

Yorkers that I am looking forward to attending the Republican National Convention and sampling what the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY) called the "champagne of water" while I am there.

Mrs. LOWEY. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to support the extension of the New York City Watershed Protection Program, and I thank my colleague VITO FOSSELLA for his leadership on this issue.

Ensuring clean drinking water for our communities has always been a priority of mine. Providing a safe and health water supply is not just a public health issue, it is also a homeland security priority.

I am pleased that the bill under consideration today will reauthorize the funding for the Watershed Protection Program through 2010. The program will provide \$15 million per year to protect and enhance the quality of New York's water supply, and in the long run will save taxpayers the cost of an alternative water filtration system. This comprehensive initiative demonstrates our commitment to the ongoing preservation of New York's safe drinking water supply, and I am pleased to see communities, environmental groups and state officials join together in support of this cause.

I am happy to support this legislation, which will benefit the health of New Yorkers and the quality of our environment for years to come.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ISAKSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. GILLMOR) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2771.

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.

SMALL PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITY ACT

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 27) to amend the United States Housing Act of 1937 to exempt small public housing agencies from the requirement of preparing an annual public housing agency plan, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 27

Be it enacted the 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 "Small Public Housing Authority Act".

SEC. 2. PUBLIC HOUSING AGENCY PLANS FOR CERTAIN SMALL PUBLIC HOUSING AGENCIES.

Section 5A(b) of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437c-1(b)) is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(3) EXEMPTION OF CERTAIN SMALL PHAS FROM FILING REQUIREMENT.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding paragraph (1) or any other provision of this Act—

"(i) the requirement under paragraph (1) shall not apply to any qualified small public housing agency; and

"(ii) any reference in this section or any other provision of law to a 'public housing agency'

shall not be considered to refer to any qualified small public housing agency, to the extent such reference applies to the requirement to submit a public housing agency plan under this subsection.

"(B) DEFINITION.—For purposes of this paragraph, the term 'qualified small public housing agency' means a public housing agency that meets all of the following requirements:

"(i) The sum of (I) the number of public housing dwelling units administered by the agency, and (II) the number of vouchers under section 8(o) of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437f(o)) administered by the agency, is 100 or fewer.

"(ii) The agency is not designated pursuant to section 6(j)(2) as a troubled public housing agency.

"(iii) The agency provides assurances satisfactory to the Secretary that notwithstanding the inapplicability of the requirements under this section relating to resident advisory boards and public hearings and notice, residents of public housing administered by the agency will have an adequate and comparable opportunity for participation and notice regarding establishment of the goals, objectives, and policies of the public housing agency."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WALTERS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER).

GENERAL LEAVE

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

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, this Member rises today to express his support for H.R. 27, the Small Public Housing Authority Act. The bill, which was introduced by this Member on January 27, 2003, will be considered under suspension of the rules. This legislation, which addresses the annual plan requirements for small public housing authorities passed the Committee on Financial Services by a unanimous, bipartisan voice vote on March 17, 2004. It is important to note that this Member introduced this legislation in the 107th Congress as well.

First, this Member would like to thank both the distinguished gentleman from Ohio (Chairman OXLEY) and the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK), the ranking minority member, for their efforts in bringing this measure to the floor.

Indeed, following some concerns and suggestions from the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK), compromise language was agreed upon to ensure unanimous support for this legislation. It should be noted for background that the Public Housing Reform Act requires PHAs to submit both a 5-year plan and an annual plan to HUD. The 5-year PHA plan addresses the Agency's mission and their plan to achieve their mission. The annual plan

requires PHAs to provide details about updates or changes to the 5-year plan.

Specifically, the annual plan, among other things, has typically asked for the following information: Housing needs of the families in the jurisdiction; strategies to meet these needs; statement of financial resources; and PHA policies governing eligibility, selection, and admissions. HUD has made the effort to streamline this annual planning for small PHAs and for high-performing PHAs. However, incredibly, an example of a streamlined plan was still 47 pages with extensive attachments.

This legislation would exempt small PHAs from being required to submit that annual plan to HUD. Under the bill as it passed the House Committee on Financial Services, a small PHA is defined to be one which has 100 or fewer combined public housing units and section 8 vouchers. PHAs, which are exempt from the annual planning requirement, would still have to prepare a 5-year plan. Moreover, a small PHA which is designated as a troubled housing agency by HUD would still be required to submit that annual plan.

