

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating the Bulgarian people on the 100th anniversary of their independence and in celebrating enduring Bulgarian-American friendship.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on House Resolution 1383, a resolution recognizing the 100th anniversary of Bulgaria's independence. I want to thank the Ranking Member on the committee, Representative ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, and Chairman HOWARD BERMAN, in addition to Chairman ROBERT WEXLER of the Subcommittee on Europe and Ranking Member of that subcommittee, ELTON GALLEGLY of California, for their support in bringing this resolution to the floor.

I am grateful to serve as the cochair of the Bulgaria Caucus of Congress along with congresswoman ELLEN TAUSCHER of California. We work for parliamentary exchanges between Bulgaria and America, along with hosting Bulgarian officials and citizens in Washington.

The people of Bulgaria should be proud that on September 22 of this year they will celebrate 100 years of independence.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Bulgaria struggled to free itself from the Ottoman Empire. Toward the end of that century, they once again fought to emerge from beneath Totalitarianism following the defeat of Communism. Bulgaria's story is a success because of the hard work and dedication of its people. They should be proud of these accomplishments.

On a personal note, 18 years ago I had the great honor to serve as an elected observer for Bulgaria's first and free elections as a participant with the International Republican Institute. At the time, I saw a nation battling the challenges of building a democratic society based on the rule of law. Communist Totalitarianism was replaced by freedom and democracy.

Bulgarians have faced the opportunities and the difficulties associated with building a prosperous free economy.

Additionally, just last month I served and visited with American troops stationed in Bulgaria on a codel led by Congresswoman MADELEINE BORDALLO of Guam, and I am proud to report that the immense economic and diplomatic progress the people of Bulgaria have made is remarkable. We were hosted by the National Assembly Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Solomon Passy. Chairman Passy served with great distinction as the former foreign minister of Bulgaria.

We met with former Bulgarian Minister to Greece Stephan Stoyanov, along with Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev, and National Assembly Speaker Georgi Pirinski. During my visit to Bulgaria in 2005, I was honored

to be hosted by President Georgi Parvanov.

Indeed, the World Bank recently classified Bulgaria as one of the top 10 nations to have undertaken important economic reforms to attract business investment. Bulgaria, admitted to the European Union in 2007, is the only EU Nation to be listed in the top 10.

In closing, we should recognize the people of Bulgaria for their continued support in the global war on terrorism. I have visited Bulgarian troops in Afghanistan and was proud that my son, Alan, served with Bulgaria during his year of service in Iraq.

As a dynamic member of NATO since 2004 and as a nation of free and democratic people, Bulgaria has stood with America in these difficult times. The partnership with America has never been stronger, built by Bulgaria's ambassador to the United States, Elena Poptodorova.

So today we recognize this immense achievement of theirs and commend them on 100 years of independence.

Again, I want to thank Chairman BERMAN, Ranking Member ROS-LEHTINEN, subcommittee Chairman WEXLER and subcommittee Ranking Member GALLEGLY for their work today.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BAIRD. I would echo the thanks and congratulate the gentleman on a successful resolution.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of House Resolution 1383, and I commend our colleague, Mr. JOE WILSON of South Carolina, for introducing it. I appreciate Mr. WILSON's formation of the Bulgaria Caucus to promote the partnership of Bulgaria and America. Bulgaria declared its independence 100 years ago, on September 22nd, 1908.

Like so much of the rest of Europe, however, Bulgaria then suffered through a very difficult and tumultuous 20th Century.

After suffering through two world wars, Bulgaria was then trapped for over four decades behind the "Iron Curtain" that fell across Eastern Europe, and its people suffered from the repression and stagnation that accompanied the imposition of the Bulgarian communist regime by the former Soviet Union.

After the communist bloc in Eastern Europe fell apart, Bulgaria was at last able to hold a truly free election in June 1990.

It then faced fresh difficulties, however, as it went through a period of social and economic turmoil that culminated in a severe economic financial crisis in 1996 and 1997.

With the help of the international community, the Bulgarian government initiated a series of difficult but necessary economic reforms.

Those reforms continue even today, but their results so far have helped Bulgaria noticeably improve its economic situation.

In fact, according to the World Bank, in 2006 Bulgaria attracted the highest levels of foreign direct investment—as a share of GDP—of all of the countries of Eastern Europe.

Challenges remain, but the market reforms undertaken so far have pointed Bulgaria in the right direction.

Bulgaria must also be commended for the political reforms it has implemented since 1990.

Right at the start, in 1991, the country adopted a new constitution, which created a parliamentary democracy that limited the powers of the President and also balanced those powers against the position of the Prime Minister—with the Prime Minister ultimately held accountable to the legislature.

