

In land right next to my district, millions of residents enjoy the drinking water and the recreational resources of the Ramapo Mountains, the Wyanokie Highlands and the Pequannock Watershed. This bill will provide millions of dollars in land preservation assistance to protect this core of wilderness in our region.

The Highlands Conservation Act should be a model for future land preservation efforts. We have debated land preservation on this very floor, and yes, we need to have a sensible approach to it and respect, as the gentleman from California pointed out, property rights.

This legislation encourages a strong partnership between the Federal, State and local communities, and the gentleman from New Jersey, my colleague in the State legislature, this has been the center of his work on preservation, and it is fitting, it is fitting on this floor that we salute his efforts, particularly at a time when things can get downright contentious here.

The bipartisan efforts we have made to create innovative legislation that preserves critical land while respecting the rights of property owners should set a standard for this House. Advocates for this bill worked tirelessly with environmentalists and private industry to create a worthy compromise that does a service to the legislative process.

So preservation of the Highlands will benefit all Americans. Indeed, the Highlands is not just a New Jersey resource. As in any other parts in this country, it is a national treasure.

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

Again, I want to point out that this bill eliminated the Office of Highlands Stewardship and the accompanied regulatory process. It reduced the authorization level from \$25 million annually to \$10 million annually over 10 years. It focused conservation efforts only on those resources most important. This bill clarified that the bill would not establish a wholly new programmatic category of land use, and, finally, it assured landowners in the Highlands region that private property rights will be protected by including safeguards for those landowners potentially at risk.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a good piece of legislation. It has been developed over a long period of time.

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

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

As stated, we did have some concerns about the expense of the bill and the funding for it, given the limitations of the land and water conservation fund, but we are supportive of the bill.

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Highlands Conservation Act.

To anyone in this Congress who questions the value of efforts to preserve open space, I invite them to come to New Jersey. My con-

stituents, like most people around the state, have seen the ills of sprawl and the consequences of poor planning and meager preservation efforts.

Despite the fact that many see rampant commercial and industrial development in New Jersey, however, there are still some wonderful tracts of land left in some areas of our state. One in particular is part of this tract we are trying to save through today's legislation, the Highlands Region. These are important not just for aesthetically pleasing vistas, but especially for the health of our environment, our water, our air, and mostly our people.

The Highlands is an incredible 2 million acre swath across four states—New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. This tract is home to nearly one and a half million people and is still a quick drive away from New York City and other major metropolitan areas.

Even more importantly, the Highlands provides and protects the drinking water supplies for over 15 million people who live in the Philadelphia-New York-Hartford metropolitan area, which cuts right through my central New Jersey district.

That is why it is so important that the House today pass the Highlands Conservation Act. This bill authorizes federal Land and Water Conservation Fund money that will be matched at least one to one by local, state, and private funding. The governors of the four Highlands states will identify which lands are best eligible for conservation efforts, then apply to the federal government for funding. I know that the governor of New Jersey is ready and eager to get to work identifying these areas and preserving more green space in the state.

I also want to highlight provisions in the bill that provide technical assistance to communities and organizations involved in conservation efforts for the Highlands. So many people in the region have already done so much wonderful work to help preserve the area, and they will now get the added benefit of assistance and expertise from the federal government.

I want to recognize Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN for his leadership on this issue and his hard work to get the legislation on the floor. I also want to salute the work of former Representative Ben Gilman, who led the effort on this legislation during the last Congress.

I also want to thank Chairman POMBO, Ranking Member RAHALL, Subcommittee Chairman RADANOVICH, and Ranking Member CHRISTENSEN for helping see this legislation through the Resources committee. This bill means a lot to New Jersey, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. CALVERT) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1964, 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.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to assist the States of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania in conserving pri-

ority lands and natural resources in the Highlands region, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WATER COMMISSION ACT OF 2003

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 135) to establish the "Twenty-First Century Water Commission" to study and develop recommendations for a comprehensive water strategy to address future water needs, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 135

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 "Twenty-First Century Water Commission Act of 2003".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds that—

(1) the Nation's water resources will be under increasing stress and pressure in the coming decades;

(2) a thorough assessment of technological and economic advances that can be employed to increase water supplies or otherwise meet water needs in every region of the country is important and long overdue; and

(3) a comprehensive strategy to increase water availability and ensure safe, adequate, reliable, and sustainable water supplies is vital to the economic and environmental future of the Nation.

SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT.

There is established a commission to be known as the "Twenty-First Century Water Commission" (in this Act referred to as the "Commission").

SEC. 4. DUTIES.

The duties of the Commission shall be to—

(1) use existing water assessments and conduct such additional assessments as may be necessary to project future water supply and demand;

(2) study current water management programs of Federal, Interstate, State, and local agencies, and private sector entities directed at increasing water supplies and improving the availability, reliability, and quality of freshwater resources; and

(3) consult with representatives of such agencies and entities to develop recommendations consistent with laws, treaties, decrees, and interstate compacts for a comprehensive water strategy which—

(A) respects the primary role of States in adjudicating, administering, and regulating water rights and water uses;

(B) identifies incentives intended to ensure an adequate and dependable supply of water to meet the needs of the United States for the next 50 years;

(C) suggests strategies that avoid increased mandates on State and local governments;

(D) eliminates duplication and conflict among Federal governmental programs;

(E) considers all available technologies and other methods to optimize water supply reliability, availability, and quality, while safeguarding the environment;

(F) recommends means of capturing excess water and flood water for conservation and use in the event of a drought;

(G) suggests financing options for comprehensive water management projects and for appropriate public works projects;

(H) suggests strategies to conserve existing water supplies, including recommendations for repairing aging infrastructure; and

(1) includes other objectives related to the effective management of the water supply to ensure reliability, availability, and quality, which the Commission shall consider appropriate.

SEC. 5. MEMBERSHIP.

(a) NUMBER AND APPOINTMENT.—The Commission shall be composed of 9 members who shall be appointed not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act. Member shall be appointed as follows:

(1) 5 members appointed by the President;

(2) 2 members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, in consultation with the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives; and

(3) 2 members appointed by the Majority Leader of the Senate, in consultation with the Minority Leader of the Senate.

(b) QUALIFICATIONS.—Members shall be appointed to the Commission from among individuals who—

(1) are of recognized standing and distinction in water policy issues; and

(2) while serving on the Commission, do not hold any other position as an officer or employee of the United States, except as a retired officer or retired civilian employee of the United States.

(c) OTHER CONSIDERATIONS.—In appointing members of the Commission, every effort shall be made to ensure that the members represent a broad cross section of regional and geographical perspectives in the United States.

(d) CHAIRPERSON.—The Chairperson of the Commission shall be designated by the President.

(e) TERMS.—Members of the Commission shall be appointed not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act and shall serve for the life of the Commission.

(f) VACANCIES.—A vacancy on the Commission shall not affect its operation, and shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment provided under subsection (a).

(g) COMPENSATION AND TRAVEL EXPENSES.—Members of the Commission shall serve without compensation, except members shall receive travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, in accordance with applicable provisions under subchapter I of chapter 57, United States Code.

SEC. 6. MEETINGS AND QUORUM.

(a) MEETINGS.—The Commission shall hold its first meeting not later than 60 days after the date on which all members have been appointed under section 5, and shall hold additional meetings at the call of the Chairperson or a majority of its members.

(b) QUORUM.—A majority of the members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

SEC. 7. DIRECTOR AND STAFF.

A Director shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Majority Leader of the Senate, in consultation with the Minority Leader and chairmen of the Resources and Transportation and Infrastructure Committees of the House of Representatives, and the Minority Leader and chairmen of the Energy and Natural Resources and Environment and Public Works Committees of the Senate. The Director and any staff reporting to the Director shall be paid a rate of pay not to exceed the maximum rate of basic pay for GS-15 of the General Schedule.

SEC. 8. POWERS AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMISSION.

(a) HEARINGS.—The Commission shall hold no fewer than 10 hearings during the life of the Commission. Hearings may be held in conjunction with meetings of the Commission. The Commission may take such testimony and receive such evidence as the Commission considers appropriate to carry out this Act. At least 1 hearing shall be held in Washington, D.C., for the purpose of taking testimony of representatives of Federal agencies, national organizations, and

Members of Congress. Other hearings shall be scheduled in distinct geographical regions of the United States and should seek to ensure testimony from individuals with a diversity of experiences, including those who work on water issues at all levels of government and in the private sector.

