

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 909, the gentleman from California (Mr. CARDOZA) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. CARDOZA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, my district in California has been especially hard hit by the current economic crisis. Even if nationwide indicators begin to reveal a healthier national economy in the coming months, it is clear that my district and others in California's Central Valley region will suffer from severe economic underdevelopment for years to come. The 18th Congressional District's struggling economy is the reason I continue to try to use every available opportunity to push for amendments and legislation that will spur job creation and economic development and provide relief to the hardest-hit communities in the country. The Bureau of Labor Statistics ranks the metro area of Merced, Modesto, and Stockton with some of the highest unemployment rates in the Nation. All three are above 15 percent, and all three well above the national unemployment rate of 10.2 percent.

My amendment simply provides a little more direction during the grant writing process by including unemployment rates in the criteria used to evaluate these various grant applications. This will provide a little extra help to communities like Los Banos and Merced to maintain and improve their fire protection services. These and many other cities in my district and across the country have critical needs that they cannot meet under the current financial stress that they are having. Instead of hiring additional personnel and boosting employment, they are forced to lay off valuable employees and risk the safety of their communities.

I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this commonsense amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of Nebraska. Mr. Chairman, I rise to claim time in opposition to the amendment. Although I am not necessarily opposed to this, I do have some concerns.

The Acting CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Nebraska is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. SMITH of Nebraska. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This amendment would require that local unemployment rates be considered as a factor in awarding grants to fire departments. While I understand the current state of the economy should make this a concern in bills we consider, the Fire grant program has, since its inception 8 years ago, awarded grants competitively based upon the potential of the applicant's proposal to enhance a fire department's ability to

respond to fires and related hazards. I am somewhat concerned that this change may result in an upset in the delicate balance of consideration that has been achieved over the years.

The factors used by FEMA in evaluating these proposals have been carefully developed and refined in consultation with national fire service organizations. They include, for example, a department's geographic response area, its population served, unique hazard vulnerabilities, and its budgetary situation. All of these factors directly impact the department's ability to respond to hazards and, thus, are appropriate criteria.

I believe the gentleman's amendment is well intentioned, but I am concerned that the unemployment rate of the locality a department protects is simply not directly related to fire hazards or the department's ability to respond to them. While a fire department's operating budget could potentially be indirectly impacted by a poor local economy that impacts tax revenues, this factor is already explicitly noted in the legislation based on need.

Further, I would caution generally against the practice of Congress dictating the specific criteria to be used by FEMA in making awards. This bill codifies consideration of high-level factors that were developed by the fire service and are currently used by FEMA, but it does not attempt to incorporate new ones based on particular interests. If we begin to open up this program to congressional direction of this sort, we risk adding a level of prescription that could transform the current highly competitive process to one driven by interests unrelated to the needs of the fire service.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CARDOZA. Mr. Chairman, I will respond to my friend and colleague that we have taken and watered this language down so that it applies to all areas. Severe unemployment is only one of many criteria that can be considered and only when the situation is a desperate situation.

We talked about our area in central California being the Katrina of California where we have such devastating consequences that we may not be able to meet some of our fire needs in our communities as they just collapsed financially. So if we find situations where we're not meeting the fire protection needs of those communities, we think that it's very important. This has just become one of many criteria in evaluating these grants. Not the sole criteria, not the most important criteria, but certainly to allow those individuals who are making the decisions to just take this into consideration. That's the purpose of my amendment.

The communities of Merced and Los Banos, in particular, have contacted my office, indicating that this is something they feel is a necessary imperative. But I can imagine cities across the country—Miami, Detroit, other places—where they may find them-

selves in similar kinds of economic situations. It might be your State by the time this bill becomes law.

So I would just say that I think it's something that is important for everyone to have as a capability to be taken into consideration. It's not something that will override the other considerations that the gentleman has outlined.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of Nebraska. Mr. Chairman, I certainly want to be sensitive to the economic conditions that hit some parts of the country harder than others, and I want to be mindful of the wise use of resources at the Federal level. I don't want to get into other policies that might impact our economy in any a very negative way. I don't have enough time to do that right now. But I certainly hope that we can arrive at good policy decisions today and down the road so that we don't stand in the way of the wise use of government and taxpayer resources.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. CARDOZA).