So, Bulgaria has made progress toward a future of democracy and economic prosperity, but it nevertheless faces continuing challenges, including a rather serious problem in the form of corruption and organized crime.

We remain supportive of Bulgaria's efforts to address those twin scourges, and I note that, in the wake of very strong concerns expressed by the European Union, the Bulgarian government has indeed begun to reform its Interior Ministry and has created a State Agency for National Security to fight such corruption and organized crime.

We certainly wish it great success in that specific effort.

Finally, I note that, while continuing with its reform efforts at home, Bulgaria has also become an active member of the international community, contributing military personnel to participate in international missions in the countries of Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Furthermore, in a very important step in March 2004, Bulgaria became a formal ally of the United States by becoming a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—NATO.

In its new role—as a member of the NATO Alliance—Bulgaria has proven itself to be a constructive and positive force in working for stability in the Black Sea region, and we are grateful for that.

This year, on the occasion of its 100th anniversary as an independent state, we commend Bulgaria on the great progress it made in just the past eighteen years.

I ask my colleagues to join me in supporting this resolution honoring the independence of our friend and ally, Bulgaria.

Mr. BAIRD. I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Washington (Mr. BAIRD) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 1383, 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.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1345

COMMEMORATING BHUTAN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SMITHSONIAN FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 1307) commemorating the Kingdom of Bhutan's participation in the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival and commending the people and the Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan for their commitment to holding elections and broadening political participation, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 1307

Whereas Bhutan is a nation cloistered among some of the highest peaks in the eastern Himalayas and has for hundreds of years served as a sanctuary for the rich and unique Bhutanese culture;

Whereas Bhutan hosts some of the most pristine and biologically diverse natural environments in the modern world, owing to the agrarian society's unique farming traditions that are rooted in a deep appreciation for the land and humble devotion to its protection;

Whereas Bhutan participated in the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival and shared with the people of the United States many aspects of its unique culture and traditions, including its special approach towards life, described in national policy as the pursuit of "Gross National Happiness";

Whereas Bhutan was only in recent decades accessible by road and airplane but is now sharing with people throughout the world its special cultural traditions that include 13 traditional arts, zorig chusum, monastic dancers who perform ritual dances from sacred tsechus festivals, and weavers who create some of the most coveted textiles in the world;

Whereas Bhutan is transitioning to a parliamentary democracy, owing to the leadership of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who abdicated his throne on December 14, 2006, and his son King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, who is committed to conducting parliamentary elections; and

Whereas King Jigme Singye Wangchuck devolved all executive authority from the throne to the cabinet in 1998, initiated the process of drafting a constitution in 2001, ordered by royal decree an end to Bhutan's absolute monarchy and the establishment of a parliamentary democracy in 2008, and issued to the people of Bhutan a historic document, or tsathrim, stating that "Bhutan is a sovereign Kingdom and the Sovereign power belongs to the people of Bhutan": Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the United States House of Representatives—

(1) commemorates Bhutan's participation in the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival;

(2) recognizes the important cultural, artistic, agricultural, and environmental achievements of Bhutan and the Bhutanese people;

(3) commends the Bhutanese people, the Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan, and His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck for their commitment to conducting parliamentary elections and transitioning from an absolute monarchy to a parliamentary democracy; and

(4) remains committed to working with Bhutan, should it so desire, to foster cultural exchange and to assist in promoting democratic reform.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. BAIRD) and the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. WILSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Washington.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the resolution under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this resolution and yield myself as much time as I may consume.

I am very pleased to be here today to speak in support of H. Res. 1307, commemorating the Kingdom of Bhutan's participation in the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival and commending the people and the Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan for their commitment to holding elections and broadening political participation.

I want to pay special thanks to my colleague FRED UPTON for his assistance with this legislation as well.

I had the honor of visiting the Kingdom of Bhutan in August of 2006. It is truly a magnificent and beautiful country with delightful people. I am proud to have authored this resolution and urge its passage.

Throughout modern history, Bhutan has been one of the most geographically isolated nations in the world. Nestled among the highest peaks in the eastern Himalayas, Bhutan was inaccessible by road, rail, and air throughout the greater portion of the 20th century.

This unique seclusion fostered in Bhutan a distinctive culture marked by rich artistic tradition, deep spirituality, and an agrarian heritage emphasizing conservation and environmental stewardship.

Bhutan has adopted a principle to guide its development and preserve its rich cultural heritage—the principle of "gross national happiness," or as the King informed us, contentment. This unique philosophy, enshrined as Bhutan's national objective by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck in 1982, measures progress not only in terms of economic gains or technological achievement, but as a complete balance of many important factors encompassing the well-being and prosperity of the communities and individuals who make up the kingdom.

