

Ms. FOXX. National taxpayer advocate Nina E. Olson lists “complexity in the Tax Code” as “the number one most serious problem facing taxpayers.” At about 4 million words in length, it’s not hard to see why. Our Tax Code is four times wordier than the Bible, minus the grace and mercy. It’s so complex and intimidating that 60 percent of Americans pay good money just to have someone else tell them how much the government is going to take from them. Families spend more on taxes today than on food, clothing, and housing combined.

We should be working to lighten that burden. A simpler, fairer Tax Code will help families save more and empower employers to pay their workers more and create new jobs. A Tax Code that doesn’t require taxpayers to own a secret decoder ring or hire a legal team is the kind of reform we’re working on in the House of Representatives. A commonsense Tax Code will make the difference in the lives of taxpayers, and that’s what this Congress should strive toward.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 5 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 2 o’clock and 12 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1701

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. HOLDING) at 5 o’clock and 1 minute p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken later.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1162) to amend title 31, United States Code, to make improvements in the Government Accountability Office, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill. The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1162

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 “Government Accountability Office Improvement Act”.

SEC. 2. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE IMPROVEMENT.

(a) AUTHORITY TO OBTAIN INFORMATION.—

(1) AUTHORITY TO OBTAIN RECORDS.—Section 716 of title 31, United States Code, is amended in subsection (a)—

(A) by striking “(a)” and inserting “(2)”; and

(B) by inserting after the section heading the following:

“(a)(1) The Comptroller General is authorized to obtain such agency records as the Comptroller General requires to discharge his duties (including audit, evaluation, and investigative duties), including through the bringing of civil actions under this section. In reviewing a civil action under this section, the court shall recognize the continuing force and effect of the authorization in the preceding sentence until such time as the authorization is repealed pursuant to law.”

(2) COPIES.—Section 716(a) of title 31, United States Code, as amended by subsection (a), is further amended in the second sentence of paragraph (2) by striking “inspect an agency record” and inserting “inspect, and make and retain copies of, an agency record”.

(b) ADMINISTERING OATHS.—Section 711 of title 31, United States Code, is amended by striking paragraph (4) and inserting the following:

“(4) administer oaths to witnesses when auditing and settling accounts and, with the prior express approval of the Comptroller General, when investigating fraud or attempts to defraud the United States, or irregularity or misconduct of an employee or agent of the United States.”

(c) ACCESS TO CERTAIN INFORMATION.—

(1) ACCESS TO CERTAIN INFORMATION.—Subchapter II of chapter 7 of title 31, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

“§ 721. Access to certain information

“(a) No provision of the Social Security Act, including section 453(1) of that Act (42 U.S.C. 653(1)), shall be construed to limit, amend, or supersede the authority of the Comptroller General to obtain any information or to inspect or copy any record under section 716 of this title.

“(b) No provision of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, including section 301(j) of that Act (21 U.S.C. 331(j)), shall be construed to limit, amend, or supersede the authority of the Comptroller General to obtain any information or to inspect or copy any record under section 716 of this title.

“(c)(1) The Comptroller General shall prescribe such policies and procedures as are necessary to protect from public disclosure proprietary or trade secret information obtained consistent with this section.

“(2) Nothing in this section shall be construed to—

“(A) alter or amend the prohibitions against the disclosure of trade secret or other sensitive information prohibited by section 1905 of title 18 and other applicable laws; or

“(B) affect the applicability of section 716(e) of this title, including the protections against unauthorized disclosure contained in that section, to information obtained consistent with this section.

“(d) Specific references to statutes in this section shall not be construed to affect access by the Government Accountability Office to information under statutes that are not so referenced.”

(2) TECHNICAL AND CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—The table of sections for chapter 7 of title 31, United States Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 720 the following:

“721. Access to certain information.”

(d) AGENCY REPORTS.—Section 720(b) of title 31, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by inserting “or planned” after “action taken”; and

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

“(1) the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate, the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform of the House of Representatives, the congressional committees with jurisdiction over the agency program or activity that is the subject of the recommendation, and the Government Accountability Office before the 61st day after the date of the report; and”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) each will control 20 minutes.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ISSA. I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within 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 California?

There was no objection.

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

As you know, the Government Accountability Office is a legislative branch agency that investigates how the Federal Government spends taxpayer dollars. Often called the “congressional watchdog,” the GAO investigates instances of waste, fraud, and abuse in the Federal Government. My committee has direct jurisdiction over the GAO.

Congress must have current information on how Federal programs are performing in order to both legislate and effectively conduct meaningful oversight.

H.R. 1162, the GAO Improvement Act, will enhance the GAO’s ability to serve Congress primarily by ensuring the agency has access to key data warehoused in the executive branch.

This bill ensures that the GAO has access to the National Directory of New Hires, which is used to verify eligibility for Federal programs, to detect or prevent fraud, and to identify improper payments.

H.R. 1162 will ensure the GAO has the ability to obtain agency records and to administer oaths to witnesses when auditing accounts and investigating fraud.

It will allow the Comptroller General to seek judicial remedy to enforce GAO’s right to information under the law.

GAO has an exemplary record of protecting sensitive government information, including national security documents. The committee is confident that GAO, a nonpartisan portion of the legislative branch, will continue to vigorously maintain confidentiality regarding information it obtains.

I want to note that the language in this bill was included in previous