This legislation also includes a provision that tenants of small PHAs which are exempt from the annual planning requirement must continue to have an adequate and comparable opportunity for participation and notice regarding the establishment of goals, objectives and policies of that PHA.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is needed to simply provide some regulatory burden relief to small PHAs which do not have the time, staff or resources to do these annual HUD plans by themselves. Many of these small PHAs only have a part-time executive director. Currently, small PHAs are forced to hire consultants since they do not have the computer software package to complete these annual plans, and these consultants are expensive costs for small PHAs which already face some daunting financial challenges.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to note that these small PHAs are located across the entire Nation. Today this Member will focus on the small PHAs in Nebraska because I am most familiar with them. For example, in this Member's district, there are 23 PHAs which would qualify under the definition used for small PHAs. There are approximately 60 PHAs in Nebraska statewide which qualify as small PHAs under this bill, especially in the district of the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE), and he will speak on that.

To give a not-atypical example from this Member's congressional district, the village of Beemer is a community of 773 people, according to the last census. They have a PHA which administered just 20 public housing units and no section 8 vouchers. Under the current law, the Beemer PHA is required to submit the extensive annual plan to HUD which I have mentioned.

In conclusion, this bill contains reasonable provisions regarding PHA annual plans which enjoy bipartisan support. This Member would urge his colleagues to support H.R. 27, the Small Public Housing Authority Act.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this bipartisan legislation offered by the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) which would ease the paperwork requirements for certain small public housing authorities and reduce their need to hire consultants to prepare housing plans, and I would like to congratulate both the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. OXLEY) and ranking member, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK), for the leadership they provided, recognizing that it is important for us to come together from time to time to work to get rid of unnecessary regulations and they have done that with this bill.

H.R. 27 would exempt small housing authorities that administer 100 or fewer units of assisted housing from the requirement to prepare an annual public housing agency plan. The threshold would include both public housing units and vouchers under section 8 of the United States Housing Act of 1937.

The affected small housing authorities would remain subject to the Public Housing Reform Act's requirement to submit a 5-year PHA plan to the Department of Housing and Urban Development that addresses the Agency's mission and its plan to achieve its mission.

In order to qualify as a small housing authority under this bill, an agency would have to provide assurances satisfactory to the Secretary of HUD that notwithstanding the inapplicability of certain provisions relating to resident advisory boards and public hearings and notice, residents of public housing administered by the Agency will have an adequate and comparable opportunity for participation and notice regarding establishment of the goals, objectives and policies of the public housing agency.

The objective of this legislation simply is to reduce the administration workload of small PHAs. The goal of H.R. 27 is to give executive directors of small PHAs more time to focus on the needs of their tenants, rather than having to spend time and resources completing an annual plan for submission to HUD.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this legislation will help to limit the burden on small PHAs while providing the necessary protections to ensure that tenants will have the opportunity for input into the small PHA's 5-year plan. I urge all of my colleagues to support this legislation.

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

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for her sup-

portive comments as we try to meet the Nation's diverse housing needs.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE).

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

I rise in support of H.R. 27, which was introduced by the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER), and thank the gentleman for his long and effective service to Congress over many years. He has done a great job and has been very helpful to me and other people in Nebraska.

Mr. Speaker, there are over 50 small public housing authorities in my district that will benefit from this legislation. I think the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) mentioned there are 60 in the State of Nebraska. My district is almost entirely rural. Most of these PHAs are very, very small, and so we have the vast majority in this particular district.

As the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) mentioned, this legislation is needed to simply provide some regulatory burden relief to small PHAs which do not have the time or staff or resources to do housing and urban development plans by themselves. Many of these PHAs have only a part-time executive director, and they hire consultants. Sometimes these PHAs are spending \$600 to \$1,000 a year just for a consultant's fee, and the complexity and length of the reports are ridiculous for the size of the PHA.

If a small PHA in my district is able to create the report, they often have difficulty in filing that report because the Internet dial-up systems are extremely slow, and often they are disconnected before their reports are filed.

So this bill really does what Congress oftentimes fails to do, which is to provide some much-needed regulatory relief. It simplifies rather than complicates the process. I would like to thank the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) for introducing this legislation, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. OXLEY) the chairman of the Committee on Financial Services, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK), and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) for their efforts in bringing this measure to the House floor. I urge its support.

Mr. NEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my support for H.R. 27, the Small Public Housing Authority Act. This legislation addresses the regulatory burdens placed on smaller Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to comply with annual planning requirements enacted into law under the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998. I am confident that passage of this bill would correct an adverse unintended consequence for smaller PHAs. This legislation passed the House Financial Services Committee, by a unanimous bipartisan voice vote on March 17, 2004.

