

minority-serving institutions when we consider this important piece of legislation. I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this bipartisan bill that is good for our Nation and good for our country.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, let me conclude by saying if a forensic expert were brought into the Committee on Science and asked to examine this piece of legislation, he would find on it the fingerprints of just about every single member of the committee, Democrat and Republican alike. The hallmark of this committee, as has been mentioned during this debate, is the inclusion. We want the ideas from everyone on the committee. I am proud to report to my colleagues in the House that this is an engaged committee. People are involved in helping to shape responsible public policy. I am very proud to serve in the capacity of chairman of a committee that is serving with such distinction addressing the needs of the American people.

We have just been through 10 years, from March of 1991 to the end of the first quarter of last year, the longest period of sustained growth in modern history for the economy. That growth was largely driven by science, math, engineering, the technical people who are part of this Information Revolution. We had a slight downturn last year, and then we had 9–11, but we are on the rebound now.

If we are to experience, to realize, the next era of sustained growth in our economy, we are going to have to be dependent on our own people, our people who are well trained, our universities that teach these very important subjects. We cannot rely on just people from abroad to come rescue us, and that is too often the case now. We have got to grow our own, right here.

And so I am proud to present this bill to the House, to my colleagues, and to urge its adoption.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3130, the Technology Talent Act of 2002.

For some time now, we have recognized the need to improve math and science education in America. The Science Committee, and the Research Subcommittee which I chair, has taken one of the lead roles in advancing these reforms. Last year, the House passed legislation generated by our Committee, the Math and Science Partnerships Act, that authorizes a number of programs at the National Science Foundation aimed at improving K–12 education.

More recently, we have turned our attention to an equally important problem: improving math, science and engineering education at the undergraduate level. Our Subcommittee held hearings to identify the problems of our current educational system, and more importantly, to understand how to encourage and support changes that will provide solutions to these problems that benefit all students.

What we learned was that there is no single problem that has resulted in the talent gap and workforce challenges we face today, but rather, an assortment of problems that demand a variety of solutions. Much of the problem is simply a supply and demand issue, the marketplace is increasingly demanding a workforce skilled in the sciences and engineering, while the supply of people capable of filling those positions has remained flat.

This has forced us to look to foreign students to help fill the gap, and we now are in a situation where only half of all engineering doctoral degrees in the U.S. are awarded to American students, and a similar disproportionate number of all high-tech jobs are filled by foreign workers.

One task that doesn't require scientific or engineering expertise and that can even be understood by politicians is that if we don't fill the current talent gap in these fields, we risk damaging America's position the global economic, technological, and scientific leader.

In response to these challenges, the Science Committee has put forth the bipartisan effort that is before us today—the Technology Talent Act. It establishes a performance-based competitive grant program at the National Science Foundation that would provide funding for institutions of higher learning to implement innovative proposals designed to increase the number of undergraduates graduating in math, science, engineering, and technology.

It also addresses other areas such as institutional reform and faculty development, and authorizes NSF to provide awards to universities for improving their research instrumentation and provide undergraduate students valuable research experience.

The bill takes advantage of NSF's competitive, peer-reviewed system, allowing institutions to develop their own proposals to maximize results and promote creativity.

The legislation also emphasizes accountability and regular program evaluation, institutions that fail to meet the goals set forth in their proposals may have their funding terminated or reduced.

It is clear that if we want to maintain our competitive edge in the world—if we want to remain the top economic power, the top military force, and ensure the safety of our citizens from terrorist aggression—it is critical that we do a better job of preparing our students for careers in science, mathematics, engineering, and technology. The Technology Talent Act provides the reforms necessary to meet these challenges.

I would like to thank the Chairman for his leadership on this legislation, and I urge all members to support this bill.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WALDEN of Oregon). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOEHLERT) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3130, 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. BOEHLERT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and submit extraneous material in the RECORD on the bill just passed, H.R. 3130.

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

There was no objection.