The pursuit of gross national happiness promotes Bhutanese cultural values as the key to the nation's development and has enabled Bhutan to progress in the modern world while maintaining its commitment to itself. By respecting these traditions, Bhutan has preserved not only its culture but its pristine national environment and enabled the kingdom to remain one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems on the planet.

As Bhutan continued on its careful path of development under the leadership of King Jigme Wangchuck, the kingdom began to pursue political reforms. In 2008, Bhutan observes an important milestone and celebrates a historical achievement: 2008 marks not only the 100th anniversary of the kingdom's monarchy but also the dawn of Bhutan's emergence as a democratic constitutional monarchy.

This process of democratization began in 1998 when King Wangchuck devolved executive authority from the throne to the cabinet and initiated the drafting of a constitution by royal decree.

On December 14, 2006, King Wangchuck honored his pledge and abdicated the throne, abolished Bhutan's absolute monarchy, and transferred the throne to his son, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.

The new King has continued to oversee the democratization of his country. In March of 2008, Bhutan held its first parliamentary elections, embarking on the final step in its decade-long transition to full constitutional democracy. There are plans for a grant coronation in November of this year. At that time, Bhutan's first constitutional monarch will formally ascend to the throne.

H. Res. 1307 recognizes the political achievements of the Kingdom of Bhutan and commends the people and the leadership of the kingdom for their ability to pursue development while serving the nation's gross national happiness. We also commemorate the participation of Bhutan at the 2008 Folklife Festival, marking a unique opportunity for thousands of Americans to appreciate the Bhutanese culture that continues to flourish along Bhutan's path of development.

I urge passage of the resolution.

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

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of House Resolution 1307, a resolution commemorating Bhutan's participation in the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival and commending the people and leaders of that isolated and mountainous country for their commitment to democratic reform.

Mr. Speaker, the Kingdom of Bhutan, called by its people "the Land of the Thunder Dragon," is one of the most hauntingly beautiful and remarkable countries in the world.

If the diversity of its peoples, geography, and ecosystems weren't enough to make Bhutan stand out, this traditional society is also experiencing an extraordinary political evolution.

Due to the perceptive policies of its two most recent rulers, Bhutan has been transformed from one of the world's most reclusive poor countries to one of its more enlightened. The economy has grown at an average annual rate of 7 percent over the past 25 years. With huge investments in public health, life expectancy rose during the King's reign from 40 to 66. During the 1990s, the primary school enrollment rate rose by over a quarter to 72 percent.

This March, Bhutan held successful elections for the lower house of parliament. This event, which built upon the historic and peaceful elections for the upper house of parliament in December 2007, marked another positive

step in Bhutan's transition to a democratic, constitutional monarchy.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support for this well-crafted and noncontroversial resolution.

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

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his kind words. It is truly a marvelous story, the development of Bhutan into a democratic monarchy. The effort of the King and his son and the entire Bhutanese people is really astonishing and a great story to tell. It is also a remarkably beautiful country.

So I would urge passage of this.

I have no further speakers at this time, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time and commend my colleague from Washington State.

Mr. BAIRD. I thank the gentleman. With that, I yield back the balance of my time as well.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Washington (Mr. BAIRD) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 1307, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. BAIRD. 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 motion will be postponed.

PERMISSION FOR COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM TO FILE SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT ON H.R. 6322, PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS HOME RULE ACT OF 2008

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform be authorized to file a supplemental report to accompany H.R. 6322.

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

There was no objection.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE ACT OF 2008

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendment to the bill (H.R. 5683) to make certain reforms with respect to the Government Accountability Office, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the Senate amendment is as follows:

Senate amendment:

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; REFERENCES; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) *SHORT TITLE*.—This Act may be cited as the "Government Accountability Office Act of 2008".

(b) *REFERENCES*.—Except as otherwise expressly provided, whenever in this Act an amendment to a section or other provision, the reference shall be considered to be made to a section or other provision of title 31, United States Code.

(c) *TABLE OF CONTENTS*.—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; references; table of contents.

Sec. 2. Provisions relating to future annual pay adjustments.

Sec. 3. Pay adjustment relating to certain previous years.

Sec. 4. Lump-sum payment for certain performance-based compensation.

Sec. 5. Inspector General.

Sec. 6. Reimbursement of audit costs.

Sec. 7. Financial disclosure requirements.

Sec. 8. Highest basic pay rate.

Sec. 9. Additional authorities.

SEC. 2. PROVISIONS RELATING TO FUTURE ANNUAL PAY ADJUSTMENTS.