The authors of the 1998 Act envisioned a planning process for PHAs that could be used as a tool for advancing management, bud-

geting, forecasting and tenant needs, among other things. The 1998 Act required a 5-year plan as well as annual planning updates. In the best of all worlds, Congress intended for this tool to be complimentary of the great things that PHAs were currently undertaking to meet the new challenges of housing low-income families and individuals. What Congress did not intend, however, was a complicated planning system that would require many PHAs to hire expensive consultants and deduct resources from other management issues.

Advocates of the 5-year and annual planning process argue that this management tool would require PHAs to engage tenants and actually provide de facto business plans that would assist in meeting future challenges before a crisis occurs. Opponents claim that both planning requirements have been a paper exercise taking away employee and funding resources that could be applied to other management needs. We have yet to get a complete picture of whether the planning process is a useful exercise. I think that it is something that the Committee should continue to review.

We are clear, however, that the smaller PHAs, of which we define in this legislation as those authorities with no more than 100 units or section 8 vouchers, have had difficulty complying with the annual requirements. This legislation would provide much needed regulatory relief for these smaller organizations where the development of the annual plans usually falls on a staff composed of very few individuals.

Mindful that the planning process has been used as an effective tool for tenant groups to provide input to PHA management, we have provided language to preserve the tenant's rights. This, we believe, is a healthy balance between the needs and resources of the PHA management teams as well as the needs of the tenants and their respective organizations.

On a final note, let me just say that it has been my pleasure to work with the sponsor of this legislation—the Gentleman from Nebraska—over the almost 10 years I have served in Congress and on the Committee on Financial Services and its predecessor—the Committee on Banking and Financial Service. Mr. BEREUTER has been an expert on a variety of issues, not limited to rural housing where he developed numerous programs such as the single family loan guarantee program as well as the multifamily loan guarantee program. In addition, he has been instrumental on reauthorizing the National Flood Insurance Program and providing much needed reform to address repetitive loss issues. I am hopeful that the flood insurance bill will be signed into law before Mr. BEREUTER retires.

On issues such as the legislation today, Mr. BEREUTER has ensured that rural and small-town America would be heard and their perspectives recognized. Mr. BEREUTER will retire at the end of this summer and I ask all of my colleagues to join me in wishing him well and thanking him for his service.

Finally, I want to thank the Committee Chairman, Mr. MIKE OXLEY, as well as the Ranking Chairman, Mr. BARNEY FRANK, for moving this bill through the Committee. Moreover, I want to thank the Housing Subcommittee's Ranking Member, Ms. MAXINE WATERS, for all her hard work on this and many issues facing this Subcommittee.

Mr. Speaker, I urge passage of H.R. 27.

Mr. OXLEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my support for H.R. 27, the Small Public Housing Authority Act. This bill will be considered under the suspension of the rules. This legislation, which addresses the annual plan requirement for small public housing authorities (PHAs), passed the House Financial Services Committee by a unanimous bipartisan voice vote on March 17, 2004.

First, I would like to thank the distinguished gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER), the author of this legislation, for his efforts in attempting to reduce the regulatory burdens that small PHAs face. I would also like to thank the distinguished gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK), the Chairman of the Subcommittee for Housing and Community Opportunity, Mr. BOB NEY, and the ranking member, Ms. MAXINE WATERS, for their support of H.R. 27.

This legislation would exempt small PHAs from being required to submit an annual plan to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Under current law, PHAs are required to submit both a 5-year plan and an annual plan to HUD. This legislation is needed to provide some regulatory relief to small PHAs who do not have the resources or time to do these HUD annual plans by themselves. Currently, small PHAs are having to hire expensive third parties to complete these annual plans. Furthermore, an indirect result of this bill would give executive directors of these small PHAs more time to focus on the important needs of their tenants.

The exemption of these smaller PHAs will not have an adverse impact on the ability of tenant organizations to continue to have input with the manager's of their developments. Language was incorporated into the legislation to ensure tenant's participation. Additionally, I want to assure my colleagues that this legislation will still require smaller PHAs to provide the forward-type thinking and advance planning as required under the 5-year plans.

The larger question, however, raised by this legislation is whether the planning requirements for smaller and larger PHAs alike can be a useful tool. It appears that the jury is still out on that question and the Committee will review the issue to determine how we can provide as much flexibility to the Public Housing Authorities, decrease unnecessary regulatory burdens as well as ensure that tenants have a stake in the communities where they live.

In conclusion, I want to urge your support for H.R. 27. This bipartisan bill contains important provisions to reduce the regulatory burdens on small PHAs.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I urge an aye vote on the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, I urge an aye vote, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CHOCOLA). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 27, 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.

