

our communities, and in return, we owe them the chance to return when they are ready—and without fear—to Liberia.

Mr. ELLISON. Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 3123, a bill that will extend temporary immigration status for Liberian refugees here in the United States. Minnesota is proud to be the home of over 1,000 Liberian refugees, people who have become our friends and neighbors. Forcing them to return now would be an injustice to not only the Liberians themselves, but to everyone in Minnesota who has come to care for their welfare.

The civil war that shook their country in the early 1990s left 150,000 people dead and nearly a million others displaced. These 1,000 refugees turned to America in their hour of need, and Madam Speaker, I am proud to serve in the Congress of a country that has been willing to help these individuals in their time of greatest hardship.

It has been well over a decade since these Liberian refugees sought Minnesota as a home, and since then they have become upstanding citizens, an important part of the fabric that makes up our communities and economies and neighborhoods. Madam Speaker, I strongly request that my colleagues join me in supporting H.R. 3121.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3123 and want to thank the gentleman from Rhode Island, my friend Congressman KENNEDY, for his leadership and hard work on this issue. This bill provides support and assistance to our ally Liberia, during a critical time in its social and economic reform and recovery.

Specifically, this bill extends until October 1, 2008, the designation of Liberians living in this country under Temporary Protected Status, TPS. The Department of Homeland Security estimates that only 3,600 Liberians are currently eligible for TPS. Many of these Liberians have been in the U.S. for more than 16 years, and all of them have been here for a minimum of 5 years.

TPS is a temporary immigration status granted to eligible nationals of designated countries. In 1990, as part of the Immigration Act of 1990, Congress established a procedure by which the Attorney General, and now DHS, may provide TPS to people in the United States who are temporarily unable to safely return to their home country because of ongoing armed conflict, an environmental disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. During the period for which a country has been designated for TPS, TPS beneficiaries may remain in the United States and may obtain work authorization. However, TPS does not lead to permanent resident status, and TPS holders are not illegal immigrants.

Since 1989, Liberia has been ravaged by two brutal civil wars, which have destabilized the region, displaced hundreds of thousands of people, and destroyed the country's economy and infrastructure. In recognition of these conditions, the United States has protected some 3,600 Liberians in the U.S. from having to return to Liberia.

Recently, DHS has decided to terminate these temporary protections in light of the fact that Liberia's civil wars have finally ended and in anticipation of the political stability that newly-elected President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf will bring. However, while there is no question that President Johnson Sirleaf has put Liberia on the road to recovery, that road will unfortunately be very long.

According to a 2006 United Nations report, Liberia is currently enduring an 85 percent unemployment rate and it continues to be one of the poorest countries in the world. Improvements to the country's infrastructure following the war have come slowly, and it continues to suffer from severe shortages in electricity and running water. The country also lacks adequate medical care, as a mere 26 physicians currently practice medicine for a population of some 3.4 million people.

According to Liberian Government officials, their nation is not yet in a position to provide returnees with employment, housing, health services, education services, and other necessary amenities and services. Due to these and other issues, the Liberian Government has stated that the country cannot absorb and provide for the estimated 3,600 Liberians who would be required to return to their homeland.

As an aside, Liberians in the U.S. also provide financial assistance, including remittances averaging about \$6 million monthly, to the Liberian economy. These transfers constitute a vital source of financial assistance and economic stability during the country's still-nascent period of recovery.

President Johnson Sirleaf stated during her address to Congress in March 2006: "For those unable to come back home now, we must appeal to you to grant them continuing protection status, and residency where appropriate, to put them in a condition to contribute to their country's reform and development."

For these reasons, and in order to support Liberia as it emerges from two decades of dictatorship and civil war, I strongly support H.R. 3123 and urge its passage.

Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California. 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. ZOE LOFGREN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3123.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GRANTING THE CONSENT AND APPROVAL OF CONGRESS TO AN INTERSTATE FOREST FIRE PROTECTION COMPACT

Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 975) granting the consent and approval of Congress to an interstate forest fire protection compact.

The Clerk read the title of the Senate bill.

The text of the Senate bill is as follows:

S. 975

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

SECTION 1. CONSENT OF CONGRESS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The consent and approval of Congress is given to an interstate forest fire protection compact, as set out in subsection (b).

(b) COMPACT.—The compact reads substantially as follows:

"THE GREAT PLAINS WILDLAND FIRE PROTECTION AGREEMENT"

"THIS AGREEMENT is entered into by and between the State, Provincial and Territorial wildland fire protection agencies signatory hereto, hereinafter referred to as 'Members'.

