

AMENDMENT TO RULES COMMITTEE PRINT 117–

20

OFFERED BY MS. SLOTKIN OF MICHIGAN

Page 175, insert after line 18 the following (and re-designate the succeeding provisions accordingly):

1 **DIVISION D—EMPOWERING VET-**
2 **ERANS** **AGAINST**
3 **CYBERTHREATS**
4 **TITLE XV—VETERANS CYBERSE-**
5 **CURITY AND DIGITAL LIT-**
6 **ERACY**

7 **SEC. 1501. SHORT TITLE.**

8 This title may be cited as the “Empowering Veterans
9 Against Cyberthreats Act of 2021”.

10 **SEC. 1502. FINDINGS.**

11 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

12 (1) Adversaries from Russia, China, and Iran
13 are using information warfare to influence democ-
14 racies across the world, and extremist organizations
15 often use digital communications to recruit mem-
16 bers. Influence campaigns from foreign adversaries
17 reached tens of millions of voters during the 2016
18 and 2018 elections with racially and divisively tar-

1 geted messages. The Unites States can fight these
2 influences by ensuring that citizens of the United
3 States possess the necessary skills to discern
4 disinformation and misinformation and protect
5 themselves from foreign influence campaigns.

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

12 (3) A 2017 report by the University of Oxford’s
13 Graphika Institute, titled “Social Media
14 Disinformation Campaigns Against US Military Per-
15 sonnel and Veterans”, concluded that “The pubic
16 tends to place trust in military personnel and vet-
17 erans, making them potentially influential voters and
18 community leaders. Given this trust and their role in
19 ensuring national security, these individuals have the
20 potential to become particular targets for influence
21 operations and information campaigns conducted on
22 social media. There are already reports of US serv-
23 ice personnel being confronted by foreign intelligence
24 agencies while posted abroad, with details of their
25 personal lives gleaned from social media.”.

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

14 (5) A 2019 investigative report by the Vietnam
15 Veterans of America entitled “An Investigation into
16 Foreign Entities who are Targeting Troops and Vet-
17 erans Online”, found that the Internet Research
18 Agency targeted veterans and the followers of sev-
19 eral congressionally chartered veterans service orga-
20 nizations with at least 113 advertisements during
21 and following the 2016 election and that “this rep-
22 resents a fraction of the Russian activity that tar-
23 geted this community with divisive propaganda.”.
24 The report also found that foreign actors have been
25 impersonating veterans through social-media ac-

1 counts and interacting with veterans and veterans
2 groups on social media to spread propaganda and
3 disinformation. To counter these acts, Vietnam Vet-
4 erans of America recommended that the Department
5 of Veterans Affairs “immediately develop plans to
6 make the cyber-hygiene of veterans an urgent pri-
7 ority within the Department of Veterans Affairs.
8 The VA must educate and train veterans on per-
9 sonal cybersecurity: how to mitigate vulnerabilities,
10 vigilantly maintain safe practices, and recognize
11 threats, including how to identify instances of online
12 manipulation.”.

13 (6) The Cyberspace Solarium Commission, a bi-
14 cameral and bipartisan commission, established by
15 section 1652 of the John S. McCain National De-
16 fense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 (Pub-
17 lic Law 115–232), concluded in its finished report
18 that the “U.S. government should promote digital
19 literacy, civics education, and public awareness to
20 build societal resilience to foreign, malign cyber-en-
21 abled information operations and that the U.S. gov-
22 ernment must ensure that individual Americans have
23 both the digital literacy tools and the civics edu-
24 cation they need to secure their networks and their
25 democracy from cyber-enabled information oper-

1 ations.”. The report recommended that Congress au-
2 thorizing grant programs to do this.

3 **SEC. 1503. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

4 It is the sense of Congress that, given the threat for-
5 eign influence campaigns pose for United States democ-
6 racy and the findings and recommendations of Congress
7 and experts, Congress must immediately act to pass legis-
8 lative measures to increase digital and media literacy, as
9 well as cyber-hygiene, among the veterans of the United
10 States

11 **SEC. 1504. VETERANS CYBERSECURITY AND DIGITAL LIT-**
12 **ERACY GRANT PROGRAM.**

13 (a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—The Secretary of Vet-
14 erans Affairs shall establish a program under which the
15 Secretary shall award grants to eligible entities to carry
16 out the activities described in subsection (c) to improve
17 cyber-hygiene and increase digital and media literacy
18 among veterans.

19 (b) ELIGIBILITY.—To be eligible for a grant under
20 this section an entity shall—

21 (1) be—

22 (A) a civil society organization, including
23 community groups, nongovernmental organiza-
24 tions, nonprofit organization, labor organiza-
25 tions, indigenous groups, charitable organiza-

1 tions, professional associations, and founda-
2 tions; or

3 (B) a congressionally chartered veterans
4 service organization; and

5 (2) submit to the Secretary an application at
6 such time, in such manner, and containing such in-
7 formation as the Secretary may require, including—

8 (A) a description of the activities the entity
9 intends to carry out with the grant funds; and

10 (B) an estimate of the costs associated
11 with such activities.

12 (c) USE OF FUNDS.—The recipient of a grant under
13 this section shall use the grant to carry out one or more
14 of the following activities to improve cyber-hygiene and in-
15 crease digital and media literacy among veterans:

16 (1) Develop competencies in cyber-hygiene.

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

19 (A) research and information fluency;

20 (B) critical thinking and problem solving
21 skills;

22 (C) technology operations and concepts;

23 (D) information and technological literacy;

24 (E) concepts of media and digital represen-
25 tation and stereotyping;

1 (F) understanding of explicit and implicit
2 media and digital messages;

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

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

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

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

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

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

21 (d) REPORTING.—

22 (1) REPORTS BY GRANT RECIPIENTS.—Each re-
23 cipient of a grant under this section shall, not later
24 than one year after the date on which the recipient
25 first receives grant funds, submit to the Secretary a

1 report describing the activities the recipient carried
2 out using the grant funds and the effectiveness of
3 those activities.

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

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

13 (1) establish and maintain a list of recipients of
14 grants under this section, and individuals identified
15 by such recipients as participating in activities fund-
16 ed by the grant; and

17 (2) make that list available to such recipient
18 and participating individuals in order to promote
19 communication and further exchange of information
20 regarding sound digital citizenship, media literacy,
21 and cyber-hygiene practices among such recipients.

22 (f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
23 authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section
24 \$20,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2022, 2024, and
25 2026.

1 (g) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

2 (1) The term “cyber-hygiene” means practices
3 and steps that users of computers and other internet
4 connected devices take to maintain and improve on-
5 line security, maintain the proper functioning of
6 computers devices, and protect computers and de-
7 vices from cyberattacks and unauthorized use.

8 (2) The term “digital citizenship” means the
9 ability to—

10 (A) safely, responsibly, and ethically use
11 communication technologies and digital infor-
12 mation technology tools and platforms;

13 (B) create and share media content using
14 principles of social and civic responsibility and
15 with awareness of the legal and ethical issues
16 involved; and

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

22 (3) The term “media literacy” means the ability
23 to—

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

1 (B) critically analyze media content and
2 the influences of different forms of media;

3 (C) evaluate the comprehensiveness, rel-
4 evance, credibility, authority, and accuracy of
5 information;

6 (D) make educated decisions based on in-
7 formation obtained from media and digital
8 sources;

9 (E) operate various forms of technology
10 and digital tools; and

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

