

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.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 3217 allows the Forest Service to convey without consideration 10.2 acres of the Apalachicola National Forest to the Mt. Trial Primitive Baptist Church of Wakulla County, Florida.

This parcel of land was purchased by the Mt. Trial church in the 1930s; but for a variety of reasons, the deed was never recorded. Unfortunately, the original landowner subsequently resold the land to the National Forest Service in the 1950s. While the Forest Service now technically owns the land, it is more than happy to return this cemetery to the church. This is a fair and equitable resolution to this unfortunate situation.

H.R. 3217 was marked up by the Committee on Agriculture on October 29, 2003. It was approved by the committee on a voice vote without amendment. The bill enjoys the support of the local community and the administration. I urge all Members to support this legislation and return this property to its rightful owner.

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

I rise in support of H.R. 3217, legislation to convey several small parcels of National Forest System land in the Apalachicola National Forest in order to resolve boundary discrepancies involving the U.S. Forest Service and the Mt. Trial Primitive Baptist Church of Wakulla County, Florida.

Briefly, H.R. 3217 would allow the Mt. Trial church to expand a cemetery that it maintains next to its church building. This legislation would correct boundary discrepancies that resulted from the church and the Forest Service claiming ownership to the same 10-acre tract of land.

By way of background, the Mt. Trial Primitive Baptist Church is a historically African American church that purchased 10 acres of land in the 1930s in anticipation of expanding its cemetery. The church, however, never recorded the deed for the land purchased at the local county courthouse.

In 1938, the U.S. Forest Service purchased the same 10 acres of land as part of a larger tract that was incorporated into the Apalachicola National Forest. In that instance, the Forest Service did record its deed; and while there is no dispute about the validity of the church's purchase, the Department of Agriculture's legal counsel has ruled that because the Federal Government did file its deed with the county, it is the rightful owner of the property. I would also note that two graves are already located on the Federal Government property and the church's existing cemetery is full.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 3217 will solve the boundary discrepancies by giving the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to transfer the property to the Mt.

Trial Primitive Baptist Church. I encourage my colleagues to support this measure. This measure has been brought to our attention by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BOYD).

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.

This is a fair and equitable way to deal with this problem. All parties agree to it, and hopefully the Members of the House will join us in support of this important legislation.

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 bill, H.R. 3217.

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. GUTKNECHT. 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. 3217, the bill just passed.

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

There was no objection.

PROVIDING FOR DESIGNATION OF A DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE DISASTER LIAISON

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3157) to provide for the designation of a Department of Agriculture disaster liaison to assist State and local employees of the Department in coordination with other disaster agencies in response to a federally declared disaster area as a result of a disaster, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3157

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

SECTION 1. LIAISON FOR DISASTER EMERGENCIES.

(a) DEPLOYMENT OF DISASTER LIAISON.—The Secretary of Agriculture shall deploy disaster liaisons to State and local Department of Agriculture Service Centers in a federally declared disaster area whenever Federal Emergency Management Agency Personnel are deployed in that area, to coordinate Department programs with the appropriate disaster agencies designated under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.).

(b) QUALIFICATIONS.—Disaster liaisons shall be selected from among Department employees who have experience providing emergency disaster relief in federally declared disaster areas.

(c) DUTIES.—A disaster liaison shall—

(1) serve as a liaison to State and Federal Emergency Services;

(2) be deployed to a federally declared disaster area to coordinate Department inter-agency programs in assistance to agricultural producers in the declared disaster area;

(3) facilitate the claims and applications of agricultural producers who are victims of the disaster that are forwarded to the Department by the appropriate State Department of Agriculture agency director; and

(4) coordinate with the Director of the State office of the appropriate Department agency to assist with the application for and distribution of economic assistance.

(d) DURATION OF DEPLOYMENT.—The deployment of a disaster liaison under subsection (a) may not exceed 30 days.

(e) DEFINITION.—In this section, the term "federally declared disaster area" means—

(1) an area covered by a Presidential declaration of major disaster, including a disaster caused by a wildfire, issued under section 301 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5170); or

(2) determined to be a disaster area, including a disaster caused by a wildfire, by the Secretary under subpart A of part 1945 of title 7, Code of Federal Regulations.

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, H.R. 3157, a bill to designate and deploy U.S. Department of Agriculture liaison teams to areas of the country declared disaster areas, was approved by the Committee on Agriculture on October 29 of this year.

The bill seeks to ensure prompt Federal assistance to agricultural producers in rural areas affected by natural disasters that have been declared by the President or the Secretary of Agriculture. The teams will coordinate the activities of USDA employees assisting agricultural producers within the disaster area. The teams will facilitate the making of claims and applications for economic assistance of affected producers and others as they deal with the agencies designated under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act.

During the business meeting to consider H.R. 3157, the committee considered and adopted as a substitute amendment four changes to the legislation as originally introduced by the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT). These changes include directing the Secretary of Agriculture to use USDA Food and Agriculture Council as a point of contact for the liaison team, requiring the Secretary to make the deployment only when FEMA has been sent to the disaster area, providing that the team will conduct and conclude its business within 30 days of the deployment, and, finally, adding wildfire as a specific disaster under a secretarial disaster declaration.

The bill before the House this afternoon makes a minor amendment to the