"FOR, AND IN CONSIDERATION OF the following terms and conditions, the Members agree:

"ARTICLE I

"The purpose of this compact is to promote effective prevention and control of forest fires in the Great Plains region of the United States by the maintenance of adequate forest fire fighting services by the member states, and by providing for reciprocal aid in fighting forest fires among the compacting states of the region, including South Dakota, North Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and any adjoining state of a current member state.

"ARTICLE II

"This compact is operative immediately as to those states ratifying it if any two or more of the member states have ratified it.

"ARTICLE III

"In each state, the state forester or officer holding the equivalent position who is responsible for forest fire control may act as compact administrator for that state and may consult with like officials of the other member states and may implement cooperation between the states in forest fire prevention and control. The compact administrators of the member states may organize to coordinate the services of the member states and provide administrative integration in carrying out the purposes of this compact. Each member state may formulate and put in effect a forest fire plan for that state.

"ARTICLE IV

"If the state forest fire control agency of a member state requests aid from the state forest fire control agency of any other member state in combating, controlling, or preventing forest fires, the state forest fire control agency of that state may render all possible aid to the requesting agency, consonant with the maintenance of protection at home.

"ARTICLE V

"If the forces of any member state are rendering outside aid pursuant to the request of another member state under this compact, the employees of the state shall, under the direction of the officers of the state to which they are rendering aid, have the same powers (except the power of arrest), duties, rights, privileges, and immunities as comparable employees of the state to which they are rendering aid.

"No member state or its officers or employees rendering outside aid pursuant to this compact is liable on account of any act or omission on the part of such forces while so engaged, or on account of the maintenance or use of any equipment or supplies in connection with rendering the outside aid.

"All liability, except as otherwise provided in this compact, that may arise either under the laws of the requesting state or under the laws of the aiding state or under the laws of a third state on account of or in connection with a request for aid, shall be assumed and borne by the requesting state.

"Any member state rendering outside aid pursuant to this compact shall be reimbursed by the member state receiving the aid for any loss or damage to, or expense incurred in the operation of any equipment answering a request for aid, and for the cost of all materials, transportation, wages, salaries, and maintenance of employees and equipment incurred in connection with such request. However, nothing in this compact

prevents any assisting member state from assuming such loss, damage, expense, or other cost or from loaning such equipment or from donating such services to the receiving member state without charge or cost.

"Each member state shall assure that workers compensation benefits in conformity with the minimum legal requirements of the state are available to all employees and contract firefighters sent to a requesting state pursuant to this compact.

"For the purposes of this compact the term, employee, includes any volunteer or auxiliary legally included within the forest fire fighting forces of the aiding state under the laws of the aiding state.

"The compact administrators may formulate procedures for claims and reimbursement under the provisions of this article, in accordance with the laws of the member states.

"ARTICLE VI

"Ratification of this compact does not affect any existing statute so as to authorize or permit curtailment or diminution of the forest fighting forces, equipment, services, or facilities of any member state.

"Nothing in this compact authorizes or permits any member state to curtail or diminish its forest fire fighting forces, equipment, services, or facilities. Each member state shall maintain adequate forest fighting forces and equipment to meet demands for forest fire protection within its borders in the same manner and to the same extent as if this compact were not operative.

"Nothing in this compact limits or restricts the powers of any state ratifying the compact to provide for the prevention, control, and extinguishment of forest fires, or to prohibit the enactment or enforcement of state laws, rules, or regulations intended to aid in the prevention, control, and extinguishment in the state.

"Nothing in this compact affects any existing or future cooperative relationship or arrangement between the United States Forest Service and a member state or states.

"ARTICLE VII

"Representatives of the United States Forest Service may attend meetings of the compact administrators.

"ARTICLE VIII

"The provisions of Articles IV and V of this compact that relate to reciprocal aid in combating, controlling, or preventing forest fires are operative as between any state party to this compact and any other state which is party to this compact and any other state that is party to a regional forest fire protection compact in another region if the Legislature of the other state has given its assent to the mutual aid provisions of this compact.

"ARTICLE IX

"This compact shall continue in force and remain binding on each state ratifying it until the Legislature or the Governor of the state takes action to withdraw from the compact. Such action is not effective until six months after notice of the withdrawal has been sent by the chief executive of the state desiring to withdraw to the chief executives of all states then parties to the compact."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. ZOE LOFGREN) and the gentleman from Utah (Mr. CANNON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous con-

sent 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. ZOE LOFGREN of California. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in strong support of S. 975, the bill that grants Congress's consent and approval to an interstate forest fire protection compact. This legislation serves as a critical tool toward providing communities in South Dakota, Colorado and Wyoming with the necessary resources to fight wildfires.

