

and your staff in moving this bill forward.

Like the prior bill, Mr. Speaker, this is not a home-rule matter, because the courts involved are Federal courts, article 1 courts. Indeed, this matter started with the Senate of the United States which approves the judges of the D.C. Superior Court and confirms them as it confirms judges of other Federal courts. This bill again may be difficult to understand, but it is equally without additional cost to the Federal Government.

This House was vigilant to see to it that the District of Columbia now has a reformed family court as a part of the Superior Court system. And may I thank the prior then-majority leader, Mr. DeLay, who worked so closely with me on this bill and saw to it that the bill was funded, that there were additional judges, and that essentially a court which had not been revised for 30 years is now a state-of-the-art family court.

However, the Congress in its concern that children and families have adequate processing through this court mandated that there be at least 15 of these judges who would be family court committed judges only. The purpose was to keep or to repair the prior circumstance where these matters were distributed to the full 58 judges in the ordinary course of business. By segregating these matters out, these matters involving families and children, we sought to see to it that they were handled quickly and efficiently.

Congress never intended, however, to reduce the number of judges available to important criminal and civil matters, but in fact the cap has had that effect. So we have had an anomalous situation where the President of the United States, seeing a vacancy in the superior court unrelated to the family court, simply goes ahead and does what he is supposed to do; he nominates somebody to in fact fill that vacancy. But because of the cap which says you have got to have at least 15 of the judges to be family court judges, and with no increase in the number of judges, that person is sitting out there or standing out there, as you may, waiting for a vacancy to occur in the superior general part of the court as opposed to the family court.

What this bill does is to recognize what Congress intended in the first place, and that is to do no harm to either section. So, there would be a full cadre of family court judges, but certainly to do no harm to the processing of civil and criminal court judges. Therefore, to retain the kind of balance we had before, we would have to raise the number of judges available to the superior court; and that would mean, instead of 58 as the at-now raise reads, you would have 61.

Importantly, Mr. Speaker, you will note that there is no cost to the Federal Government. And both the chairman and I went to great lengths to make sure that we were not talking

about increased appropriations. The court has assured us, and we have done our homework to assure ourselves, that the amount is already available in the appropriations that come to the Superior Court. All that is needed is for us to free up, if I may say so, the President of the United States so his nominees can in fact take their seats when in fact they are nominated.

Mr. DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I will be brief. I think Ms. NORTON outlined the history of this and why we are where we are today.

Unlike a lot of legislation that comes to the floor on the District of Columbia, this actually emanated in the Senate, with Senators AKAKA, LIEBERMAN, and VOINOVICH joining hands to bring this. This legislation, S. 550, increases the total number of judgeships on the Superior Court from 58 to 61.

In response to reports of abuse and neglect in child family services cases pending in the D.C. Superior Court in 2001, Congress created the family court in the district and assigned a dedicated cadre of judges to handle child and family cases. The legislation before us today is essentially a technical correction to the Family Court Act we enacted in 2001, increasing the cap on the number of judges in the D.C. superior court to accommodate the creation of this new family court.

I want to thank Chairman WAXMAN and Subcommittee Chairman DAVIS for moving this legislation so expeditiously to the floor. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I might consume.

Mr. Speaker, as a member of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, I am pleased to join my colleagues in the consideration of S. 550, which reserves existing judgeships on the Superior Court of the District of Columbia by increasing the cap on the number of judges that can serve on the court. Senate Bill 550 would increase the number of associate judges permitted to serve on the D.C. Superior Court from 58 to 61.

In accordance with the terms of the National Capital Revitalization and Self-Government Act of 1997, Congress now wields legislative and funding authority over the District of Columbia court system. Under the terms of this arrangement, section 11-903 of the District of Columbia Official Code established an overall limit of 58 on the number of judges that may be seated on the Superior Court. The current limit of 58 is in addition to a chief judge.

