

These organizations and their 97 million volunteers worldwide make invaluable contributions every day. They provide relief and humanitarian assistance to the world's most vulnerable people, alleviating the suffering of citizens afflicted by war, natural disasters and other crises.

More than 233 million people worldwide received assistance from Red Cross, Red Crescent and Magen David Adom societies each year. When a tsunami hit southeast Asia in 2005, those societies were there. When hundreds of millions of children require vaccination against measles and others diseases, those societies are there. When the need arises in the future for humanitarian aid and relief, those societies will be there.

As a Member of Congress from Florida's 18th District, I have witnessed firsthand the good works of the Red Cross throughout its efforts to help the victims of numerous hurricanes and tropical storms that have afflicted the residents of south Florida.

I have also witnessed firsthand, in my numerous trips to Israel, the relief work and the humanitarian assistance that the Magen David Adom has provided to so many, including, tragically, the many innocent victims of terror.

Therefore, I am particularly pleased that in 2006, in a long overdue development, the International Committee of the Red Cross officially recognized Magen David Adom as Israel's national aid society. With much appreciation for the good work of Red Cross, Red Crescent and Magen David Adom societies everywhere, I urge the House to adopt House Resolution 378, introduced by my good friend, Mr. FORTUÑO.

Mr. LOEBSACK. Madam Speaker, I rise today to voice my strong support for this resolution honoring the humanitarian work of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent.

In February of this year, southern Iowa was hit by a devastating ice storm that caused massive damage and left tens of thousands of people without electricity or heat in the middle of winter, some for more than ten days.

The Red Cross moved expeditiously to set up vitally needed shelters and coordinated with state and local governments to ensure that the needs of those affected by the storm were met.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, I had the opportunity to tour Red Cross shelters throughout my district and to meet with Red Cross volunteers. I was enormously impressed with the Red Cross's rapid, thorough, and compassionate response to the disaster, which affected everyone of my constituents.

On behalf of the Second District of Iowa, I would like to extend my thanks to the Red Cross for the services they provided in the aftermath of the February storms.

This resolution recognizes the type of work I saw the Red Cross carrying out first-hand, and I strongly urge its passage.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of our time.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by

the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 378, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

The title was amended so as to read: "Resolution commending the humanitarian efforts of Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Magen David Adom National Societies worldwide on the occasion of World Red Cross Red Crescent Day."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1545

PASSPORT BACKLOG REDUCTION ACT OF 2007

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 966) to enable the Department of State to respond to a critical shortage of passport processing personnel, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the Senate bill.

The text of the Senate bill is as follows:

S. 966

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 "Passport Backlog Reduction Act of 2007".

SEC. 2. REEMPLOYMENT OF FOREIGN SERVICE ANNUITANTS.

Section 824(g) of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 (22 U.S.C. 4064(g)) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1)—

(A) in subparagraph (A), by striking ";" or" and inserting a semicolon;

(B) in subparagraph (B), by striking the period at the end and inserting ";" or"; and

(C) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph—

"(C)(i) to provide assistance to consular posts with a substantial backlog of visa applications; or

"(ii) to provide assistance to meet the demand resulting from the passport and travel document requirements set forth in section 7209(b) of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-458; 8 U.S.C. 1185 note), including assistance related to the investigation of fraud in connection with an application for a passport.;" and

(2) in paragraph (2)—

(A) by striking "The authority" and inserting "(A) The authority"; and

(B) by adding at the end the following new subparagraphs:

"(B) The authority of the Secretary to waive the application of subsections (a) through (d) for an annuitant pursuant to subparagraph (C)(i) of paragraph (1) shall terminate on September 30, 2008.

"(C) The authority of the Secretary to waive the application of subsections (a) through (d) for an annuitant pursuant to subparagraph (C)(ii) of paragraph (1) shall terminate on September 30, 2009."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON) and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days 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 gentlewoman from California?

There was no objection.

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of this bill and yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, the U.S. passport system is broken and the average Americans are paying the price. We have heard their call for help and are here today to pass the Passport Backlog Reduction Act to help the State Department address this bureaucratic crisis.

Every citizen of our Nation has the right to hold a passport and getting one should only take a few weeks at most, but millions of Americans have had to wait for months on end simply for the right to travel abroad. People are lining up at dawn every day at passport offices around the country trying to salvage trips at the last minute. They are desperate to get the one document that will let them see ailing relatives overseas, conduct important business, or begin studying abroad programs.