RECIPROCAL AGREEMENTS FOR SHARING PERSONNEL TO FIGHT WILDFIRES

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5017) to amend the Temporary Emergency Wildfire Suppression Act to facilitate the ability of the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to enter into reciprocal agreements with foreign countries for the sharing of personnel to fight wildfires.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 5017

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

SECTION 1. RECIPROCAL AGREEMENTS FOR SHARING PERSONNEL TO FIGHT WILDFIRES.

The Temporary Emergency Wildfire Suppression Act (42 U.S.C. 1856m et seq.), as amended by the Wildfire Suppression Assistance Act, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

“SEC. 5. SPECIAL TERMS FOR RECIPROCAL AGREEMENTS FOR SHARING PERSONNEL TO FIGHT WILDFIRES.

“(a) TORT LIABILITY.—In entering into a reciprocal agreement with a foreign country under section 3, the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior may include as part of the agreement a provision that personnel furnished under the agreement to provide wildfire suppression or suppression services will be considered, for purposes of tort liability, employees of the country receiving such services when the personnel provide services under the agreement.

“(b) ASSUMPTION OF LIABILITY; REMEDIES.—The Secretary of Agriculture or the Secretary of the Interior shall not enter into any agreement under section 3 containing the provision described in subsection (a) unless the foreign country (either directly or through the fire organization that is a party to the agreement) agrees to assume any and all liability for the acts or omissions of American firefighters engaged in providing wildfire suppression or suppression services under the agreement in the foreign country. The only remedies for acts or omissions committed while providing services under the agreement shall be those provided under the laws of the host country, and those remedies shall be the exclusive remedies for any claim arising out of providing such services in a foreign country.

“(c) PROTECTIONS.—Neither the firefighter, the sending country, nor any organization associated with the firefighter shall be subject to any action whatsoever pertaining to or arising out of providing wildfire suppression or suppression services under a reciprocal agreement under section 3.”

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from

Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE).

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5017, introduced by my good friend and colleague from Colorado (Mr. MCINNIS) to facilitate the ability of the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to enter into reciprocal agreements with foreign countries for the sharing of personnel to fight wildfires.

Today, as we debate this issue, large wildfires are burning across the country. Over 3.1 million acres have already been consumed and the worst may be yet to come. This bill provides a safety net for ongoing fire-fighting efforts. During these high levels of fire activity, the wildfire agencies often run out of trained and qualified personnel available to fight these horrific blazes. This legislation would allow the U.S. to bring in skilled firefighters from around the world to aid in the suppression of these overwhelming wildfires.

It is important to point out that foreign nationals can only be used when all domestic sources are fully utilized. As I speak, there are over 12,000 personnel committed to fire-fighting duties. Depending on the number and nature of the fires, that number may reach 20,000 personnel in the next couple of weeks. If this occurs, we will most likely deplete our domestic fire-fighting sources. The next step would be to inquire for help from our international neighbors in battling the wildfires or risk losing more property and life.

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Unfortunately, current law exposes foreign fire agencies to unreasonable liability when responding to requests by the U.S. Government during a national emergency. Consequently, exchanges or requests for assistance during the critical part of fire season will not be honored by foreign firefighters. This bill provides foreign agencies and their firefighters coverage from liability during performance of official duties and will not expose the U.S. Government to liability or death or disability for foreign nationals that are covered under the foreign agencies' normal insurance policies.

This bill supplies the protection needed in order for foreign fire management agencies to provide firefighters to the United States. It does not grant special protection to foreign firefighters. It simply provides the same level of protection that we give our own firefighters and the firefighters we use from State, county, volunteer and municipal fire agencies for Federal firefighting efforts.

This legislation strives to ensure that we will have the ability to commit more personnel as fire situations esca-

late. It ensures our Nation's commitment to combating wildfires and provides assistance and relief to our domestic firefighters.