(b) INFORMATION AND SUPPORT FROM FEDERAL AGENCIES.—Upon request of the Commission, any Federal agency shall—

(1) provide to the Commission, within 30 days of its request, such information as the Commission considers necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act; and

(2) detail to temporary duty with the Commission on a reimbursable basis such personnel as the Commission considers necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act, in accordance with section 5(b)(5), Appendix, title 5, United States Code.

SEC. 9. REPORTS.

(a) INTERIM REPORTS.—Not later than 6 months after the date of the first meeting of the Commission, and every 6 months thereafter, the Commission shall transmit an interim report containing a detailed summary of its progress, including meetings and hearings conducted in the interim period, to—

(1) the President;

(2) the Committee on Resources and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives; and

(3) the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and the Committee on the Environment and Public Works of the Senate.

(b) FINAL REPORT.—As soon as practicable, but not later than 3 years after the date of the first meeting of the Commission, the Commission shall transmit a final report containing a detailed statement of the findings and conclusions of the Commission, and recommendations for legislation and other policies to implement such findings and conclusions, to—

(1) the President;

(2) the Committee on Resources and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives; and

(3) the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and the Committee on the Environment and Public Works of the Senate.

SEC. 10. TERMINATION.

The Commission shall terminate not later than 30 days after the date on which the Commission transmits a final report under section 7(b).

SEC. 11. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There are authorized to be appropriated \$9,000,000 to carry out this Act.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. CALVERT).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

H.R. 135, introduced by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER), and cosponsored by a wide range of Members from both parties, creates a national commission to develop increased

water supplies. The gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER) and his colleagues have properly recognized that drought is a national problem, not just a Western issue.

This bill creates a process while adhering to States' rights to address this problem. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

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

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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 rise in support of H.R. 135. This legislation would establish the 21st Century Water Policy Commission to study Federal, State, local, and private water management programs in an effort to develop recommendations for a comprehensive national water strategy.

Mr. Speaker, the objectives of H.R. 135 are worthwhile, and I appreciate the cooperation we have received from the sponsor of this bill. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 10 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. COSTELLO) and ask unanimous consent that he be allowed to control said time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from the Virgin Islands?

There was no objection.

Mr. CALVERT. Madam Speaker, I yield 10 minutes to the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DUNCAN) and ask unanimous consent that he be allowed to control that time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, first of all, I want to commend my colleague, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER), and I rise in strong support of H.R. 135, the 21st Century Water Commission Act of 2003.

Madam Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER).

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

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 135, the 21st Century Water Commission Act of 2003. H.R. 135 is designed to bring together our Nation's premier water experts to recommend strategies for meeting our water challenges in the next century.

I would like to first thank the gentleman from California (Chairman CALVERT) and his staff and the gentleman from Tennessee (Chairman DUNCAN) and his staff for being so helpful in

bringing this bill to the floor and having hearings.

Ensuring fresh water for U.S. citizens will be a critical challenge facing the United States as we enter the 21st Century. Water related issues have been of interest to me for many years. In fact, I wrote an article in 1978 that predicted that one of the 12 major challenges for our country in the next century would be providing enough fresh water for our booming population.

Since that time, about 25 years ago, America still does not have an integrated or comprehensive water policy, even with hundreds of thousands of Federal, State, local and private sector employees working to solve water problems. If we wait another 10 or 20 years to get serious about meeting our demand for clean water, it will be too late.

According to the October 27, 2003, edition of U.S. News and World Report, "Our population has more than doubled since World War II, and at this rate, we could be on our way to 1 billion people living in the United States by the end of this century." The population growth will clearly put a strain on our already-burdened water supply.

As my colleagues are aware, many States across the Nation are currently facing a water crisis. Once thought to be a problem only in the arid West, severe droughts last summer caused water shortages up and down the east coast. States once accustomed to an unlimited access to water realized that they are not immune to the problems which the West has experienced for decades.