State wildfire compacts allow States, subject to the consent of Congress, to rapidly request and mobilize firefighting equipment among compact members. Once enacted, this legislation will immediately allow South Dakota, Colorado and Wyoming to work directly with each other and to pool their resources so they could rapidly address current wildfire conditions.

In addition, S. 975 includes a provision that will allow North Dakota to participate in a similar resource-sharing agreement once its State legislature has ratified the agreement.

The need for S. 975 is critical as the fire season for this region approaches and is really upon us today. According to a recent article in the Rapid City Journal, the dry, hot conditions persisting in the Black Hills could result in August being one of the worst fire seasons in the history of South Dakota.

Thus, in an effort to expedite our consideration of this matter, given the potentially critical situation presented by the fire hazards currently affecting South Dakota, we are taking up the measure as passed by the Senate.

I should note that my colleague in the State of South Dakota, Representative STEPHANIE HERSETH SANDLIN, introduced identical legislation, H.R. 3050, to address this matter. I commend Representative HERSETH SANDLIN for her hard work and leadership in this body. And together with the strong support from the Colorado and Wyoming delegations, she has spearheaded the effort to obtain a legislative response to this crisis so that it can be sent to the President for his signature without undue delay.

Accordingly, I urge my colleagues to support S. 975.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I am happy to support this bipartisan legislation. S. 975, which approves an interstate firefighting compact, is certain to accomplish great things for the States involved.

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This compact would facilitate the rapid sharing of desperately needed

firefighting resources between the States of South Dakota, North Dakota, Colorado, and Wyoming to combat wildfires that each State could not handle alone.

Those of us from Western States know all too well the menace to human lives, property, wildlife, and the grand natural beauty of our Nation that these wildfires present every year. This compact would help those States fight dangers without compromising any of these States' abilities to protect against fires at home and without impinging on any Federal firefighting authorities.

To facilitate coordination with the Federal authorities, this compact would allow representatives of the U.S. Forest Service to participate as observers of the compact's meetings. The compact is modeled on a similar compact for the Pacific Northwest, to which Congress consented in 1998.

I urge you to support this legislation so that we do not lose a single minute in helping these States to fight fires and benefit this compact's vital provisions.

I am pleased to present this legislation because interstate compacts is an area of the House Judiciary Committee's jurisdiction, and I would like to invigorate that. As ranking member of the Subcommittee on Commercial and Administrative Law, which has jurisdiction over interstate compacts, I hope to see more interest in this area as a powerful tool for States to work together in a cooperative manner to deal effectively with the cross-jurisdictional policy issues that are arising in our country. I am sure that the subcommittee Chair, LINDA SÁNCHEZ, shares this desire; and I look forward to working with her more in this important area.

All around the country, there are many compacts addressing a myriad of issues, from the most cutting-edge climate change issues to the most mundane tax issues. These compacts must under the Constitution be presented to Congress for consent before the States may enter into them. I commend the States involved in this compact for doing things the right way in bringing this compact to Congress for consent.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation and then to come to visit the natural wonders in these States that this compact is sure to help protect.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California. Madam Speaker, I would like at this time to yield 1½ minutes to the author of the House companion bill and the Representative from South Dakota, Congresswoman STEPHANIE HERSETH SANDLIN.

Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California for yielding.

I rise today to express my strong support for Senate bill 975. As the chairwoman of the subcommittee, Ms. ZOE

LOFGREN, and the ranking member, Mr. CANNON, have described, this important legislation stands to provide immediate assistance to wildfire-fighting crews in South Dakota, Colorado, and Wyoming.

Passage and enactment of S. 975 is the final step in the fire compacting process, which allows States covered by the compact to more effectively share firefighting personnel and equipment in response to wildfires. The compacting process begins with State approval but also requires consent from the Congress. Further, this legislation enjoys the support of South Dakota's Senators TIM JOHNSON and JOHN THUNE, as well as the entire Colorado and Wyoming Senate delegations. Companion legislation that I introduced in the House also enjoys similar support from the congressional delegations within the compacted States.

The need for this legislation is underscored each fire season as we undoubtedly watch communities struggle to cope with forest fires. In my own district, I recently visited areas devastated by the Alabaugh Canyon fire near Hot Springs, South Dakota, which consumed over 10,000 acres and destroyed more than 30 homes. Tragically, one man lost his life. Only the tireless and professional work by emergency response staff in South Dakota with the help of volunteers across the State and region stopped this fire from becoming even worse.