I urge the Members of this body to join me in taking this important step today. By passing H.R. 5017, we can renew our efforts for wildfire suppression and build strong working relationships with our foreign counterparts. Join me in declaring a strong commitment to firefighting.

I congratulate my colleague from Colorado for this fine legislation and urge my colleagues to support H.R. 5017.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5017, legislation to amend the Temporary Emergency Wildfire Suppression Act. As we have heard, this legislation is designed to promote and facilitate the implementation of reciprocal firefighting agreements with foreign countries for the purpose of sharing personnel to fight wildfires.

Specifically, H.R. 5017 will require that personnel furnished under reciprocal firefighting agreements be considered employees of the country receiving the assistance for purposes of tort liability. Mr. Speaker, these agreements with foreign fire organizations are essential to suppress wildfire activities within our national forest system.

At the height of the forest fire season in the United States, we may have up to 12,200 firefighting personnel on the ground executing various fire suppression duties. The conditions that these men and women face often demand speedy alterations to existing firefighting plans if the forest fire takes an unexpected path. In order to minimize the risk of loss of life and property, our firefighting crews need experienced supervision and guidance at all times.

Unfortunately, with 244 significant forest fires burning simultaneously, the supervisory capacity of the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior are stretched to the limits. As a remedy to this problem, the United States has sought the assistance of mid-level managers from Australia and New Zealand by entering into reciprocal firefighting agreements.

H.R. 5017 would eliminate the risk of tort liability to foreign firefighters and their governments while foreign personnel are providing assistance to the United States. The foreign firefighters would be considered to be Federal employees for the limited purpose of securing them coverage under the Federal Tort Claims Act.

This legislation would also require that foreign countries or States extend a reciprocal benefit to United States firefighters in the event the United States provides personnel to them, and it would make the laws of the host country the only source of remedies

available for acts and omissions in firefighting activities in the host country. Under this legislation, foreign firefighters can readily assist us without the fear of being subjected to lawsuits.

This legislation further provides that the tort liability protection would extend to not only the firefighter but also the individual's home country and any organization associated with the firefighter.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation removes barriers to the effective implementation of reciprocal firefighting agreements with foreign fire organizations. It will increase the effectiveness of our forest fire suppression activities. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

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

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

My district in the State of Virginia has been struck by many severe forest fires this season, but thankfully nothing like what has been experienced in the State of Colorado, and I am sure that that accounts for the leadership that the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. MCINNIS) has shown in introducing this legislation. He also serves as chairman of the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health of the Committee on Resources.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. MCINNIS).

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

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me the time, and I would like to first of all begin my remarks by saying that I appreciate the gentleman from Virginia's time, his subcommittee, and obviously his attention to this matter and the urgency of getting this bill passed. It is a critical bill.

I appreciate the comments the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) made. They were all exactly on point. I think he has explained very well the crisis we face.

My district is the Third District of the State of Colorado. That district geographically is larger than the State of Florida. It is unique in that it is the highest place on the continent, and we do not usually see the kind of fires because of the elevations that we are at in that district, we do not usually see the intensity of the fire that we are seeing this year.

That intensity, of course, has been brought on through a couple of different factors. One, we are experiencing the worst drought we have seen probably in 100 years in Colorado, and two, unfortunately, we have had a number of national environmental organizations who have, in my opinion, prevented us from thinning the forest in such a way that we can properly manage these forests, but those are issues for another day.

The issue before us here today, as explained by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) and as explained by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE), is the fact that emergency personnel, our firefighters, this is a very difficult task to undertake.

Last year, as my colleagues will recall, we appropriated a dramatic increase in the firefighting budgets back here. We authorized a hiring of thousands of new firefighters. We have actually purchased 10,000 new pieces of fire equipment which range in everything from tankers to bulldozers and so on, but this year, even that is not enough, and we need some assistance.