In addition, numerous news articles over the past few years have increased our attention to other water problems that we currently face. To name just a few, aquifers are being challenged by salt water intrusion, rivers and wells are drying up all over the country, crops are being threatened, and our aging water pipes leak billions of gallons of fresh water in our cities all over the country. For example, New York City loses 36 million gallons per day and Philadelphia loses 85 million per day just through leaks in infrastructure.

Let me be clear about one thing: my bill does not give the Federal Government more direct authority or control over water. This commission is designed to make recommendations about how we can coordinate water management efforts on all levels, so that localities, States, and the Federal Government can work together.

Some highlights of the bill are as follows:

The commission will look for ways to ensure fresh water for citizens for the next 50 years.

The commission will be composed of nine members, appointed by the President and key leaders in the House and Senate.

The commission will look for ways to eliminate duplication and conflict among Federal Government agencies.

The commission will consider all available technologies and other methods to optimize water supply reliability.

The commission will hold hearings in distinct geographical regions of the United States and in Washington, D.C., to seek a diversity of views, comments, and input.

Not later than 6 months after the date of the first meeting of the commission, and every 6 months thereafter, the commission will transmit a report to the Congress. A final report will be due within 3 years of the commission's inception.

In John Steinbeck's novel, "East of Eden," the narrator observes, "It never failed that during the dry years that people forgot about the rich years, and during the wet years they lost all memory of the dry years. It was always that way."

The United States cannot afford to reevaluate its water policies every time a crisis hits. Now is the time to get ahead of this issue, and I believe the 21st Century Water Commission can serve as the channel for doing so.

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

(Mr. COSTELLO asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks, and include extraneous material.)

Mr. COSTELLO. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 135, the 21st Century Water Commission Act of 2003. This bill is a step towards addressing the availability of clean and safe water resources to meet the Nation's needs.

Madam Speaker, clean, safe and available sources of water are essential to the physical and economic well-being of this country. Commercial fishing, agriculture, real estate, manufacturing, and recreation and tourism are just a few of the economic sectors that rely on clean water to operate and ensure productivity. Every day, the U.S. economy relies on the availability of clean water to grow, process, or deliver products and services.

However, at the same time, there is an emerging concern about the availability of adequate safe supplies of water to meet the growing list of often competing needs.

Throughout the first three-quarters of the 20th century, demand for water in the United States dramatically increased.

However, this Nation made progress in reducing the overall consumption of water resources in the past 20 years. Water withdrawals in the United States are now 10 percent below their peak. In addition, industrial water use dropped nearly 40 percent from its height as industrial water-use efficiency improved and as the mix of U.S. industries changed. At the same time, industrial productivity continues to rise, demonstrating that improvements in water-use efficiency are possible without negatively impacting economic growth.

In the past few years, considerable media attention has focused on the availability of adequate water supplies to meet current and future demands. In the last 2 years, regions of the country that have not traditionally experi-

enced water resource concerns, including the Midwest and the Northeast, often found themselves with a greater demand for water resources than were available—and were forced, in some communities to ration water use.

While this debate has long existed in the more arid regions of the West, these experiences in the eastern half of the country have served as a wake-up call to the fact that water supply problems can occur in almost every region of the country. The question is now being asked, "What can be done to ensure adequate water to meet current and future needs?"

This legislation would create a Federal commission of experts on water policy to study this issue, and to recommend strategies and changes to current law that may be necessary to ensure the availability of adequate water resources for future generations.

Madam Speaker, it is important for this Nation to have a dialogue on what can be done to ensure that sufficient water resources are available to meet current and future needs. I do have some concerns with this legislation, and with the broader topic of planning for water resource needs. We need to fully discuss what the Federal role in water resource planning should be, and how Federal financial resources are to be expended to address this growing concern.

In addition, I believe that the scope of any national water resource planning study must include all affected parties, and must look to both structural and non-structural approaches to reduce consumption and ensure adequate, safe, and reliable sources of water for generations to come.

If this Congress truly wants to enter the debate on a national water resource policy, we must make sure that the record is complete, and that all alternatives are examined to determine the appropriate means to resolve this important question.

I hope that we can continue to work together on this legislation as it continues through the legislative process.

Mr. DUNCAN. Madam Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER).

