

contribution to the cultural enrichment of our community and our Nation.

BENEFITS OF PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFIT PLAN

(Mr. KINGSTON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, if you go into almost any group of 30 to 40 people and ask how many of you have someone in your family who has to take three or four pills a day, each and every day for the rest of their lives in order to stay active and stay comfortable and stay healthy, probably 70 percent of the hands in the room would go up, because that is the reality in 2004. If we wind back the clock to 1965 and ask that question, not many people would raise their hands, because we did not have the miracle pills then that we do now.

In 1965, when we started Medicare, we could not foresee this pharmaceutical revolution that we have now. That is why this Congress, under the leadership of George Bush, has put in a prescription drug benefit program in our Medicare reform package.

The plan works like this: This April, all seniors will get a 25 percent discount card that can be used in any pharmacy. Just walk in, a 25 percent savings. Then in the year 2006 you will get about a 50 percent cost reduction on your prescription drugs, on average.

Keep in mind, this is a voluntary program. It is not the greatest thing in the world, but it certainly is a huge step forward, and I think seniors will really enjoy this benefit. I am glad the President took this leadership.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF S. 610, NASA FLEXIBILITY ACT OF 2003

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 502 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 502

Resolved, That at any time after the adoption of this resolution the Speaker may, pursuant to clause 2(b) of rule XVIII, declare the House resolved into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for consideration of the bill (S. 610) to amend the provisions of title 5, United States Code, to provide for workforce flexibilities and certain Federal personnel provisions relating to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and for other purposes. The first reading of the bill shall be dispensed with. General debate shall be confined to the bill and shall not exceed one hour, with 40 minutes equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Science and 20 minutes equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Government Reform. After

general debate the bill shall be considered for amendment under the five-minute rule. The bill shall be considered as read. During consideration of the bill for amendment, the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole may accord priority in recognition on the basis of whether the Member offering an amendment has caused it to be printed in the portion of the Congressional Record designated for that purpose in clause 8 of rule XVIII. Amendments so printed shall be considered as read. At the conclusion of consideration of the bill for amendment the Committee shall rise and report the bill to the House with such amendments as may have been adopted. The previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill and amendments thereto to final passage without intervening motion except one motion to recommend with or without instructions.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TERRY). The gentleman from Florida (Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART) is recognized for 1 hour.

(Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN), pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 520 is an open rule that provides for the consideration of S. 610, the NASA Workforce Flexibility Act of 2003. The rule provides for 1 hour of debate, with 40 minutes equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking member of the Committee on Science, and 20 minutes equally divided between the chairman and ranking member of the Committee on Government Reform. The rule also provides one motion to recommend, with or without instructions.

Mr. Speaker, following the extraordinarily tragic Shuttle *Columbia* disaster, it was imperative that the United States take a deep look at its space program. The Columbia Accident Investigation Board and NASA continue to address needed safety concerns, but I think we must take steps to further innovation and scientific research, find new frontiers and unveil endless possibilities.

I believe NASA has undergone a positive transformation in recent weeks. With the stunning successes of the Mars rovers and President Bush announcing new long-term goals for manned space exploration, our national desire to comprehend the nature of our solar system and our universe has been reinvigorated. The underlying legislation provides NASA additional tools to recruit, train and keep the most talented scientists and engineers.

The legislation authorizes NASA to offer needed incentives to valued current and prospective employees, the same as most major corporations and research institutions would offer to compete. When the United States goes to space, Mr. Speaker, we need the

brightest and the best in the industry to work to make our dreams of exploration a reality. As such, this legislation authorizes recruitment, relocation and retention bonuses as an incentive to NASA employees; term appointments to our most valued scientific minds; and the ability for Administrator O'Keefe to provide pay increases to those in critical positions and with superior qualifications. These are essential additions necessary for NASA to succeed in its newest missions.

Furthermore, the underlying legislation, Mr. Speaker, authorizes \$10 million to begin a Science and Technology Scholarship Program. This funding is an important step for promoting the sciences in our high schools and colleges, while allowing less advantaged students a potential for higher studies.

Our superiority in science and the technologies, without any doubt, has declined since President Kennedy began our Nation on a path to the moon in 1961. It is our responsibility to ensure that when those highly trained NASA scientists retire, some of whom have participated in the entire history of our space program, that they know their replacements will be the best and the brightest from any background that this country has to offer.

I would like to quote Christa McAuliffe, a teacher, astronaut and American hero tragically lost in the explosion of the *Challenger* Space Shuttle. She said, "Space is for everybody. It's not just for a few people in science or math, or for a select group of astronauts. That's our new frontier out there, and it is everybody's business to know about space."

I believe that the underlying legislation, Mr. Speaker, will help NASA to continue our passionate exploration of the unknown. And we bring this legislation forward, Mr. Speaker, under an open rule. Any Member can bring forth to this House for the consideration of all of its membership any idea that Members may have. It is an open and a fair rule.

I would like to thank the gentleman from New York (Chairman BOEHLERT) and Senator VOINOVICH for their support on this issue. I urge Members to support both the rule and the underlying legislation.