(a) *IN GENERAL*.—Section 732 is amended by adding at the end the following:

"(j)(1) For purposes of this subsection—

"(A) the term 'pay increase', as used with respect to an officer or employee in connection with a year, means the total increase in the rate of basic pay (expressed as a percentage) of such officer or employee, taking effect under section 731(b) and subsection (c)(3) in such year;

"(B) the term 'required minimum percentage', as used with respect to an officer or employee in connection with a year, means the percentage equal to the total increase in rates of basic pay (expressed as a percentage) taking effect under sections 5303 and 5304–5304a of title 5 in such year with respect to General Schedule positions within the pay locality (as defined by section 5302(5) of title 5) in which the position of such officer or employee is located;

"(C) the term 'covered officer or employee', as used with respect to a pay increase, means any individual—

"(i) who is an officer or employee of the Government Accountability Office, other than an officer or employee described in subparagraph (A), (B), or (C) of section 4(c)(1) of the Government Accountability Office Act of 2008, determined as of the effective date of such pay increase; and

"(ii) whose performance is at least at a satisfactory level, as determined by the Comptroller General under the provisions of subsection (c)(3) for purposes of the adjustment taking effect under such provisions in such year; and

"(D) the term 'nonpermanent merit pay' means any amount payable under section 731(b) which does not constitute basic pay.

"(2)(A) Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, if (disregarding this subsection) the pay increase that would otherwise take effect with respect to a covered officer or employee in a year would be less than the required minimum percentage for such officer or employee in such year, the Comptroller General shall provide for a further increase in the rate of basic pay of such officer or employee.

"(B) The further increase under this subsection—

"(i) shall be equal to the amount necessary to make up for the shortfall described in subparagraph (A); and

"(ii) shall take effect as of the same date as the pay increase otherwise taking effect in such year.

"(C) Nothing in this paragraph shall be considered to permit or require that a rate of basic pay be increased to an amount inconsistent with the limitation set forth in subsection (c)(2).

"(D) If (disregarding this subsection) the covered officer or employee would also have re-

ceived any nonpermanent merit pay in such year, such nonpermanent merit pay shall be decreased by an amount equal to the portion of such officer's or employee's basic pay for such year which is attributable to the further increase described in subparagraph (A) (as determined by the Comptroller General), but to not less than zero.

"(3) Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, the effective date of any pay increase (within the meaning of paragraph (1)(A)) taking effect with respect to a covered officer or employee in any year shall be the same as the effective date of any adjustment taking effect under section 5303 of title 5 with respect to statutory pay systems (as defined by section 5302(1) of title 5) in such year."

(b) *EFFECTIVE DATE*.—The amendment made by this section shall apply with respect to any pay increase (as defined by such amendment) taking effect on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 3. PAY ADJUSTMENT RELATING TO CERTAIN PREVIOUS YEARS.

(a) *APPLICABILITY*.—This section applies in the case of any individual who, as of the date of the enactment of this Act, is an officer or employee of the Government Accountability Office, excluding—

(1) an officer or employee described in subparagraph (A), (B), or (C) of section 4(c)(1); and

(2) an officer or employee who received both a 2.6 percent pay increase in January 2006 and a 2.4 percent pay increase in February 2007.

(b) *PAY INCREASE DEFINED*.—For purposes of this section, the term "pay increase", as used with respect to an officer or employee in connection with a year, means the total increase in the rate of basic pay (expressed as a percentage) of such officer or employee, taking effect under sections 731(b) and 732(c)(3) of title 31, United States Code, in such year.

(c) *PROSPECTIVE EFFECT*.—Effective with respect to pay for service performed in any pay period beginning after the end of the 6-month period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act (or such earlier date as the Comptroller General may specify), the rate of basic pay for each individual to whom this section applies shall be determined as if such individual had received both a 2.6 percent pay increase for 2006 and a 2.4 percent pay increase for 2007, subject to subsection (e).

(d) *LUMP-SUM PAYMENT*.—Not later than 6 months after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General shall, subject to the availability of appropriations, pay to each individual to whom this section applies a lump-sum payment. Subject to subsection (e), such lump-sum payment shall be equal to—

(1)(A) the total amount of basic pay that would have been paid to the individual, for service performed during the period beginning on the effective date of the pay increase for 2006 and ending on the day before the effective date of the pay adjustment under subsection (c) (or, if earlier, the date on which the individual retires or otherwise ceases to be employed by the Government Accountability Office), if such individual had received both a 2.6 percent pay increase for 2006 and a 2.4 percent pay increase for 2007, minus

(B) the total amount of basic pay that was in fact paid to the individual for service performed during the period described in subparagraph (A); and

(2) increased by 4 percent of the amount calculated under paragraph (1).

Eligibility for a lump-sum payment under this subsection shall be determined solely on the basis of whether an individual satisfies the requirements of subsection (a) (to be considered an individual to whom this section applies), and without regard to such individual's employment status as of any date following the date of the enactment of this Act or any other factor.

(e) *CONDITIONS*.—Nothing in subsection (c) or (d) shall be considered to permit or require—