

100 locations across the country, I hope you will support these activities and provide special encouragement for continued ARS leadership in the agricultural, natural resources and technological arenas.

I urge all Members to support this important resolution.

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

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

I rise today in support of S.J. Res. 22, a resolution commending the USDA Agricultural Research Service for their 50 years of service to America. For half a century now, the ARS has been a leader in publicly-funded basic and applied research. Given the structure of U.S. agriculture, individual family farms are certainly not able to provide for their own technical and research needs. Publicly-funded research entities such as ARS can provide the lead for long-term projects and have been an obvious and significant success to the benefit of the American people.

Over the years, ARS scientists have made hundreds of technical advances, released thousands of new plant varieties, and contributed to the abundant food supply that all our citizens enjoy. My own State and district have benefited in many tangible ways from the work of the Agricultural Research Service, and I doubt that there are any of us here today who could not say the same thing. The ARS has contributed so very much to advances in the quality and quantity of our food supply, benefiting rural and urban dwellers alike.

I congratulate the Agricultural Research Service on their 50 years of service and I look forward to continue working with them to enhance both American agriculture and the well-being of all our citizens. I encourage all Members to support this well-deserved resolution of commendation.

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

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

This is a very important resolution. The ARS has done some wonderful work for us. This is one small way that Congress can say thank you and recognize their efforts.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Agriculture Research Service (ARS) of the Department of Agriculture for 50 years of outstanding research. ARS is the established leader in agriculture science, producing quality research used by many to help create responsible science-based policy. As we prepare to celebrate their accomplishments of the past half-century, it is also an opportunity for us to bear in mind future achievements.

ARS is the largest science organization in the world dedicated to agriculture research. As the Department of Agriculture's in-house agency, ARS conducts research to solve problems that are of high national priority and in the best interests of the Nation. This science is vital to the mission area of several Department

of Agriculture agencies such as the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS), Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyard Administration (GIPSA), and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). ARS also serves a number of other Federal agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and some components within the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Department of Interior (DOI). Not only is ARS responsible for providing data to these agencies, they also distribute information to producers, consumers, and other stakeholders.

It is easy to see that research is an essential tool, but it is also a worthy investment. Federal agriculture research is a critical element in maintaining our competitive edge in the international arena as well as helps us address environmental challenges. We can better protect our resources from plant pests and animal diseases and can expect improved water quality, resource conservation, and renewable sources of energy. The value of these should research programs benefit not only agriculture, but all Americans.

ARS is able to carry out their mission of providing scientific research through collaborative efforts. There are more than 2,100 scientists conducting research at approximately 100 locations across the country and overseas. At any given time, ARS has more than 1,000 research projects underway, each of which is incorporated into one of 22 national programs. The network of laboratories and research centers across the country allows ARS to address problems quickly and efficiently.

I am proud to represent one center that has significantly contributed to this effort, the Beltsville Area Research Center (BARC), located in Beltsville, MD. I have worked with BARC over the years and have witnessed the work these researchers do and how critical it is to our daily lives.

BARC is the largest and most diversified agricultural research complex in the world. Beltsville's record of accomplishments and programs has earned the center international accolade and attracts thousands of visitors each year. Research in the Beltsville area addresses issues of agriculture importance and high national priority through programs in the Plant Sciences Institute, the Animal and Natural Resources Institute, the Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center, and the U.S. National Arboretum. I am sure BARC will live up to its reputation of producing high quality research on the cutting edge that will propel U.S. agriculture into the future.

We should take great pride for the many milestones that have been met and continue to support ARS and American agriculture.

Mr. VISCLOSKEY. Mr. Speaker, for the past 50 years, the Agriculture Research Service, or ARS as they are better known, has performed indispensable agriculture research across the country, including in the Congressional District I represent. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize ARS in honor of their 50th anniversary as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's main research authority.

From improving food safety to protecting crops and livestock, ARS has proved itself invaluable throughout the past 50 years. As the Department of Agriculture's research arm, they have been able to translate their raw data into profitability for farmers and lower costs for

consumers. ARS has formed lasting partnerships with Universities throughout the nation, and has done so at Purdue University since 1965 when they released their first nationwide soil erosion-prediction equation. ARS maintains top-notch Crop Production and Pest Control, Livestock Behavior, and National Soil Erosion Laboratory units at Purdue. ARS, in conjunction with Purdue, continues to stay on the leading edge of agricultural research. Just this summer, they released their cutting edge Water Erosion Prediction Project over the Internet with software known as GeoWEPP.