The amendment was agreed to.

Mr. GORDON of Tennessee. Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee do now rise.

The motion was agreed to.

Accordingly, the Committee rose; and the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. JACKSON of Illinois) having assumed the chair, Mr. SERRANO, Acting Chair of the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, reported that that Committee, having had under consideration the bill (H.R. 3791) to amend sections 33 and 34 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974, and for other purposes, had come to no resolution thereon.

□ 1415

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken later.

WELCOMING INDIAN PRIME MINISTER MANMOHAN SINGH

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 890) welcoming the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh, to the United States.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 890

Whereas the Republic of India achieved its independence from the British Empire on

August 15, 1947, and has since maintained a democratic system of government;

Whereas from April 16 to May 13, India conducted the world's largest democratic election, which returned Prime Minister Singh to power;

Whereas India's relationship with the United States has deepened in past years and encompasses cooperation on matters relating to international security, world trade, technology, science, and health;

Whereas the relationship between the United States and India has great potential to promote stability, democracy, prosperity, and peace throughout the world and enhance the ability of both countries to work together to provide global leadership in areas of mutual concern and interest;

Whereas the Prime Minister of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh, has helped shape India's economic policies to permit the expansion of a market economy, which has led to greater economic prosperity for India and the growth of a middle class;

Whereas Americans of Indian origin have made diverse and numerous contributions to the United States; and

Whereas Prime Minister Singh has accepted an invitation by the United States to make an official visit to Washington, DC, and is the honoree of President Barack Obama's first State Dinner: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) commends the maturing of the relationship between the United States and the Republic of India, exemplified by the current official visit of the Prime Minister of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh;

(2) looks forward to continuing progress in the relationship between the United States and India; and

(3) welcomes Prime Minister Singh to the United States.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SERRANO). Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New York (Mr. ACKERMAN) and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York.

GENERAL LEAVE

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

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this resolution and of the U.S.-India relationship. Next week, the Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh, will come to Washington for a State visit, and I am pleased that with this resolution, the House will offer him its own welcome.

Prime Minister Singh has worked hard to improve our already strong ties and has courageously already taken political risks for our bilateral relationship that few others would venture. But when the Prime Minister put his government and his career on the line, it wasn't for us, though his victory has

certainly proved to be to our advantage. No, Prime Minister Singh took his chances for India, for its future and for the fulfillment of that country's enormous potential.

And our partnership is built on this foundation: that India's rise as a great power in Asia and as a global player advances critical American interests ranging from the promotion of democracy and democratic values, to improving stability and security throughout all parts of Asia.

We do not fear a growing India for one simple reason: India's values are our values. India is a real democracy with real institutions that are subordinate to the rule of law. India, though ready to defend itself, doesn't start wars or harbor terrorists. India, though as fastidious as any state about protecting its sovereignty, can be relied upon to keep its word once committed to a treaty or an international agreement. India struggles to preserve its tradition of religious, cultural, and ethnic pluralism. India safeguards sensitive technologies. India fights terrorism.

We do not see ourselves when we look at India, though this Nation has benefited immensely from Indians who have become Americans. India is vastly larger in population, vastly older in history, and vastly more complex culturally with some 2,000 ethnicities and 29 major languages.

We do see similarities. We do see a nation committed to lifting itself by its own means. We do see a nation open to the world, and we do see a nation committed to the same vision of peace and security that has guided our own Nation.

There are, as to be expected, differences between us. Some of them—and I would note particularly the issue of Iran—are very serious. But as nations committed to a relationship of equals, a relationship of mutual benefit and mutual respect, I believe we can work through our differences and achieve enormous progress in many areas of our mutual concern.

I am delighted that Prime Minister Singh, a man who is one in a billion, is returning to the United States, and I am proud of the House today in offering him such a well-deserved and warm welcome.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of House Resolution 890, a measure welcoming the Prime Minister of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh, to the United States. I am pleased to be a cosponsor of this timely resolution which recognizes the forthcoming visit by India's distinguished and universally accepted and respected Prime Minister to the United States.