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

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume. I thank the gentleman from Florida, Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART, for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of the NASA Workforce Flexibility Act of 2003, as well as the rule providing for its consideration. As the majority member of the committee previously mentioned, the underlying legislation will provide NASA with greater personnel management flexibilities to provide bonuses, hiring and other management tools in order to enhance the agency's ability to recruit and retain qualified employees.

I have always been a friend and supporter of NASA and the U.S. program. I, like so many other Americans, have relished in the Earth-shaking rumbling of powerful shuttle engines launched from the Kennedy Space Center. The instant illumination of the night sky still sends a rush of excitement throughout the United States. Children and adults alike dream of the day when they will have an opportunity to see our Earth from beyond its atmosphere.

The U.S. space program has done so much for Americans, not just inspiring and educating us on space exploration, but constantly improving our quality of life. The returns on those investments are accrued all around us. Technologies of NASA's space program have had and continue to have a profound effect on the U.S. and its people. Many products utilized in our homes and workplaces and used for health, fitness and recreation are the direct result of space technology spin-offs.

It is important for Congress to be aware of the issues facing NASA when it comes to hiring and retaining the best and brightest minds of the scientific community. NASA's workforce differs significantly from other Federal agencies in that more than 60 percent of its makeup is scientists and engineers. These statistics place NASA in a difficult position as the number of graduates in the physical sciences, both under- and post-graduate, continues to decrease.

The NASA Workforce Flexibility Act allows NASA to suit up and engage in the fierce competition with the private sector for the most qualified candidates, thus allowing it to become more competitive in recruiting and retaining the kind of workforce NASA will need in the 21st century.

But while NASA suits up, so must Congress. We must provide guidance to this important Federal agency to ensure that it is recruiting and signing up the most qualified candidates from all colleges, universities and the private sector.

Our colleague, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE), offered an amendment to the underlying bill in committee that would have reinstated the Minority University and Research Programs as a division after NASA demoted it to program status. The amendment was, unfortunately, defeated. While I have been told that this program has not been stripped of any of its abilities to carry out its mission, I certainly hope that the defeat of this amendment is not the beginning of a striptease.

NASA scholarship opportunities should be equally distributed among institutions of higher education, including minority-serving institutions. Programs such as the one the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) sought to reinstate provide the necessary outreach needed to bring the most qualified and diverse candidates to the table.

Mr. Speaker, despite the progress that has been made, it is critical that

we continue to move forward in diversifying the workplace. Lags have been particularly visible for minorities in the math and physical sciences. Democrats stand united and prepared to work with the majority to further ensure that Federal agencies, NASA included, are held accountable for their recruiting and hiring practices. Agencies must not only make good-faith efforts to recruit, employ, train, promote and retain members of underrepresented groups, but they must also show us results.

Mr. Speaker, I too want to thank the members of the Committee on Science, in particular the gentleman from New York (Chairman BOEHLERT) and the ranking member, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. GORDON), for their incredible work. I also want to thank the members of the Committee on Government Reform, particularly the gentleman from Virginia (Chairman Tom Davis) and the ranking member, the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), for all of their good work.

As I mentioned previously, I support the underlying legislation and I will not oppose the rule. I urge my colleagues to do the same.

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

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, reiterating my support for the underlying legislation as well as the rule, I ask my colleagues to support both.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1035

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TERRY). Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 36 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

□ 1055

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART) at 10 o'clock and 55 minutes a.m.

NASA FLEXIBILITY ACT OF 2003

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 502 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the Senate bill, S. 610.

□ 1056

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the Senate bill (S. 610) to amend the provision of title 5, United States Code, to provide for workforce flexibilities and certain Federal personnel provisions relating to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and for other purposes, with Mr. ISAKSON in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered as having been read the first time.

Under the rule, the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOEHLERT) and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. GORDON) each will control 20 minutes; and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) each will control 10 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOEHLERT).

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

Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of S. 610 and I urge my colleagues to approve it and send it to the White House for the President's signature.

This measure is a top priority of the entire administration, especially, of course, of the NASA Administrator. We have taken more than long enough to turn the bill into law.

The need for this bill, it seems to me, is beyond dispute. Events of the past year have highlighted NASA's need to attract and retain the best workforce imaginable, and yet NASA is on the brink of losing the talent that it already has.

Within just 5 years, 5 years, fully one-quarter of NASA's workforce will be eligible to retire. It is no wonder that the General Accounting Office has repeatedly cited strengthening human capital as one of NASA's top management challenges. We must stem the tide of the brain drain. S. 610 is a targeted, carefully crafted, moderate approach to giving NASA additional tools to meet that challenge. The bill does not make any radical departures from current law. Rather, it modifies and expands existing workforce authorities so that NASA can compete with the private sector in the labor market. That is just common sense.

Will changes in civil service laws solve all of NASA's workforce problems? Of course not. But NASA will not be better prepared to recruit and retain the workforce it needs if it is competing with one hand tied behind its back, as it is with current law.

This bill began as a proposal from NASA. We went over that proposal with a fine tooth comb, accepted some provisions, rejected others, and modified many more to clarify and target the new authority.

As a result of those negotiations and additional work in the other body, we