However, in 2001, Congress passed the D.C. Family Court Act, and included in the Act a new provision that allowed the previously established limit on the number of judges to be exceeded only to appoint additional family court judges. As a result of this provision,

the current number of associate superior court judges, combined with the 15 judges now seated on the D.C. Family Court, the cap of 58 has now been exceeded. This means that judgeship vacancies in the superior court cannot be filled unless additional retirements occur, which has led to delays in judicial proceedings, increased costs from prolonged litigation, and case backlogs. S. 550 would address these issues by increasing the number of associate judges from 58 to 61.

S. 550, which was first introduced by Senator DANIEL AKAKA, passed the Senate under unanimous consent on February 4, 2008, and on March 11, 2008 the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce Postal Service in the District of Columbia held a hearing to examine aspects of the legislation. The bill was then considered by the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, where it passed by voice vote. Mr. Speaker, I am hopeful that we, too, can approve Senate Bill 550 with overwhelming support from both sides of the aisle.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 550.

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.

ESTABLISHING MARCH 2008 AS NATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE MONTH

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 945) raising awareness and promoting education on the criminal justice system by establishing March 2008 as "National Criminal Justice Month".

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 945

Whereas there are approximately three million Americans employed within the justice system;

Whereas approximately seven million adults are on probation, parole, or are incarcerated;

Whereas millions of Americans have been victims of crime and, consequently, lost income, incurred medical expenses, and suffered emotionally;

Whereas the cost of crime to individuals, communities, businesses, and the various levels of government exceeds the billions of dollars spent each year in administering the criminal justice system;

Whereas, in 2006, fifty percent of Americans admitted they fear that their home would be burglarized when they are not home; thirty-four percent of American women feared that they would be sexually assaulted; and forty-four percent of Americans feared they would be a victim of a terrorist attack;

Whereas approximately thirty-five percent of Americans have very little or no confidence in the criminal justice system and the negative effects of crime in regard to confidence in governmental agencies and overall social stability are immeasurable;

Whereas crime rates have dropped since the early 1990s, but most Americans believe that the rate of crime is increasing;

Whereas Federal, State, and local governments increased their spending for police protection, corrections, judicial, and legal activities in fiscal year 2005 by 5.5 percent or \$204 billion; and

Whereas there is a need to educate Americans and to promote awareness within American society as to the causes and consequences of crime, as well as the strategies and developments for preventing and responding to crime: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That—

(1) it is the sense of the House of Representatives that—

(A) National Criminal Justice Month provides an opportunity to educate Americans on the criminal justice system; and

(B) Americans should be aware of the causes and consequences of crime, how to prevent crime, and how to respond to crime; and

(2) the House of Representatives urges policymakers, criminal justice officials, educators, victim service providers, nonprofits, community leaders, and others to promote awareness of how to prevent and respond to crime through National Criminal Justice Month.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, Members of the House, the measure before us calls attention to a critically important issue, the state of our Nation's criminal justice system. We do this by designating March as National Criminal Justice Month, because it will serve to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of crime, as well as our crime prevention efforts. It is a subject and an area that, for too long, we have not paid close attention to, and it is our feeling that this designation will have a great impact upon our work.

Millions of Americans have been victimized by crimes, and many millions more pass through our criminal justice system. We have more than 2 million Americans behind bars, I am sad to say. This means that almost one out of every 100 Americans is incarcerated. Among African American men between the ages of 20 and 34, one in nine are behind bars. What a tragedy. What a waste of human life and potential.

The New York Times observed, "We have become a prison nation."

[From the New York Times, Mar. 10, 2008]

PRISON NATION

After three decades of explosive growth, the nation's prison population has reached some grim milestones: More than 1 in 100 American adults are behind bars. One in nine black men, ages 20 to 34, are serving time, as are 1 in 36 adult Hispanic men.

Nationwide, the prison population hovers at almost 1.6 million, which surpasses all other countries for which there are reliable figures. The 50 states last year spent about \$44 billion in tax dollars on corrections, up from nearly \$11 billion in 1987. Vermont, Connecticut, Delaware, Michigan and Oregon devote as much money or more to corrections as they do to higher education.