This will be the first official visit by a foreign head of government during this administration. And, Mr. Speaker, that makes it wholly appropriate that Prime Minister Singh and India be accorded this wonderful honor.

Without doubt, the high status accorded to his visit reflects India's growing global role and its increasingly comprehensive relationship with our country, the United States. Implicitly, however, the pomp and the circumstance associated with his visit also reflect the extraordinary contribution of Indian Americans to solidify our people-to-people relationship and all of the dynamism that they have brought to our diverse and vibrant society.

In any regard, the Congress fully shares with the executive branch a deep commitment to strengthening our partnership with India and to expand our cooperation on a wide range of bilateral and global issues. These opportunities for mutual cooperation range from global security to economic growth, trade promotion, human development, and the expansion of our two-knowledge societies, and also nuclear nonproliferation, and protection of the environment.

Mr. Speaker, it is altogether fitting that we should honor the Indian-American relations as strong as they are and ever closer every day and the visit of Prime Minister Singh by adopting this thoughtful resolution.

I urge its support, and I reserve the balance of our time.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to yield 2½ minutes to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT).

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I want to raise my voice in strong support for H. Res. 890, a resolution introduced to welcome Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, to the United States. As co-Chair of the caucus on Indian and Indian Americans, I extend our hand in friendship to our close friend and strategic ally in South Central Asia. I've known Prime Minister Manmohan Singh since he was the finance minister in 1990 who really brought about the Indian miracle.

The President has chosen to recognize the close ties between our nations by honoring India with its first official State dinner at the White House next week, and I look forward to participating.

In the 21st century, the world's oldest and largest democracies have much to share and learn from each other. Over the years, I visited India 22 times, but perhaps the most memorable visit came this year as a part of the congressional delegation with John Lewis.

We were there to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the historic visit to India by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his wife. At the end of the visit, Dr. King said, "The choice today is no longer between violence and non-violence; it is either nonviolence or nonexistence." That truth is self-evident today.

Both India and the United States must deepen our ties—even if we respect different cultures—if we are to make this a safer and better world. And we are up to the challenge. The

Prime Minister has made significant economic progress for the people of India and that has resulted in new business opportunities for American companies and U.S. jobs. In Seattle, the heart of my congressional district, Boeing builds airplanes for a major customer, Air India. That is just one of the examples of the business ties that bind us together.

We also cooperate in science, technology, trade, and education. All of this draws us together in countless ways.

Recently, I joined Her Excellency, Meera Shankar, the Ambassador of India, for the unveiling of a statue of Gandhi at the King County Public Library. And last weekend in Seattle, we celebrated the festival of Diwali.

In the 21st century, the Internet has removed the borders that separated nations, but it will take people to unite us into one world. That is what makes a State visit like this so important. Leaders working in good faith on behalf of the people can bridge any divide no matter how wide and deep. As Nelson Mandela in South Africa once said, "It always seems impossible until it's done."

This resolution is a down payment on the future, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. I would like to reserve, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Speaker, it's now my pleasure to yield to the distinguished gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), the majority leader of the House, 1 elastic minute.

Mr. HOYER. I thank my friend, Mr. ACKERMAN, for yielding, and I thank the ranking member, Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN, for bringing this resolution to the floor.

Next week, as has been said, President Obama will be hosting the first State dinner of his administration, and the guest of honor, appropriately, will be the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh.

Prime Minister Singh visits America at a time when the relationship between our two nations is as strong as it has ever been. In India we see a vital partner on issues of national security to world trade. We see a nation that confronts many of the threats that challenge America, from terrorism to global warming. We see an emerging economic power with a growing middle class. And though our nations are separated by distance, language, and culture, we recognize in one another the democratic values we share; and of course we have a language in common as well, as well as common values, despite its great size and diversity.

And for those who may not know, India will soon be not only the largest democracy, but the most populous nation in the world.