From this research station, individuals such as Larry Dunkle, Donald Lay, and Darrell Norton have been able to study the agricultural dynamic of Northwest Indiana. They have all contributed a fundamental service to Northwest Indiana as well as the rest of the state, and their service with the ARS is indeed recognized and deeply appreciated. The agricultural community of Northwest Indiana has counted on their contributions of ARS for 50 years now, and that strong partnership will continue into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me as I congratulate ARS and its researchers on their 50th anniversary by supporting S.J. Res. 22. I would further like to express my gratitude for their service to the agricultural community. Their accomplishments speak volumes, and I thank them for their vital public service.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. 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 Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate joint resolution, S.J. Res. 22.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

NATIONAL VETERINARY MEDICAL SERVICE ACT

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1367) to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to conduct a loan repayment program regarding the provision of veterinary services in shortage situations, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 1367

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 "National Veterinary Medical Service Act".

SEC. 2. ESTABLISHMENT OF LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM REGARDING VETERINARY MEDICINE.

The National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7

U.S.C. 3101 et seq.) is amended by inserting after section 1415 the following new section: "SEC. 1415A. VETERINARY MEDICINE LOAN REPAYMENT.

"(a) PROGRAM.—

"(1) SERVICE IN SHORTAGE SITUATIONS.—The Secretary shall carry out a program of entering into agreements with veterinarians under which the veterinarians agree to provide, for a period of time as determined by the Secretary and specified in the agreement, veterinary services in veterinarian shortage situations. For each year of such service under an agreement under this paragraph, the Secretary shall pay an amount, as determined by the Secretary and specified in the agreement, of the principal and interest of qualifying educational loans of the veterinarians.

"(2) SERVICE TO FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may enter into agreements of one year duration with veterinarians who have agreements pursuant to paragraph (1) for such veterinarians to provide services to the Federal Government in emergency situations, as determined by the Secretary, under terms and conditions specified in the agreement. Pursuant to an agreement under this paragraph, the Secretary shall pay an amount, in addition to the amount paid pursuant to the agreement in paragraph (1), as determined by the Secretary and specified in the agreement, of the principal and interest of qualifying educational loans of the veterinarians.

"(B) REQUIREMENTS.—Agreements entered into under this paragraph shall include the following:

"(i) A veterinarian shall not be required to serve more than 60 working days per year of the agreement.

"(ii) A veterinarian who provides service pursuant to the agreement shall receive a salary commensurate with the duties and shall be reimbursed for travel and per diem expenses as appropriate for the duration of the service.

"(b) DETERMINATION OF VETERINARIAN SHORTAGE SITUATIONS.—In determining 'veterinarian shortage situations' the Secretary may consider the following:

"(1) Urban or rural areas that the Secretary determines have a shortage of veterinarians.

"(2) Areas of veterinary practice that the Secretary determines have a shortage of veterinarians, such as public health, epidemiology, and food safety.

"(3) Areas of veterinary need in the Federal Government.

"(4) Other factors that the Secretary considers to be relevant.

"(c) ADMINISTRATION.—

"(1) AUTHORITY.—The Secretary may carry out this program directly or enter into agreements with another Federal agency or other service provider to assist in the administration of this program.

"(2) BREACH REMEDIES.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—Agreements with program participants shall provide remedies for any breach of an agreement by a participant, including repayment or partial repayment of financial assistance received, with interest.

"(B) AMOUNTS RECOVERED.—Funds recovered under this subsection shall be credited to the account available to carry out this section and shall remain available until expended.

"(3) WAIVER.—The Secretary may grant a waiver of the repayment obligation for breach of contract in the event of extreme hardship or extreme need, as determined by the Secretary.

"(4) AMOUNT.—The Secretary shall develop regulations to determine the amount of loan repayment for a year of service by a veteri-

narian. In making the determination, the Secretary shall consider the extent to which such determination—

"(A) affects the ability of the Secretary to maximize the number of agreements that can be provided under the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program from the amounts appropriated for such agreements; and

"(B) provides an incentive to serve in veterinary service shortage areas with the greatest need.