□ 1745

EXPRESSING SENSE OF HOUSE REGARDING NEED FOR FREEDOM AND DEMOCRATIC REFORM IN LAOS

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 402) expressing the sense of the House of Representatives regarding the urgent need for freedom, democratic reform, and international monitoring of elections, human rights and religious liberty in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 402

Whereas, in 1975, the Kingdom of Laos, a constitutional monarchy and important ally of the United States during the Vietnam War, was overthrown by the Marxist Lao People's Revolutionary Party with the assistance of the People's Army of North Vietnam;

Whereas the Lao People's Democratic Republic was established as a one-party regime in 1975 following the communist takeover;

Whereas tens of thousands of Laotian and Hmong people, a prominent highland minority group, were killed or died at the hands of communist forces while attempting to flee the Lao communist regime, and many others perished in reeducation and labor camps;

Whereas tens of thousands of Laotian and Hmong became refugees, eventually resettling in the United States where they now reside as American citizens and lead constructive lives as members of their communities;

Whereas the only political party allowed by law in Laos is the communist Lao People's Revolutionary Party;

Whereas, in 1989, Laos held its first elections since the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, but only candidates who were approved by the communist Lao People's Revolutionary Party were allowed to seek public office;

Whereas, in 1991, Laos adopted its first constitution which purports to guarantee the people of Laos a wide range of freedoms, including the freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion;

Whereas the Lao People's Revolutionary Party Congress meets every five years and controls or influences the organs of the state in Laos, including the armed forces, the security services, and the National Assembly;

Whereas the Lao People's Revolutionary Party promulgates the five-year state plans that control the economy and do not need to receive the approval of the National Assembly;

Whereas, in 1999, peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations held by Laotian students in the capital of Vientiane calling for political and economic reforms were suppressed by force by the Lao government, which arrested many of the students;

Whereas Amnesty International reports that many Laotian student leaders from the 1999 pro-democracy demonstrations continue to be held by the Lao government and languish in the Lao prison system or remain unaccounted for;

Whereas, in 2001, Olivier Dupuis, a Member of the European Parliament, was arrested and jailed in Laos along with a group of pro-democracy activists after peacefully protesting for the release of the Lao students and for democratic and human rights reforms in Laos;

Whereas international election monitors are currently not permitted to enter Laos to monitor elections;

Whereas Laos remains a one-party communist state that continues to prohibit the organizing of opposition political parties to the Lao People's Revolutionary Party;

Whereas, in 2002, elections for the Lao People's Democratic National Assembly were held nearly a year earlier than scheduled and excluded all candidates from political parties other than the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, as well as all overseas Laotians;

Whereas Amnesty International and other independent human rights organizations are not permitted to enter Laos to monitor or investigate the human rights situation or reports of alleged human rights violations;

Whereas, in 2003, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom issued a country report on religious persecution in Laos, recommending that the President designate Laos as a "country of particular concern";

Whereas the Department of State reported in its most recent Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Laos that Laos restricts its citizens from enjoying the freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion, and from undertaking activities to change their government;

Whereas, in 2003, the United Nations Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination stated that the Lao government had failed to honor its obligations, and the Committee expressed its grave concerns at the information it had received of serious and repeated human rights violations in Laos;

Whereas, in October 2003, Amnesty International issued a statement detailing its concern about the use of starvation by the Lao government as a weapon of war against civilians in Laos and the deteriorating situation facing thousands of family members of ethnic minority groups, predominantly the Hmong;

Whereas, in 2003, Amnesty International's International Secretariat, in a statement further detailing its concerns about Laos, condemned in the strongest terms the use of starvation as a weapon of war against civilians and cited it as a clear and serious violation of the Geneva Conventions that Laos has ratified;

Whereas because many Laotians and Hmong, including those in the overseas communities, are not members of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, they do not meet with its approval as political candidates, but they are nevertheless successful businessmen, technocrats, and community and religious leaders with democratic aspirations and concern for the people of Laos; and

Whereas the United States has a vital interest in the worldwide promotion of democratic principles and respect for human rights, and supports democratic reforms in Laos: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives strongly supports the following points and urges the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the United Nations, the European Union, and the Association of South East Asian Nations—

(1) to work to provide unrestricted access to Laos by international election monitors for upcoming presidential and National Assembly elections;

(2) to work to provide unrestricted access to Laos, including special closed military zones and closed provinces, by international human rights organizations, the United Nations, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, and humanitarian aid organizations;

(3) to work to ensure that opposition political parties and their candidates are allowed to run for public office in multi-party elections without regard to gender, race, ethnicity, religion, economic standing, or political affiliation, and that all adult citizens of