These statistics, contained in a new report from the Pew Center on the States, point to a terrible waste of money and lives. They underscore the urgent challenge facing the federal government and cash-strapped states to reduce their overreliance on incarceration without sacrificing public safety. The key, as some states are learning, is getting smarter about distinguishing between violent criminals and dangerous repeat offenders, who need a prison cell, and low-risk offenders, who can be handled with effective community supervision, electronic monitoring and mandatory drug treatment programs, combined in some cases with shorter sentences.

Persuading public officials to adopt a more rational, cost-effective approach to prison policy is a daunting prospect, however, not least because building and running jailhouses has become a major industry.

Criminal behavior partly explains the size of the prison population, but incarceration rates have continued to rise while crime rates have fallen. Any effort to reduce the prison population must consider the blunderbuss impact of get-tough sentencing laws adopted across the United States beginning in the 1970's. Many Americans have come to believe, wrongly, that keeping an outsized chunk of the population locked up is essential for sustaining a historic crime drop since the 1990's.

In fact, the relationship between imprisonment and crime control is murky. Some portion of the decline is attributable to tough sentencing and release policies. But crime is also affected by things like economic trends and employment and drug-abuse rates. States that lagged behind the national average in rising incarceration rates during the 1990's actually experienced a steeper decline in crime rates than states above the national average, according to the Sentencing Project, a nonprofit group.

A rising number of states are broadening their criminal sanctions with new options for low-risk offenders that are a lot cheaper than incarceration but still protect the public and hold offenders accountable. In New York, the crime rate has continued to drop despite efforts to reduce the number of non-violent drug offenders in prison.

The Pew report spotlights policy changes in Texas and Kansas that have started to reduce their outsized prison populations and address recidivism by investing in ways to improve the success rates for community supervision, expanding treatment and diversion programs, and increasing use of sanctions other than prison for minor parole and probation violations. Recently, the Supreme Court and the United States Sentencing Commission announced sensible changes in the application of harsh mandatory minimum drug sentences.

These are signs that the country may finally be waking up to the fiscal and moral costs of bulging prisons.

Each year, we on all of our criminal justice systems spend more than \$200

billion. The Pew Center Report states that Connecticut, Delaware, my own State of Michigan, Oregon, and Vermont spend as much or more money on corrections as they do on higher education. I think this is a disgraceful circumstance, and the policies of simply incarcerating increasing numbers of Americans without real opportunities for rehabilitation fail those who go through the criminal justice system, but, more than that, it hurts and diminishes every American.

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

□ 1445

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

I appreciate Mr. CONYERS, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, for whom I have great respect. This bill was on the calendar to take up in weeks past, but it was pulled a number of times, resulting in it being taken up at this time. We are grateful that it has been allowed to come to the floor.

I rise in support of House Resolution 945, and I want to commend my good friend and fellow Texan, and also fellow recovering judge, TED POE, the original sponsor of this legislation, for his dedication and commitment to the issue of criminal justice.

The goal of this resolution is to raise awareness and promote education of the criminal justice system by establishing March as the National Criminal Justice Month. It is important that Congress encourages Americans to learn more about the criminal justice system, and the approximately 3 million Americans who work within the system.

As a former prosecutor, judge and chief justice, I have been honored to be involved with some of our Nation's best who work in the criminal justice system for some time. Throughout that experience, I have been consistently impressed with the professionalism and the ability of the public servants who work in the field of criminal justice. These brave and dedicated Americans work every day to make our country safe for ourselves and for our families.

Further, it is important to recognize the gains that have been made in combating crime across the Nation. Crime rates began dropping within the last 20 years as more tools were given to law enforcement and the more dangerous criminals have been locked up for longer periods of time, though there are some who are working to reverse that decade-long trend.