There is no effort whatsoever nor any actual occurrence of any displacement of any American worker by using foreign assistance. In fact, for many years we have used this foreign assistance primarily with Australia and New Zealand, and that is pretty self-explanatory in that Australia and New Zealand have opposite seasons of the United States. So while we are in our summer, right now they are in their winter, and we actually have an exchange program that is in place.

Unfortunately, the Australians became very concerned, and I think legitimately concerned, about the fact of their firefighters being in the United States, with the kind of litigious society that we have. We have lots of lawsuits filed in this country, many, many, many, many times more than any other country in the world, and Australia and New Zealand are reluctant to send their firefighters up here, then to see their firefighters trying to help our country fight our fires ending up being named in litigation.

So this bill is very, very important for us to pass on an immediate basis. This bill was introduced by me about a week ago. It is very uncommon in the House of Representatives for a bill to go through the House this quickly. The only way we were able to do that, frankly, is through the assistance of not only the chairman and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), the ranking member, but I also want to thank five other members of the body; the gentleman from Utah (Mr. HANSEN), who is chairman of Committee on Resources; the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HYDE), chairman of the Committee on International Relations; the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST), the chairman of the Committee on Agriculture; and the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER), chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary; as well as the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE), who gave a great deal of effort and who himself has suffered a 450,000-acre fire in Arizona.

Before I finish my comments here, and I do have to read some comments for the RECORD, I do want to point out that the State of Colorado and the State of Arizona are open for business. I wish I would have brought my satellite picture. Despite all the stories my colleagues have heard about Colo-

rado, if we took a look at what actually has burned in Colorado, we would see it is significantly less than 1 percent. Unfortunately, across the country, because of the media coverage of these horrible fires, these fires have people thinking the whole State is on fire, and we have seen a tremendous drop in our tourism, not only in Colorado but Arizona as well, for no reason at all. The majority, like I said, 99 point some percent of Colorado, is open for tourism, and it is a great place to visit, as is Arizona.

That said, I want to point out that in the season that we are facing, here are a couple of unique things. One, we go to what we call a level 5. Across this country, the national fire emergency system, our alert system goes clear to level 5. Level 5 is the highest and we are now currently in a level 5 situation. It is not unique that we go to a level 5 situation. In fact, we have done it several times in the past, but what is unique is we have never gone to a level 5 system prior to July 28. We actually went to level 5 two weeks ago. So we are almost 6 weeks, almost 6 weeks ahead of what we have ever gone to in this emergency status before.

So my colleagues can understand the importance of getting this exchange program back on track. As I said, it was already in place. We are not creating a new wheel here. It is a wheel that got taken off the track, and we are trying to put it back on the track.

I should point out also that the National Interagency Fire Center, in declaring this readiness number 5, also acknowledges the importance of these management personnel that our countries exchange.

I would ask support from my colleagues, and once again, I want to particularly thank my colleagues that helped us get this through on an expedited basis. Any one of those chairmen of any one of those committees could have slowed this bill down, could have insisted that this bill run the regular course that a bill usually runs, but every one of those chairmen, to the person and to the credit of the chairman and ranking member, understood the urgency and the importance of getting assistance out there on the ground fighting these fires.

We expect a very full fire season ahead of us. We expect, as my colleagues know, and I would point out, unfortunately, we have had fatalities so far. We had a fireman killed in Durango, and to his family we wish Godspeed. We lost five firemen not very far from my house on the highway in a vehicle accident as they were going to the scene of a fire, and Godspeed to their families as well, but we are going to get them assistance.

I would ask all of my colleagues to support this. I expect unanimous support of the bill, and I will be back with discussions on this floor to talk about the necessity of thinning forests, to talk about the litigation and the appeal process that has stopped us from

thinning and managing these forests as we should. Fire must be managed. We just cannot let it go. We have seen the results of what has happened when it gets out of control, and fortunately, we have a couple of countries willing to help us out.