"(5) QUALIFYING EDUCATIONAL LOANS.—Loan repayments provided under this section may consist of payments on behalf of participating individuals of the principal and interest on government and commercial loans received by the individual for attendance of the individual at an accredited college of veterinary medicine resulting in a degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine or the equivalent, which loans were made for—

"(A) tuition expenses;

"(B) all other reasonable educational expenses, including fees, books, and laboratory expenses, incurred by the individual; or

"(C) reasonable living expenses as determined by the Secretary.

"(6) REPAYMENT SCHEDULE.—The Secretary may enter into an agreement with the holder of any loan for which payments are made under this section to establish a schedule for the making of such payments.

"(7) TAX LIABILITY.—In addition to educational loan repayments, the Secretary shall make such additional payments to participants as the Secretary determines to be appropriate for the purpose of providing reimbursements to participants for individual tax liability resulting from participation in this program.

"(d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated for carrying out this section such sums as may be necessary and such sums shall remain available to the Secretary for the purposes of this section until expended."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT).

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1367, the National Veterinary Medical Service Act. I commend the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. PICKERING) for his leadership on this issue.

H.R. 1367, as amended, authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture, subject to the availability of appropriations, to assist veterinarians in repaying their educational loans if they agree to provide veterinary medical services in areas where the Secretary has determined a shortage of qualified veterinarians exists.

In addition, at the request of the USDA, the bill authorizes the Secretary to provide additional loan repayment for those veterinarians in this program who agree to provide services to the Federal Government in emergency situations. Examples of when this may be important include California's recent experience with Exotic Newcastle Disease, or in a case closer to home, an outbreak of low pathogenic Avian influenza in Virginia here

in 2002. In both of these examples, the Federal Government, acting through USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, mobilizes its resources in order to detect, control and eradicate disease. Having a pool of qualified veterinarians able to assist in a time of emergency simply bolsters our ability to rapidly contain diseases which can cost our economy millions or even billions of dollars.

Once again, I commend the gentleman from Mississippi for his hard work on this important legislation and urge all Members to support it.

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

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

I rise today in support of H.R. 1367, the National Veterinary Medical Services Act. I want to commend the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. PICKERING) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. TURNER) for their good work in advancing this legislation.

Assuring an adequate supply of veterinarians in many underserved rural and urban areas is a critical issue for our Nation's animal health infrastructure. It is generally private veterinarians who are the first to identify and respond to animal disease outbreaks. In addition, there is a great need for private veterinarians to supplement the Federal response during future animal health emergencies. The assistance that this legislation will provide to encourage veterinary practice in underserved areas, along with the creation of something like a "National Guard" for private veterinarians who can be called up in emergencies, should wisely enhance our preparation to deal with future animal health emergencies.

The bill under consideration will help to encourage both goals through a very modest public investment with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. I believe H.R. 1367 is a good, cost-effective policy. I encourage Members to support passage of this bill.

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

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. PICKERING), the author of the bill.

Mr. PICKERING. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) and all of his staff who have worked in a bipartisan manner with the gentleman from Texas (Mr. TURNER) and myself as we have brought this much-needed legislation through the committee and now to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives.

I want to thank those leaders at Mississippi State University who had the foresight and the ability to bring to our attention here on the committee and in my office the need that we have, the critical need, the desperate need that we have to be able to help our students, our veterinarian students who

often end up their education with up to, on average, \$70,000 in debt. When that occurs, it is so difficult for them to pay the debt and practice in rural or underserved markets and make the type of salary that is needed to be able to retire that debt and pay that debt and raise a family, start a family and start their dreams. And so we are doing just as we have done for medical doctors and dentists and nurses and teachers, and, that is, starting a program that will help them repay their debt, that will pick up those obligations, if in return, they will agree to serve in those areas where we have critical shortages in the rural and the large-animal practices and the underserved markets. Not only will they fill that critical need that is so important not only in animal health, but as it relates to the connections to human health, and in national security, and in homeland security, where we have new threats of bioterrorism, or we have the outbreaks of dreaded diseases that we have seen ravage not only Europe, the economy and the agricultural economy in Europe with mad cow disease, that in those times of crisis those that sign up and meet these requirements and then have their debts repaid, will agree to serve their country, in essence, a National Guard for veterinarians.

□ 1415

So we see today a way to meet the critical shortage of veterinarians in rural and underserved markets. We see a way to encourage the service to our country in homeland security and to meet the threats of either bioterrorism or major animal disease outbreaks. This is much-needed legislation that will help us as we go forward.