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

Madam Speaker, this legislation deals with an issue which I have considered a priority for some time, our water resources and the ability of the Federal Government to provide our communities with effective solutions to their problems.

Our economy depends on our Nation's water resources. In fact, the United States economy base has grown both geographically and economically through its efficient and effective water system. We must realize that water is a precious resource, and we take steps to ensure its proper use.

This legislation establishes a 21st Century Water Commission to study and develop recommendations for a comprehensive water strategy to address future waters needs. This commission would assess our current and future water supply needs and consider

all available technologies for increasing water supply efficiently while safeguarding the environment. Additionally, this commission will suggest financing options and strategies to preserve existing water supplies.

Most importantly, the commission will pursue strategies that avoid increasing mandates on State and local governments. We understand that unfunded mandates take away from local decisionmaking. When the first withdrawal from a municipality's finances must go for an unfunded mandate, that community then has less discretion in paying for vital services and programs expected by its citizens. It is critical to the health of our local communities not to burden them with these types of mandates.

I would like to thank the gentleman from Tennessee (Chairman DUNCAN) and the ranking member, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. COSTELLO), and the entire Committee on Resources for all their hard work.

I support H.R. 135 wholeheartedly and ask that my colleagues do the same.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I have the privilege of chairing the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment. We held a hearing on this legislation, and the then chairman, the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG), and I and the ranking member, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), and the ranking member of my subcommittee, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. COSTELLO), all approved bringing this legislation to the floor at this time.

As I said a few moments ago, I rise in strong support of H.R. 135, the 21st Century Water Commission Act of 2003. I want to commend the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER) for his foresight and his hard work in bringing this legislation to this point.

A couple of years ago, the New York Times had a series of articles in which they called water the oil of the 21st century. There is probably nothing that people take more for granted than a clean, safe, adequate water supply.

This bill begins the hard work of tackling one of the most important and difficult environmental and economic issues facing our Nation, and that is ensuring that we have an adequate water supply. We need water for our homes, farms, and factories. Water also supports navigation, generates power, and sustains our environment. Communities cannot grow or even exist without adequate water.

As we enter the 21st century, demands for water are growing and are stripping supplies in many areas, both in the West and the East, leading to disputes over water supply and allocation. In response, many municipalities, businesses and land developers are trying to secure more water rights so they will have adequate water supplies now and in the future.

Last year's drought in the East made it clear that while water may be abundant in many areas, it is not limitless, and even our Nation's most water-rich regions can run dry. Even though the East has been wet this year, much of the West remains very, very dry. Policymakers no longer can ignore this issue. We need to start planning for the future.

H.R. 135, the 21st Century Water Commission Act of 2003, will help start that planning process by looking at our Nation's available water supply and the projected demand for water and making recommendations on how to meet that demand.

Because of the importance of water to our Nation's economy and well-being, I held a series of hearings this past spring on water scarcity problems, ways businesses and communities are responding, and how H.R. 135 can help States and communities address their water problems. The witnesses strongly supported greater planning for future water needs, involving all levels of government, and supported H.R. 135 as a means to help start that process.

H.R. 135 respects the primary role that States play in addressing water supply issues, but the Federal Government can provide expertise and technical assistance. Numerous parties strongly support this legislation, including the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Urban Water Council, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the National Water Resources Association, the National Association of Homebuilders, the Association of California Water Agencies, and many others.

I urge all of my colleagues to support this very important bill and once again commend our colleague, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER), for leading this effort.

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

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

Madam Speaker, once again I want to commend the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER) for his leadership on this bill. As the chairman of the Subcommittee on Water and Power, I have witnessed firsthand throughout this country water problems that tend to grow, not shrink, as our country faces the problem of less water and water quality issues throughout our country.

Vision is an important thing that we do around here that sometimes we forget. The gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER) certainly is showing vision to make sure that we have adequate water in the future.

The 21st Century Water Commission, I refer to it as the Linder Water Commission, will recommend a strategy that recognizes and respects the primary role of States and water rights laws while eliminating duplication and conflict among governmental agencies. This is an incredibly important strategy. We need dependable water supplies that are safe and secure for our future generations.

Again, I commend the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER) for his leadership.