I have great respect, as I said, for the Judiciary Committee chairman, who mentioned the reference to this being called a prison nation; and it is tragic that we have so many people who are locked up. I must say that one of the things that concerned me and drove me from the bench were having an increasing number of people who ended up in the criminal justice system before me as a district judge, having allegedly committed felonies, and in the cases I

am talking about where they admitted them, told about their background, had testimony about it in court, but it began to break my heart.

Back in the 1960s, we had legislation called The Great Society legislation that was well intentioned. There were single mothers that were seen to be trying to survive with only a deadbeat father to help. And the Federal Government looked, saw the need and said let's help these people. They began giving checks to women for each child born out of wedlock. And I began having more and more young mothers, some older mothers, who would have a child out of wedlock, many times encouraged to do so by people they respected and loved, and they found out rather quickly that check will not allow the individual to live a decent living and take care of the child. So they would have another child, thinking that two checks would help, and then three.

It broke my heart that our Federal Government had lured people into a rut and not given them a way out. So it is important that we be careful in considering legislation that we pass. Of course, everybody has to be responsible for their own actions, but the legislation we pass is important, and I think it is wonderful that my friend, Mr. POE, has sponsored this legislation, and that our chairman, Mr. CONYERS, has encouraged this and supported it, in establishing March as the National Criminal Justice Month.

Congress will provide an opportunity now to educate Americans through this designation about the criminal justice system, and will make Americans more aware of causes and consequences of crime, as well as how to prevent crime and how to respond to crime. This resolution will also recognize and applaud the efforts of law enforcement officials, judges, court staff, and the many probation and parole officers who work with offenders to help them reintegrate into the community. Those are all important positions. We appreciate them all. I urge my colleagues to support the resolution.

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

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I only have a little bit more to add, and so I yield myself a little more time.

This measure is a good one even though it comes a little late. Some may have noticed that this is for a celebration in March, and this is April. The reason is that we couldn't get it on the schedule before now, but there were many celebrations in connection with this matter that occurred.

I want to commend the judge and distinguished member of the Judiciary Committee from Texas who is managing the bill for his personal comments that he has brought to this matter today. I can imagine the kinds of things that not only him but members of the judiciary across this country are seeing, heartbreaking incidents, circumstances and experiences.

There are so many people that are incarcerated, they are in prison because of nonviolent offenses, of sentencing procedures that are really out of the hands of the court. People think of the unlimited powers of the judiciary. Many times they are restricted in terms of what it is they can do and how they can handle the matters that come before their courts.

I am impressed that our colleague would tell us of some of the things that move him in his experience in the judiciary. Now I don't want to think that he was driven from the judiciary to the Congress because that is like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire; but I am happy that he serves on the committee with great distinction, and we always are pleased to be able to work together on these kinds of matters.

In that spirit, I urge the support of H. Res. 945.

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

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as the right honorable Judge POE may consume.

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman for yielding, and I also want to thank the chairman for moving this piece of legislation.

I introduced this legislation to declare March as National Criminal Justice Month, and the purpose is to educate Americans on how important our justice system is and encourage discussion on how to prevent and respond to criminal conduct.

Our criminal justice system employs over 3 million Americans at the local, State and Federal levels of the government. And the word and the emphasis should be on the phrase "justice system" because it involves the cooperation of law enforcement and prosecutors, courts, correctional officers, and many other persons.

In my former life, I spent 8 years as a prosecutor in the Houston area, and then I spent 22 years on the criminal court bench in Houston, hearing over 25,000 felony cases.

When I came to Washington, D.C., I established the bipartisan Victims Rights Caucus to advocate on behalf of crime victims and law enforcement. It is apparent to me that victims need a voice in Congress. They don't have high paid and high-dollar lobbyists; they expect Members of Congress to be their advocates.

Each year, millions of Americans become victims of criminal conduct, everything from stealing to homicide, and these individuals do not choose to become victims. They are thrown into the criminal justice system without ever having a say. The devastating consequences of crime remain with the victims long after the crime is over with; and the purpose of the criminal justice system is to provide closure for victims and punish people who commit crimes against the rule of law, which is society's rules of law.