A passport is much more than a travel document, and these delays are much more than an inconvenience. A passport is proof of American identity and, for many Americans with immigrant heritage, a passport is proof of their identity and commitment to America and the American idea. A passport must be available to any American citizen who requests one, and delays that are currently clogging our system are preventing American citizens from fully exercising their right of citizenship as well as freedom of travel.

Three years ago, Congress passed the law requiring travelers to show passports if they were returning from anywhere in the Western hemisphere. Demand for passports in the last year has been at record highs, but poor planning by top officials meant that the State Department was unprepared to cope with the surge in applications.

My colleagues and I on the Foreign Affairs Committee have been outraged by this poor planning and the resulting bottleneck. Last week the committee held a hearing on passport delays, and we heard testimony about the hard-working employees who are working through the night and giving up their weekends to clear the backlog of applications. At passport bureaus across the country the State Department has shipped in junior staff, government fellows, and rehired retirees to meet the crushing demand. Yet, phone calls to regional passport bureaus and to consular affairs offices have often gone unanswered on tens of thousands of occasions. Meanwhile, congressional offices

are being flooded with phone calls from outraged citizens. They wonder if their passports have simply disappeared.

The Passport Backlog Reduction Act will assist the State Department's efforts to get all of the filed passports back to waiting travelers, and keep up with the demand in the coming months. This bill lifts legal impediments so that the agency can hire retired foreign service officers to process passport applications. Some of these officers will also be permitted to assist the officials who investigate passport fraud to ensure that passports only go to those citizens who are eligible for them and who do not pose a security risk.

Endless delays in exercising every citizen's right to a passport are outrageous and absolutely unacceptable. So, I urge my colleagues to support this bill so the House can take one additional step to ensure that our citizens' demands for their passports are met expeditiously.

Madam Speaker, I strongly support this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of Senate bill 966, the Passport Backlog Reduction Act. All of us have heard from our constituents. Millions of Americans are facing unprecedented delays in the processing of their passport applications. As weeks become months, these painful holdups have wrecked long-planned travel, job opportunities, and family obligations for thousands of our fellow citizens. This situation is incomprehensible and inexcusable. Officials should have anticipated and planned for this increased demand when the new travel security requirements were legislated 3 years ago.

Furthermore, the State Department has been collecting additional surcharges under authority granted by Congress 1½ years ago for the express purpose of meeting the increased demand for passports. But as we learned at last week's hearing before the Foreign Affairs Committee, officials did not adequately prepare for the increased demand that everyone knew would be coming, and there is no good explanation why.

At the same time that the planning was botched by their superiors, I want to praise the dedicated and hard-working individuals who have been working on an extended and overtime schedule to address this backlog. Madam Speaker, I am particularly impressed by the men and women of the Miami passport processing center who have maintained their professionalism and their courtesy even in this high pressure situation.

The bill before us will help in a limited but an important way to restore the timely passport processing that the American public has every right to expect. By easing certain reemployment restrictions, it will enable retired For-

ign Service officers to come back to work on passport and visa processing on more than a part-time basis. It will also allow them to assist with passport fraud investigations which have not kept pace with the dramatic increase in passport applications.

Of course, this bill is only a temporary measure that will ease but will not fix the larger problem. Senate bill 966 is no substitute for the budgeting, hiring, and training that must be part of the Department's annual and long-range planning. We appreciate the solemn assurances at last week's hearing that the Departments of State and Homeland Security are now treating these problems with the seriousness that they deserve. I have no doubt that the Committee on Foreign Affairs under Chairman LANTOS' leadership will follow up to ensure that the current problems are remedied promptly and avoided in the future.

The bill before us, Madam Speaker, is a small part of that remedy and deserves our unanimous support.

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

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Texas, Representative RUBÉN HINOJOSA.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of the Passport Backlog Reduction Act of 2007, or S. 966.

As I represent a district in south Texas, ensuring a safe and secure border which remains conducive to trade and travel is among my most urgent priorities in Congress. For that reason, I greatly appreciate the work of Senators SCHUMER and BIDEN, as well as my colleagues Congressman CAPUANO and Congresswoman McCARTHY, in bringing this legislation forward.

Several months ago, my constituents began reporting to me that they were not receiving the passports they needed for spring and summer travel from the State Department within the Department's own posted timelines. As spring has turned to summer, many Americans have been unable to travel abroad and have missed many business, educational, and vacation opportunities as a result of the State Department's failure to provide them with required travel documents.

This bill will help to ease the backlog of passport applications caused by the State Department's mismanagement by allowing retired workers to voluntarily return to work without jeopardizing their pension eligibility. These volunteers will provide immediate assistance to the thousands of American travelers who have requested their travel documentation in a timely manner and expect the State Department to facilitate their travel plans.