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

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

Madam Speaker, I support this legislation strongly. I commend our colleague, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER), who came before our committee for a hearing, and to urge the adoption of this legislation.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 135, a bill to establish a commission to examine the issue of clean, safe, and reliable water supplies for this generation and for generations to come.

Madam Speaker, water may well be the most precious resource the earth provides to humankind. The existence of water set the stage for the evolution of life and is an essential ingredient of all life today.

Recognizing the importance of this vital resource, the United Nations designated 2003 as the "International Year of Freshwater." Throughout the year, the United Nations has been conducting a series of international meetings to raise awareness on the importance of available sources of clean and safe fresh water. According to the U.N., throughout the world roughly one person in six lives without regular access to safe drinking water, and over twice that number—or 2.4 billion—lack access to adequate sanitation. In addition, water-related diseases kill a child every eight seconds.

In the United States, we have avoided many of these concerns through careful planning and decades of investment in our water infrastructure. Nationally, a combination of Federal, State, and local funds have built 16,024 wastewater treatment facilities that provide service to 190 million people, or 73 percent of the total population.

In addition, 268 million people in the United States—or 92 percent of the total population—are currently served by public drinking water systems, which provide a safe and reliable source of drinking water for much of the Nation.

As I noted earlier, clean, safe, and reliable sources of water are critical to this Nation's health and livelihood. However, in the past few decades, a series of natural and potentially human induced events have demonstrated that our Nation remains vulnerable to shortages of water.

In my own State, shortages of snowfall and rain of over the past few years have had an adverse impact on local water supplies, agriculture, and recreation and tourism, and have resulted in a lowering of water levels in Great Lakes to historic levels. One thing that is certain is that no area of this country is immune to the threat of diminished water supplies, and we must be vigilant to prepare for such occurrences.

This bill is a part of the debate on the very important issue of water resource planning in this country. The gentleman from Georgia, Mr. LINDER, has taken an important step in encouraging this debate, calling for the creation of a Federal commission to examine issues related to national water resource planning, and to report its findings on potential ways to insure against large-scale water shortages in the future.

While I believe that the legislation introduced by our colleague is a good starting point, we must be sure to fully examine all of the relevant issues for ensuring adequate supplies of clean and safe water to meet current and future needs.

For example, water resource planning should work toward increasing the efficiency of water consumption as well as increasing the supply of water. Simply increasing the supply of water can be a more costly approach to meeting future water needs, and in any case, merely postpones any potential water resource crisis.

In addition, it is important to remember that issues of water supply are closely related to water quality. Contaminated sources of freshwater serve little use to this Nation's health or livelihood, and merely increase the overall cost of providing safe a reliable water resources to the population. In addition, human activities, whether through the pollution of waterbodies from point or non-point sources, the elimination of natural filtration abilities of wetlands, or through the destruction and elimination of aquifer recharge points, can have a significant impact on available supplies of usable water.

We cannot base our future water resource planning needs on the possibility of continually finding "new" sources of freshwater while, at the same time, continuing to destroy or contaminate existing sources. Such a practice is unsustainable and unconscionable.

I urge my colleagues to support the bill.

Mr. STENHOLM. Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 135, the Twenty-First Century Water Commission Act.

One thing I've learned since being elected twenty-five years ago, is that Congress can't pass a bill and make it rain.

This morning I look at the United States Drought Monitor again and I was reminded of a disturbing trend that several states have experienced for many years. Twenty-five states are suffering from drought conditions, and with no definite starting or ending point, droughts are extremely hard to predict.

But, as a cotton farmer from West Texas, I am always optimistic that the rains will come eventually. In the meantime, we cannot afford to leave a single stone unturned in our efforts to ensure that our citizens have a safe and adequate water supply.

Will my district be able to meet our water needs fifty years from now? We aren't able to answer that question today, and we sure can't wait until that time is upon us to find out.

This is why I joined my colleagues in co-sponsoring the 21st Century Water Policy Commission Act. This legislation does what so many communities in my West Texas district are already trying to do. It establishes commission to consider all aspects of water management, water supply and demand, and it recommends comprehensive policy for meeting our nation's water needs in the 21st Century. For these reasons, I'm glad to support H.R. 135.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. CALVERT) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 135, 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.