I hope this resolution encourages communities to discuss the causes and

the consequences and long-term effects of criminal conduct. When a crime occurs, a community must respond by apprehending the individual and ensuring appropriate punishment if that person is found guilty, and, of course, helping the victim that is in need.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 35 percent of Americans have little or no confidence in our criminal justice system. It is unfortunate that one-third of the people in this country feel that way. If you turn on your local news each night, the first thing that most local newscasts have is the latest crime that has been committed in a neighborhood. It is mostly bad news, and much of that bad news is about criminal conduct. Americans should have more confidence in our criminal justice system. I am convinced that our criminal justice system is the best system in the world.

I had the opportunity to visit the former Soviet Union. They don't have a criminal justice system. They just have a system. The same is true with China, when I visited their system on how they administer their laws. There is no justice in that system. It is just a system.

And here in the United States, we do have the best criminal justice system in the world on determining the guilt of an individual and giving defendants and victims of crime certain rights in the court, and maintaining the worth of the individual. Every year individuals, communities, businesses, and all levels of government spend millions and billions of dollars administering our justice system. The cost of crime is not cheap, and the aftermath of crime is not cheap either. Yet the price is worth it because of the price we pay to ensure our order, safety and appropriate punishment for those who fail to follow our laws.

As my fellow Texan and former judge, Judge GOHMERT, has mentioned time and time again, there are numerous cases where we both have seen individuals who have come to the criminal justice system that have been victims of criminal conduct. And long after that trial is over with, even if the offender is convicted and sent to the Texas penitentiary for the maximum period of time, they suffer the repercussions of criminal conduct. Many of them are never able to cope with that conduct, and spend the rest of their lives in desperate hope, and wishing that crime had not occurred against them.

We as Americans need to be sensitive to those individuals. We need to be sensitive to the people who live among us who have crime committed against them.

So I hope this resolution gets more communities talking about the best way to prevent and respond to crime, and I want to urge its adoption.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 945, raising awareness and promoting education on the criminal justice system by establishing March

2008 as "National Criminal Justice Month," introduced by my distinguished colleague from Texas, Representative TED POE. This important legislation calls on policymakers, educators, criminal justice officials, community leaders, victim service providers, nonprofits, and others to promote awareness of how to prevent and respond to crime through the creation of a National Criminal Justice Month.

A country's criminal justice system is often a reflection of what values the society deems to be important. Our criminal justice system serves as a means for society to enforce the standards of conduct necessary to protect individuals and the community. During this month we need to be mindful of the need for criminal justice reform. Currently, there are approximately seven million adults on probation, parole, or are incarcerated causing the cost of crime to individuals, communities, businesses, and the various levels of government to be well into the billions. I have sought to alleviate a number of the sentencing disparities responsible for such frivolous government spending through various pieces of legislation, including my "The Second Chance Act" and "The Drug Sentencing Reform and Cocaine Kingpin Trafficking Act of 2007" that will help to lessen some of the economic and social burden. Our focus should be to educate Americans and to promote awareness within American society as to the causes and consequences of crime, as well as the strategies and developments for preventing and responding to crime.

The American people deserve to have a knowledge of the criminal justice system; thus, allowing society to feel safe in their homes as well as on the streets. In 2006, fifty percent of Americans admitted they feared that their home would be burglarized when they are not home, thirty-four percent of American women feared that they would be sexually assaulted, and forty-four percent of Americans feared they would be a victim of a terrorist attack. That is unacceptable. Americans need to be educated about the criminal justice system and how it works to protect all Americans.

During this month there has to be a joint effort between policymakers, criminal justice officials, educators, victim service providers, nonprofit organizations, community leaders, and others to promote awareness of how to prevent and respond to crime. It is imperative that we reach out through all the above names avenues to ensure that each and every American knows just how their criminal justice system operations protect them.

