

The Native American Direct Home Loan Program has been a highly successful veterans effort, particularly in my Hawaii where it applies to veterans living on lands held in trust under this Congress' Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920.

The majority of these Hawaiian home lands are in my 2nd Congressional District, on the islands of Oahu, Kauai, Molokai, Maui, Hawaii, and Lanai.

Since the inception of this program, which was spearheaded by Hawaii Senator Spark Matsunaga, and continued by Senator DANIEL AKAKA, Native Hawaiian veterans have successfully utilized this direct home loan program for their acute housing needs, and, I am proud to say, with nominal delinquency. Over \$20 million has been approved for over 200 loans in Hawaii, with 106 loans, totaling \$7.5 million, pending.

This is an incredible help not only with the needs of many veterans who would likely otherwise be precluded from quality housing, but with Hawaii's overall housing crisis.

Due to its success over the last 13 years, the Native American Direct Home Loan Program, which initially started out as a pilot program, was twice extended by Congress, but is currently set to expire on December 31, 2005.

It is vital to understand why this program is so important to our Native American veterans and why we should make the program permanent, as S. 1235 purposes.

Of course, the most basic reason is the success of the overall program in honoring our commitment to our nation's veterans.

Beyond that, Congress found some years ago that, during the entire history to that date of the program, not a single Native American veteran living on Indian trust lands or Hawaiian home lands had received a VA home loan under the VA's traditional home loan program.

The reason for that was that the unique trust status of native lands did not lend itself to conventional lending practices because banks and other financial institutions did not recognize those lands as valid collateral.

As part of our obligation to all of our Nation's veterans is to ensure that they are all able to tap fully into VA programs, the Native American Direct Home Loan Program addressed this unique and discrete challenge facing many Native American veterans and afforded them the same opportunity of homeownership availed their comrades-in-arms.

This bill recognizes and improves upon the clear success of this effort, and I ask my colleagues to vote in favor of S. 1235.

Mahalo.

Mr. CANTOR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act.

For more than 10 years, Congress has taken unprecedented steps to support our veterans and the families. The American veteran is the model of integrity. They have given this Nation so much and ask for so little in return. They symbolize all that is great about America.

Since 1995, Congress has increased the Department of Veterans Affairs' healthcare budget by 80 percent, drastically increased coverage and benefits, and taken great steps to better the lives of families left behind. This legislation continues to help our veterans, and it is my privilege to cast a vote in favor of our veterans.

Today, Congress takes another step in our on-going effort to better the lives and well

being our Nation's veterans and their families. This legislation will increase the availability and amount of coverage for life insurance, assist in stabilizing low mortgage rates, require educational outreach by the VA to better inform our veterans of services available to them.

As our brave service men and women continue to serve in harm's way, it is important that we always honor their sacrifices and support their families. They return home as veterans and join the ranks of many who have selflessly served our Nation. These brave men and women have given so much so that the American people and our values would remain safe.

As they faithfully upheld their duty to defend our flag and all that it stands for—now we have a duty to stand strong for them.

I urge passage of this legislation.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 1235, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

GENERAL LEAVE

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

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

There was no objection.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LEACH) and the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MALONEY) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Iowa.

GENERAL LEAVE

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

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5401, the Lewis and Clark Commemorative Coin Correction Act introduced by the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. EMERSON). This is a technical correction which addresses language in legislation that authorized the minting and sale of a commemorative coin recognizing the bicentennial of the great Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery expedition.

□ 1500

The original legislation was sponsored by a former colleague, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. Bereuter), and the coin was issued in the year 2004.

That bill specified that the surcharge income from the sale of the coins be divided between the National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Council and the National Park Service to be used for events commemorating the bicentennial. Unfortunately, the Park Service has no capacity to raise the private funding necessary to satisfy the matching funds requirement of statutes guiding the issuance of commemorative coins.

This legislation, which has broad bipartisan support, corrects that problem and will allow disbursement of the funds in ways that support the Lewis and Clark exhibit that has made its

LEWIS AND CLARK COMMEMORATIVE COIN CORRECTION ACT

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5401) to amend section 308 of the Lewis and Clark Expedition Bicentennial Commemorative Coin Act to make certain clarifying and technical amendments.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 5401

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 "Lewis and Clark Commemorative Coin Correction Act".

SEC. 2. LEWIS AND CLARK COMMEMORATIVE COIN AMENDMENTS.

Section 308 of the Lewis and Clark Expedition Bicentennial Commemorative Coin Act (31 U.S.C. 5112 note) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a), by striking "Secretary as follows:" and all that follows

way around the country and opened 2 weeks ago at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History. This is an extraordinarily educational exhibit with many items from personal collections that have not been together since the expedition itself.

