mr. Littlejohn was sentenced to 5 years in Federal prison for unlawfully accessing and disclosing tax information, which is the maximum sentence under current law.

This bill would have provided the judge with the discretion to increase the sentence, given the massive leak of information.

As required by law, the IRS has notified nearly 70,000 taxpayers who were impacted by this unauthorized disclosure. We must do all that we can to prevent this from happening again. This bill will provide taxpayers addi-

tional confidence in the IRS that their information is safe and protected.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. YAKYM).

Mr. YAKYM. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Missouri and the chairman for his time as well as his leadership on this bill.

I rise in strong support of the Taxpayer Data Protection Act, which will increase penalties for the unauthorized disclosure of personal information.

Americans want certain things kept private. For example, the secret ballot protects the sanctity of the voting booth. HIPAA keeps medical history between you and your doctor. Section 6103 is supposed to safeguard the sensitive information of our tax returns.

Beginning in 2017, an IRS contractor illegally downloaded tax returns for thousands of Americans and began sharing them with reporters. When the investigators caught on, he tried to destroy the evidence of his crime. Yet the Biden-Harris administration let off the perpetrator of this egregious breach of trust with only a single count of unauthorized disclosure.

We cannot let partisan actors with delusions of white knighthood think they can get away with sacrificing institutional trust in furtherance of their personal political vendettas.

I thank Chairman SMITH for keeping the spotlight on this case, and I urge my colleagues to support the bill.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time for closing.

Taxpayers must have full confidence that the IRS will safeguard their data. As Members of Congress, we must strengthen our laws to ensure that every American's tax information is protected.

This bill increases the maximum penalty for unauthorized disclosure and will serve as a big deterrent for folks who may think about breaking the law.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" in support of this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Every taxpayer deserves to have their data protected from theft and illegal disclosure. Our voluntary tax filing system depends on trust, a trust that was betrayed by a criminal with political motives who calculated that the crime would be worth the current punishment.

Simply put, he knew the crime he was committing, he knew the likelihood he would end up in prison for just a few months or years, and he decided the risks were clearly worth his reward.

We have an opportunity to deter similar actions from happening again in the future by making the punishment match the crime.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in voting for the Taxpayer Data Protection Act, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BUCSHON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 8292, as amended.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

IMPROVING SOCIAL SECURITY'S SERVICE TO VICTIMS OF IDENTITY THEFT ACT

Mr. SMITH of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3784) to amend title VII of the Social Security Act to provide for a single point of contact at the Social Security Administration for individuals who are victims of identity theft, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3784

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Improving Social Security's Service to Victims of Identity Theft Act".

SEC. 2. SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT FOR IDENTITY THEFT VICTIMS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Title VII of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 901 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

"SEC. 714. SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT FOR IDENTITY THEFT VICTIMS.

"(a) IN GENERAL.—The Commissioner of Social Security shall establish and implement procedures to ensure that any individual whose social security account number has been misused (such as to fraudulently obtain benefits under title II, VIII, or XVI of this Act, or in a manner that affects an individual's records at the Social Security Administration, or in a manner that prompts the individual to request a new social security account number) or whose social security card has been lost in the course of transmission to the individual has a single point of contact at the Social Security Administration throughout the resolution of the individual's case. The single point of contact shall track the individual's case to completion and coordinate with other units to resolve issues as quickly as possible.

"(b) SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT.—

"(1) IN GENERAL.—For purposes of subsection (a), the single point of contact shall consist of a team or subset of specially trained employees who—

"(A) have the ability to coordinate with other units to resolve the issues involved in the individual's case, and

"(B) shall be accountable for the case until its resolution.

"(2) TEAM OR SUBSET.—The employees included within the team or subset described in paragraph (1) may change as required to meet the needs of the Social Security Administration, provided that procedures have been established to—

"(A) ensure continuity of records and case history, and

"(B) notify the individual when appropriate."