

immediate impact to the tribal members that are affected by making their allotted lands more competitive for oil and gas leasing. This will give a huge boost to the economies of this area of southwest Oklahoma and provide a tremendous economic benefit to the various tribes.

This legislation will not only provide an economic benefit to those tribes, it will allow them to use the land and resources that are rightfully theirs.

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

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 944.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GRANTING THE VIRGIN ISLANDS GREATER FISCAL AUTONOMY

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2841) to amend the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands to provide for greater fiscal autonomy consistent with other United States jurisdictions, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 2841

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

SECTION 1. GREATER FISCAL AUTONOMY.

(a) ISSUANCE.—Section 8(b)(ii)(A) of the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands (48 U.S.C. 1574(b)(ii)(A)) is amended—

(1) in the first sentence, by inserting after “other evidence of indebtedness” the following: “, including but not limited to notes in anticipation of the collection of taxes or revenues.”;

(2) by striking “to construct, improve, extend” and all that follows through “Provided, That no public” and inserting “for any public purpose authorized by the legislature: Provided, That no such”; and

(3) by striking “and payable semiannually. All such bonds shall be sold for not less than the principal amount thereof plus accrued interest”;

(b) TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS AND CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

(1) REPEAL.—Section 8(b)(ii)(B) of the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands (48 U.S.C. 1574(b)(ii)(B)) is repealed.

(2) REDESIGNATION.—Section 8(b)(ii)(C) of the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands (48 U.S.C. 1574(b)(ii)(C)) is redesignated as section 8(b)(ii)(B).

(3) REDUNDANT PROVISION.—Section 1 of Public Law 94-392 (90 Stat. 1193) is amended by striking subsection (d).

SEC. 2. AGREEMENT.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of the Interior is authorized to enter into an agreement with the Governor of the Virgin Islands establishing mutually agreed financial accountability and performance standards for

the fiscal operations of the Government of the Virgin Islands.

(b) TRANSMISSION TO CONGRESS.—Upon ratification of the agreement authorized in subsection (a) by both parties, the Secretary shall forward a copy of the agreement to the Committee on Resources in the House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources in the Senate.

SEC. 3. EFFECTIVE DATES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided by subsection (b), the amendments made by section 1 shall apply to those instruments of indebtedness issued by the Government of the Virgin Islands after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(b) EFFECT OF FAILURE TO REACH AGREEMENT.—If the agreement authorized in section 2(a) is not ratified by both parties on or before December 31, 1999, the amendments made by section 1—

(A) shall not apply to instruments of indebtedness issued by the Government of the Virgin Islands on or after December 31, 1999; and

(B) shall continue to apply to those instruments of indebtedness issued by the Government of the Virgin Islands after the date of the enactment of this Act and before December 31, 1999.

SEC. 4. CONSTRUCTION.

These amendments to the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands are not intended to modify the internal revenue laws. Thus, the bonds authorized by this bill must comply with subsection (c) of section 149 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (which requires the new bonds to comply with the appropriate requirements of the Internal Revenue Code).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) and the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON).

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

(Mr. SAXTON asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN) for the great work that she has done in bringing this bill to the floor today.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2841, to amend the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands to provide for greater fiscal autonomy consistent with other United States jurisdictions. This bill will allow the Government of the Virgin Islands to use new, flexible bonding authority to help them out of their current dire financial crisis. The new authority is conditioned on the Virgin Islands entering into an agreement committing to financial accountability and performance standards. This updated bonding authority is one way Congress can help the Virgin Islands to help themselves resolve their financial problems.

H.R. 2841 provides for: The Virgin Islands to enjoy the same fiscal authority of other states and territories for the issuance of general obligation bonds; a financial accountability and performance standards agreement to be concluded by the Government of the Virgin Islands and the Department of Interior; and the additional bonding authority to terminate if the financial accountability and performance

standards agreement is not concluded by December 31, 1999.

Members should know that the amendments to the Virgin Islands Organic Act made by this bill are not intended to modify the internal revenue laws. Thus, the bonds authorized by H.R. 2841 must comply with subsection (c) of section 149 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986. I thank Chairman ARCHER of the Ways and Means Committee and his staff as well as the Joint Committee on Taxation for their extraordinary cooperation in helping to schedule this bill today.

I urge my colleagues to support this measure.

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

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

(Mrs. CHRISTENSEN asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) for his kind remarks and for joining me on the floor this afternoon for an explanation of H.R. 2481, to provide the Virgin Islands with greater fiscal autonomy consistent with other United States jurisdictions.

I want to thank the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG), chairman, and the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER), the ranking member, for their support on this bill and for their willingness to assist the Virgin Islands generally to recover from our fiscal difficulties.

Mr. Speaker, the Governor of the Virgin Islands requested that I introduce H.R. 2481 to make it less expensive for his administration to close on a planned financing to meet currently due obligations as well as to provide sufficient cash reserves to operate the territorial government while his deficit reduction plan and budget initiatives take effect.

Usually matters such as this one relating to the bonding authority to a particular State or territory are defined by local law. However, in the case of my district, the U.S. Virgin Islands, we have not yet adopted a constitution, and the Federal law which acts as our constitution does not give us the same general obligation bonding authority enjoyed by other local jurisdictions; thus the need for this bill which was reported out of Committee on Resources by a unanimous vote.