Mr. Speaker, this is a technical correction with no cost to the government. The cause is deserving. American history has many elements, but the Lewis and Clark expedition is unique to our development as a Nation. The courageous trek deserves celebration because it helps define the innate sense of adventure which is such an integral part of the American spirit.

Mr. Speaker, I ask for its immediate passage and would simply note the wonderful support on both sides of the aisle as symbolized by the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MALONEY), a good friend.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5401, the Lewis and Clark Commemorative Coin Correction Act. This technical correction to the Lewis and Clark Expedition Bicentennial Commemorative Coin Act redirects a portion of the proceeds of sales of the Lewis and Clark silver dollars from the National Park Service to the Missouri Historical Society.

The Park Service does not want to and cannot receive the one-third share of the surcharge funds originally allocated to it since it has no mechanism to raise the required matching funds.

The Missouri Historical Society, in contrast, has to date raised matching funds equal to over half of the surcharge funds. The other share has been raised by the National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial.

Under the bill proposed today, the National Council and the Missouri Historical Society would each receive half of the surcharge funds. Any funds not expended by these two organizations would go to the Lewis and Clark Heritage Foundation for the establishment of a trust for the stewardship of the Lewis and Clark Historical Trail.

I am happy to say the coin has been very successful and raised almost \$5 million to date. I understand that this resolution is supported by Congressional Representatives from many of the States along the trail and by the board of the national council, which has members from all of the Lewis and Clark States.

It is a sensible way to assure that funds raised by this coin are used for activities that preserve and honor the achievements of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from the great State of Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), the lead Democratic cosponsor of this bill and the ranking member of the Armed Services Committee.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend and gentlewoman from New

York and friend and gentleman from Iowa for their support on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, several years ago, I hosted a small breakfast for the well-known historian Stephen Ambrose, and I asked him what it was that made America so great. Now, I fully expected him to mention the westward movement of American pioneer families in the 1800s.

Instead, Mr. Ambrose replied, "Look at Russia. They have abundant natural resources and a hearty workforce. But they never had a George Washington, a John Adams and a Thomas Jefferson. It was Thomas Jefferson who had the wisdom and the foresight to appoint Merriweather Lewis and William Clark to explore the Louisiana Territory."

I am pleased that we are considering this legislation that will continue to honor the historic achievements of Lewis and Clark, and I want to thank my good friend, Jo ANN EMERSON, for introducing the bill; and I appreciate the support of Financial Services Committee Chairman MIKE OXLEY and Ranking Member BARNEY FRANK.

This bill will designate the National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial and the Missouri Historical Society as beneficiaries of proceeds from the sale of the Lewis and Clark commemorative coin. These nonprofit organizations have raised nearly \$5 million to conduct Lewis and Clark Bicentennial promotional activities. They will use funds from the sale of the coin to further historic investments in the Lewis and Clark Heritage Trail and to promote additional Lewis and Clark bicentennial celebrations.

This legislation has been endorsed by the National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial and the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, which includes representation from all the States along the Missouri River basin.

It is with a note of interest, Mr. Speaker, that the Missouri River flows right by my hometown of Lexington, Missouri, and as Lewis and Clark went up that river in that historic year 1804, they went by the bluffs which now contain my hometown of Lexington, Missouri. So it is special to those of us that do live along the river that we continue to honor the work, the courage of Lewis and Clark on their very, very courageous journey.

Mrs. MALONEY. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I thank very much the gentlewoman from New York and, of course, the gentleman from Missouri; and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LEACH) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5401.

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.

PROVIDING FOR PARTICIPATION OF JUDICIAL BRANCH EMPLOYEES IN LEAVE TRANSFER PROGRAM FOR DISASTERS AND EMERGENCIES

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 1736) to provide for the participation of employees in the judicial branch in the Federal leave transfer program for disasters and emergencies.

The Clerk read as follows:

S. 1736

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

SECTION 1. LEAVE TRANSFER PROGRAM IN DISASTERS AND EMERGENCIES.

Section 6391 of title 5, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsection (f) as subsection (g); and

(2) by inserting after subsection (e) the following:

"(f) After consultation with the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, the Office of Personnel Management shall provide for the participation of employees in the judicial branch in any emergency leave transfer program under this section."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SHAYS) and the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MALONEY) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Connecticut.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SHAYS. 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 Connecticut?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 1736, legislation to allow judicial branch employees to participate in the Federal leave transfer program in the event of disasters and emergencies.

In 1997, Congress authorized the creation of an emergency leave transfer program that allowed employees of the executive branch, as well as the Government Accountability Office, to transfer portions of their annual leave to other executive branch employees who are adversely affected by a natural disaster or emergencies. The 1997 legislation was built upon special procedures that were developed to assist Federal employees in the wake of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on April 19, 1995.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Administrative Office of the United States Courts petitioned Congress to consider extending the existing emergency leave transfer program to cover employees of the judicial