I hope that my colleagues will join me in providing relief to American travelers.

Mr. MANZULLO. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of S. 966, which gives the Department of State the authority to re-hire Foreign Serv-

ice retirees without harming their pensions through October 1, 2010 to temporarily increase more personnel to reduce the backlog on passport applications. S. 966 has already passed the Senate and it is time to send this bill on its way to the President's desk for his signature. I appreciate the expeditious consideration of this legislation to give the State Department another tool to help them deal with the massive increase in the number of passport applications.

I hate to say "I told you so" but in 2005 I predicted this train wreck. When I chaired the Small Business Committee, I held a hearing on the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) in 2005 primarily to examine the effect of WHTI on small business. At the time, I said that because of the amount of commerce within the Western Hemisphere it "may make it next to impossible to fulfill the statutory mandate to require this enhanced documentation."

I recognize that Congress gave the Departments of State and Homeland Security a difficult mission to implement within a short time period. I was one of the 75 Members to vote against the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 that contained the WHTI mandate.

However, since WHTI was implemented on January 23, my office has been inundated with frantic calls from constituents seeking passports to travel overseas. So far this year, my office has assisted 491 individuals with problems in obtaining their passports for travel. For all of 2006, my office helped just 51 constituents with passport problems. These calls are dominating the time of the caseworkers in my district offices.

Although we have been 99 percent successful in getting people the passports they need to travel, it has not been easy. Our caseworkers spend countless hours on the phone each day with panicked constituents who face the prospect of losing thousands of dollars and missing out on dream vacations if we cannot help them. And it seems we are always in crisis mode. Many passports do not get issued until two to three days before departure, and that is done with a continual push from my staff.

Despite constant monitoring and advocacy by my staff, some constituents do not receive their passports within 48 hours of departure. The last resort for these constituents is to take a day off work and travel to downtown Chicago—about two hours away—to get their passports on an emergency basis. I am told that although these constituents arrive before the required 7:00 a.m. opening time, it generally takes all day to get their passports.

Madam Speaker, you might not feel as bad if these were people who did not follow the rules and who waited until the last minute to get their passports. But a vast majority of the people who seek our assistance have done everything our Government asked of them. They applied for their passports well within the allotted time to receive their passports on time for their departures. And yet, their vacations and thousands of dollars of investments are in jeopardy.

I applaud the State Department and DHS for trying to ease the situation last month when they agreed to allow people traveling to Mexico, Canada or the Caribbean to depart as long as they had receipts in hand showing they had applied for their U.S. passports. But problems still occur. Some have applied, but

the State Department website indicates their applications cannot be found and thus a receipt cannot be secured. In addition, some of the cruise lines in the Caribbean do not accept these receipts. This situation causes even more anxiety for my constituents.

I understand the goal of the WHTI, but its implementation has been difficult. It has caused unnecessary anxiety and enormous amounts of work for my constituents and my staff. We must come up with an alternative way to enhance our security or make severe adjustments in the way we manage WHTI so we don't leave high and dry the people who followed the rules to get their passports.

That is why I applaud the prompt scheduling of S. 966 so shortly after the Senate passed the bill at the end of last month. I urge my colleagues to pass S. 966 so that the bill can be signed into law by the President as soon as possible.

Mrs. McCARTHY of New York. Madam Speaker, our Nation is facing a serious backlog in the processing of passports. Since the new travel rules have been enacted, the number of Americans applying for a passport has increased dramatically. Unfortunately, the number of Foreign Service officers responsible for the processing of passport requests remains far below the necessary capacity. This discrepancy has led to long lines at passport offices nationwide and extended processing times.

During the summer months, travel typically increases to and from the United States. To assist U.S. residents with the passport backlog, I have introduced H.R. 2845, a bill that allows for an increase in Foreign Service officers trained to handle passport requests. My good friend from New York, Senator SCHUMER, successfully moved similar legislation through the Senate, which we will be voting on today.

I am encouraged to see the House act on this important and time sensitive issue and am hopeful the President will quickly sign S. 699 to help alleviate the tremendous passport backlog facing our constituents.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of S. 966, the Passport Backlog Reduction Act of 2007. We are all very concerned by the extreme backlog in the passport system, and even more so by the apparent lack of adequate preparation that has led to the severe delays that our constituents are now experiencing. I would like to thank Senator SCHUMER for introducing this important legislation.

Madam Speaker, we all recognize the need to protect our Nation and to secure our borders. As a senior member of the Committee on Homeland Security, this has long been a priority for me, and I appreciate the need to continually review and update the policies we use to permit entry into the United States. However, I believe that the current delays are far in excess of what is excusable.

