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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Mr. Lundregan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the following title in which concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 1052. An act to implement further the Act (Public Law 94-241) approving the Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America, and for other purposes.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

THE SPEAKER. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 19, 1999, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member except the majority leader, the minority leader or the minority whip limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

PROMOTING LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

MR. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, the issue of the livable communities will be one of the dominant themes in the year 2000 election.

It is not altogether clear to me that the pollsters, pundits, and consultants fully understand the depth of this issue and what it means to American families.

The reason it will be an issue is not because it is being driven by the national level, although I do appreciate the leadership of the administration and Vice President GORE. This is an

issue that is being driven from the grassroots.

Many of us are aware that in 1998 there were over 240 State and local ballot measures nationwide that dealt with issues of open space, land use planning, and environmental protection and transportation.

Seventy-two percent of these measures passed involving spending of over \$7.5 billion; even in the relatively quiet so-called off year of 1999, the drumbeat continued. There were 139 ballot measures with a 77 percent approval rating.

The media coverage of the term "smart growth," which is probably the best proxy of livable communities, rose from 101 citations in 1996 to over 2,700 citations in 1999.

Why is this?

People know that the past patterns of development are simply not sustainable. From 1992 to 1997, we just learned a couple of weeks ago that over 16 million acres of farm and forest land were lost to development, an area larger than the State of West Virginia.

Mr. Speaker, we as a Nation are sprawling faster than we increase in population. In the last 5 years, the population grew by 5 percent, while developed land area increased 18 percent. In fact, we are seeing communities around the country that are actually losing population, yet are gobbling up land at a 10 percent, 20 percent, 30 percent rate in a decade. This means that wetlands in the United States are disappearing at a rate of 54,000 acres annually, despite our good intentions, despite some protections that are being built in.

At the same time, we are becoming increasingly dependent on foreign oil. Petroleum prices have tripled in the last few months. Drivers in the Washington, D.C. metro area waste 116 gallons of fuel each year simply waiting in traffic.

We know that we can do better than forcing the average commuter to spend more than 50 workdays a year behind

the wheel of his or her car just to get to work.

Livability does not have to be a casualty of gridlock in Washington, nor does it have to become a partisan issue. There is no reason we cannot embrace as a Congress some of the administration's specific recommendations for livable communities, in transportation funding, for better America bonds.

We can as a Congress embrace the bipartisan legislation that is coming forward by the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) and the gentleman from Alaska (Chairman YOUNG) for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. There is no reason that we cannot see the enactment of terrific legislation, if I do say so myself, the two-floods-and-you-are-out of the taxpayer pocket that the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) and I are working on to reform our national flood insurance program, to help people and not promote and subsidize the degradation of our environment.

Mr. Speaker, at a time when the public knows we can do a lot better, it is time for the Federal Government to be a full partner in that effort of promoting livable communities.

I am looking forward to bringing to this floor proposals this year that will make our families safe, healthy, and economically secure, maybe something as radical as requiring the post office to obey the same land use, environmental and planning regulations as the rest of America.

Promoting livable communities is not rocket science. It is definitely our job. I urge the Congress to take a bit of a break from some of what occupies our attention day in and day out and think about ways that we can make our families safer, healthier, more economically secure, while saving money and protecting the environment.

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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