

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Madam Speaker, if the gentleman would again yield, and I thank him for yielding, and I sincerely hope that perhaps, even after expressing the sense of the Congress in our resolution, that maybe the next phase is to put in teeth by saying by statute that we do this. Because again, despite all of the good efforts that perhaps the administration may be making on this issue, it is not just from this administration, but even from previous administrations, I think we are tired of the rhetoric. It is time to now put teeth in this issue and make sure that if we are going to be the only Nation complying with the substance of the convention while the others can still do what they want, I think there is a tremendous inequity in this effort.

Again, I thank the gentleman for bringing this point to the attention of our colleagues.

Mr. SAXTON. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman from American Samoa for making the point so clearly.

Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers at this time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. CAPITO). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 268, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

EXTENDING THE TERM OF THE FOREST COUNTIES PAYMENTS COMMITTEE

Mr. SAXTON. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3249) to extend the term of the Forest Counties Payments Committee.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3249

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

SECTION 1. EXTENSION OF TERM OF FOREST COUNTIES PAYMENTS COMMITTEE.

Effective as of October 11, 2003, section 320(e) of the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2001 (Public Law 106-291; 114 Stat. 994; 16 U.S.C. 500 note), is amended by striking "three years after the date of the enactment of this Act" and inserting "on September 30, 2007".

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SAXTON. 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 the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, this bill, H.R. 3249, simply changes the termination date of the Forest Counties Payments Committee that was created by Congress in the Interior Appropriations Act of 2001 to coincide with the expiration date in 2006 of the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self-Determination Act of 2000.

The purpose of this committee is to develop recommendations for Congress concerning the Federal program of payments to States and counties and to evaluate the effectiveness of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act that regulates those payments. While some of the work of the committee has been completed, the important job of evaluating the effectiveness of Public Law 106-393 is ongoing and will need to be continued in order to assist Congress as it reviews options for either reauthorization or the development of new legislation. These efforts are crucial if we hope to further our understanding and support for healthy communities and healthy forests.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. WALDEN) for his thoughtful leadership on this issue and on this bill. I urge adoption of the bill.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Madam 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. Madam Speaker, H.R. 3249 extends the term of the Forest Counties Payments Committee until September 30, 2007. This date coincides with the expiration date of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000. The committee, whose term expired on October 11, 2003, is to provide recommendations concerning Federal payments to States and counties in which public lands are situated. The bill is noncontroversial, and we do not object to it.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the two gentlemen from Oregon, the sponsor of the bill, (Mr. WALDEN), and our Democratic colleague (Mr. DEFAZIO) for bringing this legislation to the floor.

Mr. WALDEN of Oregon. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3249—a bill I introduced with my colleague from Oregon, Mr. DEFAZIO, which would extend the term of the Forest Counties Payments Committee. I want to commend the chairman of the Resources

Committee, Mr. POMBO, and the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee, Mr. GOODLATTE, for expediting the consideration of this legislation in their respective committees.

Madam Speaker, H.R. 3249 would extend the term of the Forest Counties Payments Committee to coincide with the sunset of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000, which expires on September 30, 2007. The committee was created in the FY 2001 Interior Appropriations bill and is comprised of local government county and school officials. Its purpose was to develop long-term solutions to ensure the proper management of our national forests, emphasizing forest health and economic activity, and evaluate the effectiveness of the County Schools legislation.

Congress charged the committee with evaluating several key areas in making its recommendations. They include the methods by which payments are made to eligible states and counties; the impact of revenues from historical multiple use of federal lands on states and counties; the economic environmental, and social benefits of federal lands to counties and reviewing the costs to counties resulting from the presence of federal lands. The committee held at least six listening sessions throughout the country to understand better the impact that the presence of these federal lands has on counties where they are located. The input gathered from these listening sessions was ultimately used to write the committee's report, which was published in February 2003.

What did the committee's report find? It found that many communities in my district have known for at least the last decade: that the decline in timber receipts from federal lands has had a devastating economic impact on these rural communities. While communities acknowledge the benefits associated with the presence of public lands within their counties, including improved quality of life, recreational opportunities, and the revenue coming into their communities through travel and tourism, the committee validated the claims that these benefits are outweighed by the degradation of county roads and schools that has resulted from the decline in timber receipts. This not only creates access issues for individuals wishing to recreate on public lands, but also creates safety concerns for transporting children to schools, responding to emergencies and day-to-day travel.

This unfortunate reality especially holds true in the counties I represent in eastern Oregon. Between 1990–1999 the counties in this region saw Forest Service payments from timber receipts and other generated revenues drop by 87 percent.

In light of the rapid decline of timber receipts reaching these communities, Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000. This act stabilized timber revenue dependent counties by providing a temporary "safety-net" payment to forest counties and schools at 85 percent of the average of their three highest receipt years from 1986–1999. The legislation also provided an additional 15 percent to support community-based projects, like hazardous fuels treatments taking place on federal lands.