I have witnessed the suffering of those waiting to receive passports first I hand in Houston, where my office shares a building with the passport agency. I have spoken with many of the countless Americans who have carefully planned and saved money for family vacations, only to lose the money spent on plane tickets and hotel rooms when they are unable to procure passports. Families in which only one of many children receives a passport in time for travel. U.S. citizens desperate to travel overseas to see ailing relatives. Business-

men and women who are unable to complete necessary overseas travel while waiting to receive their documents. These individuals and families lined up on the streets of Houston are indicative of the huge numbers of Americans who are suffering as a result of the U.S. Government's failure to adequately prepare for the swell in passport demands.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the men and women in the Houston field office, who have worked tirelessly to ensure that as many Americans as possible receive the necessary travel documents. Washington has let them down by failing to provide them with the adequate resources and personnel to successfully do their job, and it has failed the American people. This is a situation that demands leadership from the top.

The Department of State Crisis Response Act of 2007 is an important first step toward alleviating the massive passport backlog that has developed since the recent implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, or WHTI. It allows the State Department to employ retired Foreign Service officers to process passport applications. Many Foreign Service retirees already possess the necessary training and security clearance for these functions, and could therefore be rapidly deployed to meet the ongoing crisis.

Under the provisions of this act, Foreign Service retirees can work without forgoing pension payments, provided that they either provide assistance to consular posts with a substantial backlog of visa applications, or they provide assistance in meeting the passport backlog resulting from the WHTI.

I firmly believe we must do all in our power to keep the American people, and our Nation itself, safe. This includes constantly reviewing and, as need be, revising our entrance policies. However, I also believe that we owe it to the American taxpayers to do everything that we can to allow free travel. We must work to ensure that such a serious problem does not occur in the future, while also working to immediately address the ongoing passport backlog. I strongly support this legislation, which is an important first step toward alleviating the existing passport delays, and I would like to encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. LOEBSACK. Madam Speaker, I rise today to voice my strong support for the Passport Backlog Reduction Act.

Our country's passport system is broken. The backlog in processing passport applications has been a severe burden on businesses and families. My constituents have been forced to cancel or delay travel plans; pay thousands of dollars for international flights they were unable to board; and lose deposits on accommodations they were unable to use. The current situation is unacceptable.

The administration had 3 years to plan for the new passport requirements, yet the Department of State was caught flat-footed by the surge in applications. Eliminating the backlog as swiftly as possible should be a matter of priority for the State and Homeland Security Departments, and new passport requirements for land and sea travel should not be enacted until the staffing infrastructure is in place to do so.

This bill allows the State Department to rehire retired Foreign Service employees to staff passport processing centers. By providing access to highly qualified staff, this bill will assist the State Department in reducing the backlog in passport applications.

The administration's lack of foresight and planning has created significant problems for families in Iowa and across the Nation. I strongly urge the passage of this bill as a crucial step towards fixing our country's passport system.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 966, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RECOGNIZING THE CONTRIBUTION OF MODELING AND SIMULATION TECHNOLOGY TO THE SECURITY AND PROSPERITY OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. GORDON of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 487) recognizing the contribution of modeling and simulation technology to the security and prosperity of the United States, and recognizing modeling and simulation as a National Critical Technology.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 487

Whereas the United States of America is a great and prosperous Nation, and modeling and simulation contribute significantly to that greatness and prosperity;

Whereas modeling and simulation in the United States is a unique application of computer science and mathematics that depends on the validity, verification, and reproducibility of the model or simulation, and depends also on the capability of the thousands of Americans in modeling and simulation careers to develop these models;

Whereas members of the modeling and simulation community in government, industry, and academia have made significant contributions to the general welfare of the United States, and while these contributions are too numerous to enumerate, modeling and simulation efforts have contributed to the United States by—

(1) expanding the understanding of nuclear chain reactions during the Manhattan Project through some of the earliest simulations replicating the reaction process, which ultimately contributed to the end of World War II;

(2) serving as a foundational element of the Stockpile Stewardship Program, which enabled the President of the United States to certify the safety, security, and reliability of the nuclear stockpile for more than ten years without the use of live nuclear testing, which demonstrates the Nation's commitment to nuclear nonproliferation;

(3) accelerating the effectiveness of joint, coalition, and interagency training exercises, while dramatically reducing the costs of such exercises, as demonstrated by United States Joint Forces Command's 2007 homeland security exercise, Noble Resolve, which was conducted virtually and required 5