Again, I want to thank the committee, the staff, the chairman, and the ranking member for all their help and assistance in getting us to this point. We hope that this legislation can pass not only today in the House but move quickly through the Senate as we address this much-needed legislation and to address the critical shortages that we face in rural districts like mine and across the country.

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

I would ask to engage the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) on behalf of the gentleman from Virginia (Chairman GOODLATTE) in a brief colloquy.

During the Committee consideration of H.R. 1367, I raised some concerns about the potential that implementation of this bill, should it be passed and signed into law, might include an arbitrary graduation cutoff date for veterinarians wishing to participate. We certainly do not want to preclude participation by veterinarians that may have years of valuable experience. This has been a problem with regard to a different educational loan repayment program that folks from my district have tried to access in the past. It is my understanding that nothing in this legis-

lation before us today would encourage the establishment of such a standard by USDA. It is my understanding that any veterinarian who meets the general standards for participation would be eligible to apply for this program no matter how long might have elapsed since her or his graduation from an accredited school of veterinary medicine. Is that the gentleman's understanding of the bill language?

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. STENHOLM. I yield to the gentleman from Minnesota.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) for yielding and for raising this issue. We have talked to the gentleman from Virginia (Chairman GOODLATTE), and it is our understanding and intent that nothing in this language would preclude any veterinarian, no matter when they graduated from vet school, from applying or to participate so long as they have eligible student loan debt and meet other criteria for participation as described in the legislation.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for helping to make this point clear.

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

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

I would like to thank the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. PICKERING). I think this is a very important piece of legislation. I think veterinarians in some respects are like tourniquets: we do not need one often; but when we do need one, we need one rapidly; and in underserved areas, it could become a very serious problem. So I think this is an important piece of legislation. I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting this bill.

Mr. HAYES. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleagues for this needed legislation which ensures the Federal Government's deep commitment to a highly trained and diverse workforce in rural and underserved areas, and encourages veterinarians to assist the U.S. Department of Agriculture in emergency disease outbreak situations. But we should go even further. In order to best maximize Federal Government resources, both in this program at the Department of Agriculture, as well as loan repayment programs throughout the Federal Government, we should allow competition within other aspects of the student loan program, including consolidation loans.

The 1998 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act allowed Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) student loan borrowers who hold loans from more than one underlying lender to select from those lenders when consolidating their loans. This change has enabled many recent college graduates to refinance their loans at a lower fixed-interest rate. However, student loan borrowers who hold loans through a single lender must consolidate loans through their current lender. This rule is known as the "Single Holder Rule."

In order to ensure that we instill competition, we will need to make sure that during the re-

authorization of the Higher Education Act, which is currently moving through the Education and the Workforce Committee, we repeal the single holder rule. I want to thank Chairman BOEHNER and Congressman MCKEON for their efforts to keep college costs under control during consideration of this important legislation. It will be part of my commitment to Federal agencies, students and families everywhere that they have the benefit of competition from qualified lenders in the program when they consolidate their loans and, thus, allow them to take advantage of historically low fixed interest rates—just as other borrowers are able to do every day.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PETRI). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1367, 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.

PROVIDING FOR CONVEYANCE OF LAND IN APALACHICOLA NATIONAL FOREST, FLORIDA

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3217) to provide for the conveyance of several small parcels of National Forest System land in the Apalachicola National Forest, Florida, to resolve boundary discrepancies involving the Mt. Trial Primitive Baptist Church of Wakulla County, Florida, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3217

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

SECTION 1. LAND CONVEYANCE, APALACHICOLA NATIONAL FOREST, FLORIDA.

(a) CONVEYANCE AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary of Agriculture may convey, without consideration, to the Mt. Trial Primitive Baptist Church of Wakulla County, Florida, all right, title, and interest of the United States in and to four parcels of real property in the Apalachicola National Forest, Florida, located in section 5 of township 5 south, range 2 west, Tallahassee meridian, and consisting of approximately 9.95 acres, 0.09 acres, 0.09 acres, and 0.096 acres, respectively, as depicted on a map, plat number 5-118, prepared as part of a 1983 Forest Service survey.

(b) DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY.—The exact acreage and legal description of the real property to be conveyed under subsection (a) shall be determined by the Secretary.

(c) ADDITIONAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS.—The Secretary may require such additional terms and conditions in connection with the conveyance under subsection (a) as the Secretary considers appropriate to protect the interests of the United States.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) each will control 20 minutes.