India has remained a democracy since its independence more than 60 years ago. And this year, Prime Minister Singh was returned to power in the world's largest democratic elec-

tion. In fact, India made him the first Prime Minister since Nehru to return to office after completing a full term, a truly remarkable accomplishment.

All of us should be proud, and I know we are, to host the leader of one of America's most vital allies. On behalf of the House of Representatives, Speaker PELOSI, and all of us on both sides of the aisle, and Mr. BOEHNER, I am pleased to have this opportunity to welcome Prime Minister Singh to the United States and rise in strong support of this resolution.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the sponsor of this measure, Mr. MCDERMOTT, and the gentleman from California (Mr. ROYCE) for providing us with an opportunity to recognize this ever-growing tie in the relationship between our democratic nations and to welcome, in an official way, Prime Minister Singh.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H. Res. 890, which welcomes the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh, to the United States, and commends the maturation of the U.S.-India relationship.

That relationship has made remarkable strides in the past 2 decades. And one of the critical elements helping launch our improved ties was the series of economic reforms India initiated in 1991, reforms developed and implemented under the leadership of then Finance Minister, Dr. Singh.

With his rise to Prime Minister in 2004, Dr. Singh provided the leadership required for his country to strike the landmark U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative with us, a deal that facilitates nuclear cooperation and offers the bilateral relationship a major strategic opportunity.

After his party's victory in this year's general elections, Dr. Singh became the first full-term Indian Prime Minister to be returned to power since 1962. The particularly strong electoral mandate he received in the recent election is testament to his accomplishment. It also offers our two countries a chance to move our partnership to an even higher level, better positioning us to advance solutions to the key regional and global challenges we confront, from pandemic disease, to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, climate change, and poverty.

Reflecting India's emergence as a major international player and the importance of the U.S.-India relationship, the Prime Minister's visit here next week will be the first official state visit by any foreign dignitary to the Obama White House.

The Prime Minister should know that the United States Congress values his leadership and our bilateral partnership just as much as the new Administration, and so I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H. Res. 890.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this resolution. I want to thank Mr. MCDERMOTT, my cochairman of the India Caucus.

Indian Prime Minister Singh's visit to Washington for an official visit is an important signal of deepening relations between the United States and India. His visit sends a signal to the Indian people that their country is a valued partner. This resolution recognizes this relationship—its past successes, and hopes for its future.

Significantly, Prime Minister Singh's visit will come almost to the day of the horrific terrorist attacks on Mumbai carried out by Islamist militants. On that day 163 people were cut down in a bloody rampage. Our thoughts will be with Indian people on that anniversary.

Mr. Speaker, over the past decade, relations between the U.S. and India have undergone a renaissance. Prime Minister Singh has done much to bring the United States and India together, but perhaps nothing more consequential than signing the landmark civil nuclear cooperation agreement between the two countries.

Indian officials have told me about their ambitious plans to expand nuclear power. India needs additional electricity to fuel its growing economy and nuclear energy is a clean source. With this deal, the Indian nuclear industry is overcoming the international restrictions that have curtailed it since 1974, to reach its full potential. India will still rely on other energy sources, but it is smart policy for any country to diversify. We in the U.S. should learn that lesson. We are expecting U.S. companies to be part of the Indian nuclear industry. We should give them more opportunities at home too.

Official visits should lead to concrete policy improvements. If this relationship is to move ahead, progress must be made on trade. Right now, the signs aren't good. Both countries need to get serious on advancing trade, or we'll both lose.

The U.S.-India relationship has made great strides, but progress can't be taken for granted. We have many common interests: economics, counter-terrorism, energy. While President Obama was in China this week, India is another very important country. The India Caucus will be watching next week's visit in hopes that specific advances will be made.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. I urge unanimous support for this measure, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I thank the gentleman for her support and endorsement of the resolution and her wonderful comments; and we yield back the balance of our time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. ACKERMAN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 890.

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.

□ 1430

RECOGNIZING ANNIVERSARY OF THE VELVET REVOLUTION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 212) expressing the sense of Congress on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of historic events in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, and reaffirming the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the United States