Again, I want to especially thank the ranking member and the chairman.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 5017, a bill that would amend the Temporary Emergency Wildfire Suppression Act to enhance the ability of the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to enter into reciprocal agreements with foreign countries for the sharing of personnel to fight wildfires. At the outset, I want to thank five Members of this body who have been nothing short of essential in getting this bill to the House floor in very short order—Congressman JIM HANSEN, chairman of the Resources Committee, Congressman HENRY HYDE, chairman of the International Relations Committee, Congressman LARRY COMBEST, chairman of the Agriculture Committee, and Congressman JIM SENSENBRENNER, chairman of the Judiciary Committee and JEFF FLAKE. Each of these Members, and their respective staffs, were instrumental in fast tracking this legislation to the full House today, less than 2 weeks after I first introduced it.

In practical terms, H.R. 5017 would clear the way for scores of firefighters from Australia and other countries to immediately join forces with the thousands of brave Americans on the frontlines of our battle against catastrophic wildfire out West and in other parts of the country. And make no mistake about it, Mr. Speaker, we need all the reinforcements we can get.

The 2002 fire season is well on its way to becoming among the largest and most destructive in recorded history. It is on pace to eclipse the catastrophic 2000 fire season when 122,000 fires burned 8.5 million acres, destroying over 800 homes and structures. Already this year, we've burned well over 3 million acres, which by itself is nearly three times the average for an entire year. What's most alarming about this statistic is that, historically, wildfire burns the hottest, largest, and most frequent in the latter parts of July and into August and September. The wildfire forecast for the coming months, Mr. Speaker, is ominous indeed.

In response to this growing crisis on the national forests and public lands, the National Interagency Fire Center recently declared a national preparedness level of 5, the highest readiness threshold for our wildland firefighting agencies. This heightened readiness stage allows the Forest Service and Department of Interior agencies to more readily tap the assets of the military and other agencies not typically oriented to fighting wildfires. The Readiness 5 declaration was Uncle Sam's way of saying it's time to deploy all available resources, and pull out all available stops.

But even as we do, we would be remiss not to tap into the formidable human resources of our friends and allies overseas, many of whom have considerable experience fighting wildfire. Countries like Australia and New Zealand have particular appeal in this regard because their fire season occurs during our winter months, making their firefighters open and available during our fiery summer months.

Congress recognized this years ago with the enactment of the Temporary Emergency Wild-fire Suppression Act, where it authorized the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture to enter into reciprocal arrangements that, in essence, amount to a foreign firefighter exchange program. These reciprocal agreements allow us to borrow on the expertise of foreign firefighters when a need arises, and vice-versa.

In 2000, this authority was particularly useful. Firefighters from Australia and New Zealand fought shoulder-to-shoulder with American firefighters at a time when we quite frankly needed the help. By all accounts the exchange program was a huge success.

Which brings us to today. While the Wildfire Suppression Act has been a huge help and major success, new exchange agreements have been stalled because of legitimate liability concerns on the part of Australia and other countries with whom we have historically partnered. Our bill would address those concerns in straightforward fashion by eliminating the risk of tort liability to foreign firefighters and their governments while foreign personnel are providing assistance to the United States. It requires that foreign nations extend a reciprocal tort claims benefit to United States firefighters in the event the United States provides similar assistance to them. The proposed legislation would also deem foreign firefighters to be federal employees for the limited purpose of securing them coverage under the Federal Tort Claims Act. Finally, it would make the laws of the host country the only source of remedies available for acts and omissions in firefighting activities in the host country.

Mr. Speaker, I've been told that there are 100 or so Australian firefighters all but on the tarmac ready to fly out to the United States to join our firefighting forces pending the enactment of this legislation. This highly skilled group will provide support in the place that it's needed the most right now—management caliber firefighters directing and overseeing rank-and-file firefighters on the front lines. This bill will ensure that this area of need is met in a meaningful way for the duration of this and future fire seasons.

Mr. Speaker, this is a commonsense bill that is a real priority for Secretary Norton and Secretary Veneman, just as it is for me. I hope and trust that my colleagues will join with me in supporting it.