The fire season is, however, far from over, and I am pleased that the passage of this bill in the House today will be the final legislative step towards enacting this important bill into law. The new authorities contained in the bill will let compacted States work directly with each other increasing the efficiency and, most importantly, the speed with which firefighting crews in South Dakota, Colorado, and Wyoming can mobilize resources in response to fires. The compact also leaves space for North Dakota to join at a later date.

Finally, I would like to thank Chairman CONYERS and his staff for their swift consideration of this bill and their willingness to work with me to bring it to the House floor this evening. Their work, and a joint effort from State officials in South Dakota and the State's entire congressional delegation, has facilitated this progress. I stand in strong support of S. 975 and urge my colleagues to join me.

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

Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California. Madam Speaker, this bill grants our approval to an important interstate compact that will enable States in the Great Plains to pool resources to control forest fires. Especially in light of the fact that these States may shortly be experiencing what could be the worst fire season in years, I strongly urge my colleagues to support this urgently needed measure.

I commend the ranking member, Mr. CANNON, and the chairwoman of the

subcommittee, Ms. SÁNCHEZ, as well as the chairman of the committee and ranking member for not standing on formality, waiving jurisdiction, and bringing this bill directly to the floor. It is the right way to get something done in a hurry, and it needs to get done.

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. ZOE LOFGREN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 975.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SMALL PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITY ACT

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3067) 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 the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3067

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 "Small Public Housing Authority Act".

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

(a) IN GENERAL.—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) except as provided in subsection (e)(4)(B), 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 an annual public housing agency plan under this subsection.

"(B) CIVIL RIGHTS CERTIFICATION.—Notwithstanding that qualified small public housing agencies are exempt pursuant to subparagraph (A) from the requirement under this section to prepare and submit an annual public housing plan, each qualified small public housing agency shall, on an annual basis, make the certification described in paragraph (16) of subsection (d) of this section, except that for purposes of such small public housing agencies, such paragraph shall be applied by substituting 'the public housing program of the agency' for 'the public housing agency plan'.

"(C) DEFINITION.—For purposes of this section, 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 250 or fewer.

"(ii) The agency—

"(I) is not designated pursuant to section 6(j)(2) as a troubled public housing agency; and

"(II) has not, within the preceding 12 months, been assigned a failing or below passing score under the section 8 management assessment program of the Secretary."

(b) RESIDENT PARTICIPATION.—Section 5A of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437c-1) is amended—

(1) in subsection (e), by inserting after paragraph (3) the following:

"(4) QUALIFIED SMALL PUBLIC HOUSING AGENCIES.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subparagraph (B), nothing in this section may be construed to exempt a qualified small public housing agency from the requirement under paragraph (1) to establish one or more resident advisory boards. Notwithstanding that qualified small public housing agencies are exempt pursuant to subsection (b)(3)(A) from the requirement under this section to prepare and submit an annual public housing plan, each qualified small public housing agency shall consult with, and consider the recommendations of the resident advisory boards for the agency, in any determinations and actions of the agency regarding establishing goals, objectives, and policies of the agency.

"(B) APPLICABILITY OF WAIVER AUTHORITY.—Paragraph (3) shall apply to qualified small public housing agencies, except that for purposes of such small public housing agencies, subparagraph (B) of such paragraph shall be applied by substituting 'the functions described in the second sentence of paragraph (4)(A)' for 'the functions described in paragraph (2)'.

"(f) PUBLIC HEARINGS.—"; and

(2) in subsection (f) (as so designated by the amendment made by paragraph (1) of this subsection), by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(5) QUALIFIED SMALL PUBLIC HOUSING AGENCIES.—

"(A) REQUIREMENT.—Notwithstanding that qualified small public housing agencies are exempt pursuant to subsection (b)(3)(A) from the requirement under this section to conduct a public hearing regarding the annual public housing plan of the agency, each qualified small public housing agency shall, not less than annually, conduct a public hearing to discuss the goals, objectives, and policies of the agency, and any changes to such goals, objectives, and policies, and to invite public comment regarding such issues.

"(B) AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION AND NOTICE.—Not later than 45 days before the date of such a hearing, the qualified small public housing agency shall—

"(i) make all information relevant to the hearing and any determinations of the agency regarding the goals, objectives, and policies of the agency to be considered at the hearing available for inspection by the public at the principal office of the public housing agency during normal business hours; and

"(ii) publish a notice informing the public that (I) the information is available as required under clause (i), and (II) a public hearing under subparagraph (A) will be conducted."

(c) AMENDMENTS AND MODIFICATIONS TO PLANS.—Subsection (g) of section 5A of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C.