I also want to take this opportunity to discuss briefly the overall financial picture of the U.S. Virgin Islands, as further background.

We are presently wrestling with a large cumulative deficit which has developed over the last 10 years and an annual operating deficit which has brought the Territory close to the bridge of fiscal collapse. The causes are many, both internal and external.

As my colleagues know, we have been the victim of a series of hundred-year hurricanes which came at such a rate and pace that we have never been able to completely recover.

The toll that these natural disasters took on the private sector placed an extra burden on an already over-bloated government sector and increased the obstacles to our struggle to downsize or right-size.

Even though government revenues are still not where they should be because of the problems yet being faced by our private sector, steps are being put in place to reduce government spending and increase revenues in order to begin to reduce our deficit. Initiatives are also in progress to stimulate our economy.

The bill before us today is an important part of this effort. But there are other important areas in which we look to Congress for support and assistance.

The first is lifting the current cap on the return of Federal excise taxes on Virgin Islands-produced rum, as provided for in our Organic Act, or our working constitution. I cannot overstate the importance of the funds that lifting the rum cap would provide to the Virgin Islands. It is essential that we receive these additional funds if we are to have any success at all in recovering from the current fiscal crisis.

We have certainly appreciated the passage of my bill to revive a watch industry that has been the mainstay of employment for many on the island of St. Croix, and I thank my colleagues, but that will not be enough.

We also need for my colleagues to provide full funding to the territories under the Children's Health Insurance Program or CHIP. Full funding under CHIP to the territories, based on our populations, was proposed by the administration when the program first began. However, decisions made by this body as a result of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, provided us with less than what is necessary to ensure that our children receive medical care, and this causes an undue strain on our already beleaguered local treasury.

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Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ), and I have a bill to provide full funding for the territories under CHIP, and I hope that all my colleagues will support its passage.

There are incipient discussions on several other initiatives for which, when further researched and developed, we may ask later for your assistance and support as well.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2841 would allow the government of the Virgin Islands to avoid a costly two-step financing arrangement. In the absence of such legislation, the outdated limitations in the Government's general obligation authority would cause the government of the Virgin Islands to incur extraordinary costs in excess of \$6 million in order to complete this process.

Additionally, the new authority that the bill provides will expire on December 31, 1999, if the government of the Virgin Islands and the Secretary of the Interior do not reach an agreement on

various fiscal and accountability standards for reducing the islands' deficit. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

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

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume to note that, as the gentlewoman has just pointed out, this is a bill which is intended to provide, we hope, the economic stimulus necessary for the Virgin Islands to do a better job economically in order to benefit the constituents of the gentleman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN).

But beyond that, I would like to say that the gentlewoman has worked so hard to bring this bill to the floor, and I hope that her constituents are mindful of the great effort that she has put into this bill. So, Mr. Speaker, at this time I would just like to commend her for it and ask all my colleagues to support the bill.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume to just thank again the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG), the ranking member of the committee, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER), and my colleague, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON), as well as my staff and the staff of the committee for the hard work in assisting me to get this bill to the floor today.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in favor of H.R. 2841 which provides the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) greater fiscal autonomy. I commend my colleague, Representative DONNA CHRISTENSEN for ensuring that the voices of the people of the USVI are heard in Congress. I also thank Chairman DON YOUNG and Ranking Member GEORGE MILLER for making certain that this legislation moved quickly and without resistance through the Committee.

As is the condition with most other U.S. Territories, such as Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, the USVI is also experiencing financial difficulties. For the past several years, while the U.S. has been able to boast of low unemployment and increased revenues, the U.S. territories have not been as fortunate. For the economies of Guam and the CNMI, which are largely dependent on tourism, our downturn has been a condition of Asia's financial crisis. Other Territories remain diligent and continue to explore new ways to attract businesses to their island. The USVI, however, has been placed at a disadvantage of providing themselves the opportunity for more economic activity.

H.R. 2841 will help with USVI get back on their feet and provide them the opportunity to diversify and expand their economic opportunities. This same authority exists with other U.S. Territories but was not included in USVI's Revised Organic Act. H.R. 2481 corrects this oversight and extends them the ability already enjoyed by the other territories.

I encourage my colleagues to vote in favor of H.R. 2481.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. UPTON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2841, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 2841, S. 944, S. 323, S. 293, and H.R. 1934, the five bills just debated.

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

There was no objection.

PRESERVING AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR SENIOR CITIZENS AND FAMILIES INTO THE 21ST CENTURY ACT

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 202) to restructure the financing for assisted housing for senior citizens and otherwise provide for the preservation of such housing in the 21st Century, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 202

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE AND TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the "Preserving Affordable Housing for Senior Citizens and Families into the 21st Century Act".

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

- Sec. 1. Short title and table of contents.
- Sec. 2. Regulations.
- Sec. 3. Effective date.

TITLE I—CONVERSION OF FINANCING AND REFINANCING FOR SECTION 202 SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY

- Sec. 101. Conversion of financing
- Sec. 102. Prepayment and refinancing.

TITLE II—AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS FOR SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- Sec. 201. Supportive housing for elderly persons.
- Sec. 202. Supportive housing for persons with disabilities.
- Sec. 203. Service coordinators and congregate services for elderly and disabled housing.

TITLE III—EXPANDING HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ELDERLY AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Subtitle A—Housing for the Elderly

- Sec. 301. Matching grant program.