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

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

The other State that was referenced by the gentleman from Colorado that has been absolutely devastated by wildfires this summer is the State of Arizona, and I thank very much the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE) for his contribution to this legislation and his efforts to make sure that firefighting capabilities in the State of Arizona, as well as the rest of the country, are supplemented with foreign firefighters as we need them, and I thank him for that effort.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE).

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

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me the time.

Mr. Speaker, I do come from the State of Arizona where we have had 450,000 acres burn already this year. The entire West, as mentioned by the gentleman from Colorado, is a tinderbox at this point. We are at level 5, the first time we have reached level 5 this early in the year.

Arizona, as mentioned, lost about 600 square miles to fire. We still have a lot of Ponderosa pine forest left. We have the largest stand of Ponderosa pine forest in the country. Many of my colleagues, particularly from the East Coast, were surprised to hear that we had forests in Arizona, let alone that they were burning.

We had a horrible fire that was finally contained after 2 weeks, contained fully on Sunday. That fire is contained, but I can tell my colleagues that this season is not done, and this legislation recognizes the need to have firefighters, particularly in a management capacity, come here and to ensure that we have the forces necessary to put out these fires.

When the lightning seasons hit, we had some lightning just a couple of days ago, five new fires started quickly, had to be suppressed, and we are going to see a lot more of that this year. So it is very important that we pass this legislation.

I thank the gentleman from Colorado for introducing it and for the chairmen, as he mentioned, who moved it so quickly to this point.

We have a situation in Arizona and throughout the West where we have far too much fuel that allows these fires to burn far hotter and spread far faster than they would otherwise. These are things that we need to address as we look to the future, but for now, we need to ensure the firefighters are on the ready. That is what this legislation does.

I urge my colleagues to support it when it comes to the floor.

Mr. Speaker, In August of 2000, 68 firefighters from Australia arrived in Montana to help their American counterparts bring wildfires under control. At that time more than 70 fires were burning in 12 U.S. states that prompted the call for assistance.

After devastating wildfires in 2000, long-term agreements were negotiated with Australia and New Zealand. These agreements have not been implemented, however, due to concerns that the foreign firefighting personnel would face liability for alleged torts committed while their personnel were furnishing assistance to the U.S. Over 450,000 acres of land burned in the widely publicized fire of Arizona.

The National Interagency Fire Center has declared a state of "Preparedness Level 5"—indicating the highest level of risk and the need for the greatest degree of preparedness due to the severity of fire season conditions. For safety purposes, for every twenty firefighters on the front line of a fire there must be one management level firefighter to supervise and ensure the safety of the men in the field. Fourteen days ago when this legislation

was introduced, the Hayman fire was still burning in Colorado and the Rodeo-Chedeski fires were raging in Arizona. Various other fires were also burning; together they were almost expending the resources we have available to fight these blazes.

At that point there was a strong concern that there wouldn't be enough management level personnel to keep all the necessary frontline firefighters fighting the blazes. This legislation prevents that from occurring. The legislation before us makes it possible to ensure sufficient management level firefighters in the event of catastrophic fires by providing protections to firefighters, sending countries and any organization associated with the firefighter from any liability resulting from actions taking place while fighting fires here in the United States.

Also provided within the legislation is a reciprocal agreement providing the same protection to American firefighters who go to other countries to assist in fire suppression or firefighting. With the West experiencing a severe drought and one of the worst fire seasons it has ever seen on record, fire managers are expecting a busy summer.

Remove the constraints that prevent management level firefighters from ensuring we can meet the demands of this season. Support this legislation.

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Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I urge support of the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WALDEN of Oregon). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5017.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GOODLATTE. 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. 5017, the bill just considered.

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

There was no objection.

IMPROPER PAYMENTS INFORMATION ACT OF 2002

Mr. HORN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4878) to provide for reduction of improper payments by Federal agencies, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 4878

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Improper Payments Information Act of 2002".