Madam Speaker, the authorization for the Forest Counties Payments Committee expired several weeks ago, on October 11, before it was able to examine fully the impact of the

County Schools legislation. More importantly, if the committee's term is not extended, it will not have the opportunity to examine the potential effect that the implementation of the National Fire Plan or the Healthy Forests Initiative will have on America's forested counties. The Chairman of this committee, Mark Evans, stated in a letter to Chairman POMBO, ". . . the Committee did not have adequate time to consider ways to integrate the Healthy Forests Initiative and National Fire Plan with future payment options. The timing of development of these two programs along with a 18-month timeframe imposed on the Committee to produce a final report precluded full consideration of possible options."

Madam Speaker, I agree wholeheartedly with the remarks of Chairman EVANS. We need to pass this legislation to allow the Payments Committee to continue its good work. It goes without saying that its future findings will lay the foundation as we move towards the reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act.

I'd like to once again thank the efforts of Chairman POMBO and Chairman GOODLATTE in getting this legislation to the floor in an expeditious fashion. I urge the House to adopt this extension and yield back the balance of my time.

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

Mr. SAXTON. 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 New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3249.

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.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JUNIOR,
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE LAND
EXCHANGE ACT

Mr. SAXTON. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1616) to authorize the exchange of certain lands within the Martin Luther King, Junior, National Historic Site for lands owned by the City of Atlanta, Georgia, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 1616

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 "Martin Luther King, Junior, National Historic Site Land Exchange Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

(1) Public Law 96-438 established the Martin Luther King, Junior, National Historic Site, and allows acquisition, by donation only, of lands owned by the State.

(2) The National Park Service owns a vacant lot that has no historic significance. The City of Atlanta has expressed interest in acquiring this property to encourage commercial development along Edgewood Avenue.

(3) The National Historic Site Visitor Center and Museum is land-locked and has no emergency ingress or egress, making it virtually impossible for firefighting equipment to reach.

(4) The acquisition of city-owned property would enable the National Park Service to establish easy street access to the National Historic Site Visitor Center and Museum, and would benefit the City by exchanging a piece of property that the City could develop.

(b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this Act is to authorize the exchange of certain lands within the Martin Luther King, Junior, National Historic Site for lands owned by the City of Atlanta, Georgia.

SEC. 3. LAND EXCHANGE.

Section 2(b)(1) of the Act of October 10, 1980 (Public Law 96-428; 94 Stat. 1839; 16 U.S.C. 461 note) is amended by striking the period and inserting "or exchange."

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SAXTON. 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 the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, H.R. 1616, introduced by my great friend, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS), would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to exchange certain disposable lands within the boundaries of the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site in the City of Atlanta, Georgia for land owned by the City of Atlanta.

The acquisition of the city-owned property would accomplish two things: first, to enable the National Park Service to establish easy street access to the Historic Site Visitor Center; and, second, to provide emergency equipment and personnel easy access to the visitor center.

Madam Speaker, H.R. 1616 is supported by the administration and the majority and minority of the committee. I urge adoption of this bill and add my congratulations to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) for bringing this legislation forward.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, H.R. 1616, introduced by my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS), authorizes the exchange of land between the National Park Service and the City of Atlanta at the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site.

The national historic site was established in 1980 to preserve and interpret the birthplace, church, and grave of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Part of the site also includes a vacant lot that is not historically significant to the site, but which the City of Atlanta would like to acquire as part of its redevelopment of the area surrounding the National Historic Site.

The National Park Service has established a visitor center and museum at the historic site that could be enhanced by acquisition of an adjacent parcel owned by the city. While there have been discussions of an exchange of the two properties under the site's Enabling Act, city-owned property can only be acquired by donation.

Madam Speaker, both the National Park Service and the City of Atlanta support this exchange. It is an action that would benefit both the national historic site and the city. This looks to be a win-win situation and, as such, we support the legislation.

Madam Speaker, it is an honor to serve with the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) who, of course, was a trusted and invaluable worker and leader along with Dr. Martin Luther King and who continues to be a drum major for justice today.

Madam Speaker, I yield such time as he might consume to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS).

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands for those kind remarks and also for yielding to me time to speak about H.R. 1616, the Martin Luther King, Junior, National Historic Site Land Exchange Act. I also want to thank my good friend and colleague, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON), for bringing this legislation before us.

Madam Speaker, H.R. 1616 is a good bill. It authorizes the exchange of land owned by the National Park Service for land of equal or greater value from the City of Atlanta. The National Park Service and the City of Atlanta have already agreed to the land swapping. However, this cannot be done without authorization from Congress, and H.R. 1616 completes the deal.

This legislation is so important because the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site Visitor Center and Museum is landlocked and has no emergency access, making it virtually impossible for firefighting equipment to reach the facility. In fact, if there were a fire at the visitor center, the Atlanta Fire Department would have to walk at least 150 to 200 yards in order to reach the center.

Luckily, we have not been faced with such an outcome. However, we must be prepared. Furthermore, Madam Speaker, with heightened security concerns at our Nation's monuments and parks, emergency access is critical.

Passage of H.R. 1616 will allow the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site to create an emergency access road to and from the site.