CONVEYANCE OF DECOMMISSIONED SHIP TO UTROK ATOLL

Mr. CALVERT. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2584) to provide for the conveyance to the Utrok Atoll local government of a decommissioned National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ship, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 2584

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

TITLE I—UTROK ATOLL RADIOLOGICAL MONITORING SUPPORT

SEC. 101. UTROK ATOLL RADIOLOGICAL MONITORING SUPPORT.

(a) In support of radiological monitoring, rehabilitation, and resettlement of Utrok Atoll, whose residents were affected by United States nuclear testing, the Secretary of Commerce may convey to the Utrok Atoll local government without consideration, all right, title, and interest of the United States in and to a decommissioned National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ship in operable condition.

(b) The Government of the United States shall not be responsible or liable for any maintenance or operation of a vessel conveyed under this section after the date of the delivery of the vessel to Utrok.

TITLE II—RATIFICATION OF CERTAIN NOAA APPOINTMENTS, PROMOTIONS, AND ACTIONS

SEC. 201. RATIFICATION OF CERTAIN NOAA APPOINTMENTS, PROMOTIONS, AND ACTIONS.

All action in the line of duty by, and all Federal agency actions in relation to (including with respect to pay, benefits, and retirement) a de facto officer of the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration who was appointed or promoted to that office without Presidential action, and without the advice and consent of the Senate, during such time as the officer was not properly appointed in or promoted to that office, are hereby ratified and approved if otherwise in accord with the law, and the President alone may, without regard to any other law relating to appointments or promotions in such corps, appoint or promote such a de facto officer temporarily, without change in the grade currently occupied in a de facto capacity, as an officer in such corps for a period ending not later than 180 days from the date of enactment of this Act.

TITLE III—INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES REAUTHORIZATION

SEC. 301. SHORT TITLE.

This title may be cited as the "International Fisheries Reauthorization Act of 2003".

SEC. 302. EXTENSION OF PERIOD FOR REIMBURSEMENT UNDER FISHERMEN'S PROTECTIVE ACT OF 1967.

Section 7(e) of the Fishermen's Protective Act of 1967 (22 U.S.C. 1977(e)) is amended by striking "2003" and inserting "2008".

SEC. 303. REAUTHORIZATION OF YUKON RIVER SALMON ACT OF 2000.

Section 208 of the Yukon River Salmon Act of 2000 (16 U.S.C. 5727) is amended by striking "2000" and all that follows through "2003" and inserting "2004 through 2008".

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. CALVERT).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CALVERT. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2584, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, H.R. 2584 will transfer a decommissioned NOAA vessel to the Utrok Atoll local government in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The Utrok Atoll is one of 29 low coral atolls in the Marshall Islands that is inhabited by 600 people.

This small atoll has been exposed to the horrible effects of radioactive pollution during our nuclear bomb testing period. These citizens require ongoing tests, monitoring and medical care; and it is currently difficult for them to obtain access to that care.

The fundamental goal of this legislation is to provide these citizens with a reliable, safe means of transportation to the city of Majuro. This city is the capital of the Marshall Islands and is more than 300 miles from the Utrok Atoll.

The NOAA vessel likely affected by this measure is the McArthur. The ship is 175 feet long, has a cruising speed of 10 knots, a cruising range of over 6,000 nautical miles and a draft of 12 feet. It was commissioned as a NOAA research vessel in 1966 and decommissioned on May 20, 2003.

Under the terms of H.R. 2584, all rights, title, and interest in the ship are transferred to the Utrok Atoll government. The vessel must be in operable condition prior to the actual transfer; but in the future, all maintenance, responsibility, and liabilities are conveyed to the Utrok Atoll government.

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Title II of the bill is a corrective measure for the Department of Commerce which may approve appointments and confirmations made for the NOAA Corps in the Clinton and Bush administrations. This measure has been unanimously adopted by the other body.

Title III of the bill reauthorizes two important laws dealing with international fisheries, the Fisherman's Protective Act and the Yukon River Salmon Act. Identical language was incorporated in H.R. 2048 which unanimously passed the House of Representatives on October 20 of this year. This