This important legislation creates an avenue through which to educate the American people about the criminal justice system as well as the causes and consequences of crime, how to prevent crime, and how to respond to crime. I strongly support this important legislation and urge all my colleagues to do the same.

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

Mr. CONYERS. 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 Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 945.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1500

ARTS REQUIRE TIMELY SERVICE (ARTS) ACT

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1312) to expedite adjudication of employer petitions for aliens of extraordinary artistic ability, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1312

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 "Arts Require Timely Service (ARTS) Act".

SEC. 2. EXPEDITED ADJUDICATION OF EMPLOYER PETITIONS FOR ALIENS OF EXTRAORDINARY ARTISTIC ABILITY.

Section 214(c) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1184(c)) is amended—

(1) by striking "Attorney General" each place it appears and inserting "Secretary of Homeland Security"; and

(2) in paragraph (6)(D)—
(A) by striking "(D) Any" and inserting "(D)(i) Any";

(B) by striking "Once the" and inserting "Except as provided in clause (ii), once the"; and

(C) by adding at the end the following:
"(ii) The Secretary of Homeland Security shall adjudicate each petition for an alien with extraordinary ability in the arts (as described in section 101(a)(15)(O)(i)), an alien accompanying such an alien (as described in clauses (ii) and (iii) of section 101(a)(15)(O)), or an alien described in section 101(a)(15)(P) (other than an alien described in section 214(c)(4)(A) (relating to athletes)) not later than 30 days after—

"(I) the date on which the petitioner submits the petition with a written advisory opinion, letter of no objection, or request for a waiver; or

"(II) the date on which the 15-day period described in clause (i) has expired, if the petitioner has had an opportunity, as appropriate, to supply rebuttal evidence.

"(iii) If a petition described in clause (ii) is not adjudicated before the end of the 30-day period described in clause (ii) and the petitioner is an arts organization described in paragraph (3), (5), or (6) of section 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and exempt from tax under section 501(a) of such Code for the taxable year preceding the calendar year in which the petition is submitted, or an individual or entity petitioning primarily on behalf of such an organization, the Secretary of Homeland Security shall provide the petitioner with the premium-processing services referred to in section 286(u), without a fee."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SMITH) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, Members of the House, H.R. 1312 is a bipartisan measure intended to address the extended delays in visa processing faced by nonprofit arts organizations when they invite foreign artists to perform in the United States.

Hosting a performance by a foreign artist or arts group requires, obviously, a great deal of planning. And the host organization has to calendar the event, advertise it, and sell tickets far in advance. And these efforts are made with the expectation that the visa petitions filed by the guest performers will be adjudicated in time for their arrival in the United States. If their adjudication is delayed, it causes a tremendous disruption and has led some arts organizations in the world to stop engaging foreign artists altogether because they can't risk the expensive canceling of performers.

Performances by foreign artists give American audiences the opportunity to experience a variety of arts traditions. And when they're called off, it's not just the host organization and the audience that bears the cost, the cancelled show impacts the local economy as well.

Current law requires the Department of Homeland Security to process petitions for O and P visas within 2 weeks of receipt of a completed petition. And the Department has implemented a premium 15-day processing for a \$1,000 fee, but when a visa is required to be processed in 14 days, it seems particularly unreasonable to ask a nonprofit entity to pay \$1,000 for a 15-day service. So, what we do in this measure is strike a balance by giving the Department 30 days, more than twice the current processing time, and if the visa is not processed in 30 days and the petitioner is a nonprofit organization, the bill requires the Department to provide premium processing for no additional fee.

I'm happy to say that my colleagues, the former Judiciary Committee Chair, JAMES SENSENBRENNER, and the current ranking member, LAMAR SMITH of Texas, have tried and worked with us to arrive at a solution similar to the one laid out in this bill.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to thank the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) for his generous comments a while ago, and I certainly appreciated working with him on this bill as well.

Performing arts organizations use O and P visas to bring many talented foreign artists to our country to perform