

the heads of the American Medical Association, the American Nursing Association, and the American Hospital Association. Doctors, hospital administrators, nurses—not politicians. The clear consensus is that the health care legislation, as it is taking shape here in Congress, can be expected to result in better patient care while holding costs in check. Let me repeat, the legislation, as it is taking shape in Congress, can result in better care at no more cost for all Americans.

**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.

**UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE
FINANCIAL RELIEF ACT OF 2009**

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 22) to amend chapter 89 of title 5, United States Code, to allow the United States Postal Service to pay its share of contributions for annuitants' health benefits out of the Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 22

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 "United States Postal Service Financial Relief Act of 2009".

**SEC. 2. GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTIONS FOR
POSTAL ANNUITANTS' HEALTH BENEFITS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Clause (iii) of section 8909a(d)(3)(A) of title 5, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

"(iii) \$1,400,000,000, not later than September 30, 2009;"

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall take effect as if included in the enactment of section 803(a)(1)(B) of the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (Public Law 109-435; 120 Stat. 3251).

SEC. 3. TECHNICAL CORRECTION.

The heading for section 8909a of title 5, United States Code, is amended by striking "BENEFIT" and inserting "BENEFITS".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New York (Mr. TOWNS) and the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York.

GENERAL LEAVE

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

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

There was no objection.

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, H.R. 22, the United States Postal Service Financial Relief Act of 2009, as amended, would permit the United States Postal Service to lower its 2009 payment into the retirement health benefit fund, \$5.4 billion, reduce it to \$1.4 billion. This bill does not provide any taxpayer funds to the Postal Service. In essence, H.R. 22 is intended to provide the Postal Service with some relief from its current financial crisis by lowering the amount of its 2009 payment due. The measure has been properly vetted and amended by the House Oversight Committee, in line with calls for a more fiscally responsible government. The bill, as amended, does not score.

The bill enjoys the support of 339 Members of the House from both parties. I would like to thank Representatives McHUGH of New York and DAVIS of Illinois for introducing this bill and for their hard work and patience in navigating the bill through the House. Further, I would like to thank the House Democratic leadership and the Budget Committee for working with us to help advance the bill to the floor.

□ 1245

Also I would like to thank and recognize Chairman LYNCH of Massachusetts for his leadership on the subcommittee and being a tireless advocate for the postal service and all of its employees. Unfortunately, Chairman LYNCH could not be with us today, but his statement will be in the RECORD.

Additionally, I would like to thank the gentleman from California, Congressman ISSA, for his support and strong work on this bill. Also Congressman CHAFFETZ for his work as well. I would like to recognize them because this is truly bipartisan support for this important legislation, which I think is so important.

The United States Postal Service is regularly acknowledged to be among the most trusted of the Federal agencies in part due to the positive relationship that its approximately 625,000 employees develop with local communities. The postal service is often the only Federal presence in many of the urban and rural areas throughout the United States, and it is often the face of the Federal Government.

Yet despite the best efforts of its employees, the postal service faces financial challenges unlike at any other time. Mail volumes have declined at a record pace, falling by 7 million pieces during the third quarter of fiscal year 2009, 14.3, compared to the same period last year. In fact, volume continued to fall for all types of mail: first class, standard, periodical, and also package services. The postal service ended the third quarter ending in 2009 with a loss of \$2.4 billion, its year-to-date net loss through the third quarter at \$4.7 billion.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the introduction of this bill on January 6, the first legislative day, was appropriate. This is a problem for an organization, the United States Post Office, which is, in fact, 15 times larger than General Motors. The United States Post Office is not only a constitutional obligation but, in fact, an organization which has existed for the service of the United States of America since our founding.

But since the 1970s, the United States Post Office has had a problem. The problem is our own success. Alternate efficiencies have reduced the need for the United States Post Office to deliver mail. Invoices, payments, and certainly many other emails instead of paper mails are being delivered electronically today. The United States Post Office is also suffering from a recession that we all are suffering under.

Therefore, the committee has worked on a bipartisan basis to recognize that we must reform the post office again. Having just passed the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act in 2006, we are faced with another crisis; but rather than having that crisis lead to haphazard reductions, the chairman and I have worked together with Members on both sides of the aisle, as the chairman said, 339 cosponsors, to create a soft landing for the post office.

It will not be that soft, Mr. Speaker. It will, in fact, require that they accelerate the reduction in their force. It will require that they look at all costs and services. It will require without a doubt the closing of post offices around our Nation.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, these are difficult decisions. They are both financial and they're political. They impact the communities who have for so long allowed people to go to their corner post office to maintain a postal mailbox, to do other services. These services will be further away in the future.

So for that reason, although I would have preferred a major reform, I would have preferred that we were able to do some of these hard steps, I'm supporting an alternate course, one in which we use these last 2 weeks and only these last 2 weeks of the fiscal year to move this bill with a cost, as the chairman said, of zero because there is so little time left in the year. However, we are committed on this side of the aisle and I know the chairman shares this, to work with the postal service to find ways to reduce their costs, their overhead, and many of the legacy items that today make it difficult.

Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat something the chairman said because it's noteworthy for my conservative friends. The post office's money that we are talking about today is the money they have put aside. This is the only agency that works in this way. So

although this could have scored, it does not score, and although people will often say that we are being fiscal conservatives if we vote against this, the truth is the postal service operates within its own funds. The funds that will be used in H.R. 22 are their funds. Ultimately the American people will look to the post office to make the corrections. This committee on a bipartisan basis will oversee the post office to see that they come in line for the future so they continue to operate on their own revenue and not on any revenue provided by Congress.

So, Mr. Speaker, I hope my friends are listening. I hope this will go far behind the 339 cosponsors, and I hope that everyone on both sides of the aisle will put down their mark today to make sure that we commit ourselves working with the post office to do the necessary reforms so we will not be back here again in the same way next year.

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

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to first yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. CLAY).

(Mr. CLAY asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding. I want to also thank the chairman and the ranking member as well as the House leadership for shepherding this bill to the floor.

This substitute amendment to H.R. 22 is sorely needed to partially relieve the U.S. Postal Service of an oversize payment of \$5.4 billion to a Retiree Health Benefits Fund. The postal service under this legislation will pay \$1.4 billion.

The postal service is suffering the same effects of this recession as the rest of the Nation. Without legislative relief, the postal service will default on a \$5.4 billion payment due on September 30.

This bill is not a bailout, as no taxpayer funds will be provided to the postal service. The Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act required the postal service to prefund the cost of health care benefits for future retirees. No other government agency or private company is required to prefund retiree benefits on such an aggressive or ambitious schedule.

The postal service operates on revenues from sales of its products and services. The postal service has already embarked on cost-cutting estimated to be \$6 billion in fiscal year 2009, by cutting work hours, freezing hiring, and closing administrative offices.

The postal service has paid \$10 billion into the trust fund over the past 2 years, although it's suffered combined losses of \$7.9 billion during that 2-year period.

This bill is in line with the actions of many large businesses, including their competitors, which have temporarily reduced or suspended payments for retiree benefits or pensions during the recession.

Again, I thank the chairman for yielding.

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, at this time it is my honor to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Utah (Mr. CHAFFETZ), a member of the committee.

Mr. CHAFFETZ. I want to thank Chairman TOWNS and I want to thank Ranking Member ISSA for the bipartisan support and effort to move this bill forward. It's an important piece of legislation.

H.R. 22 is needed to avoid a taxpayer-funded bailout to the United States Postal Service. The United States Postal Service is the only Federal entity required to prefund its pension and retiree health plans. H.R. 22 would enable the United States Postal Service to use its existing revenues that have been funded over the years through its own operations to pay for retiree health benefits as opposed to using this year's operating revenues.

While the United States Postal Service needs to continue to reduce costs, one of the impressive things that has happened is that they have reduced their workforce by 22 percent since 1999, a 22 percent reduction in their workforce since 1999, compared to a 13 percent increase in the Federal workforce in other parts of the government.

The main driver of the United States Postal Service debt has been the 2006 Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act's requirement to prefund 80 percent of its future retiree health benefit costs, a 75-year liability, in just 10 years. No other business or government entity in the United States does that. Had it not been for this prefunding, the United States Postal Service would actually have shown a profit, and that's why I think you see broad bipartisan support with 339 cosponsors on this bill in support of H.R. 22.

I encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this so that we can avoid a taxpayer bailout that would be needed.

Finally, let me just mention the good men and women who work so hard, so diligently, that care so much. My hat's off to them for the good work that they do for this country and the United States Postal Service.

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Washington, D.C. (Ms. NORTON).

Ms. NORTON. I rise with great thanks to our chairman and our ranking member, who worked so well together on this really essential bill.

Mr. Speaker, we have rescued a lot of private sector agencies, a whole slew of them. But here comes the postal service not asking for a bailout. Understand that we don't even subsidize the postal service, even though it is the only Federal agency mentioned in the Constitution. So it's a Federal agency we must have, mandated by the Constitution.

Yet alone among government agencies, if you want to consider an agency that funds itself out of its own revenue a government agency just because it's

in the Constitution, alone the Postal Service is required to prefund its retiree health benefits. Not us, mind you. No Federal agency has got to do that. And how does the Postal Service prefund? From postal funds.

I don't think you need to read the papers every day to know what has happened to postal funds. These folks have had to put up \$10 billion in prefunding in the past couple of years out of postal funds; yet this is a failing business. It's not a failing business because of its policies or practices. The Postal Service has been overtaken by the fax; overtaken by emails.

They're not like Wall Street, which went into a deliberate mode of greed. I don't care what kind of genius you are, you're going to have a hard time if you're the postal service, which must exist under our Constitution, to figure out how you're going to stay in business.

Yet in the past year alone, look at the kind of hits this institution has taken, not mandated by us: your mail carrier, almost 11,500; rural carriers, 753 gone; mail handlers, 2,938 gone. In the last 10 years, the postal service has lost 175,000 employees. Show me a business that is left standing, having taken those kinds of hits not because it's overspending but for reasons, some of which are beyond its control.

Now the chairman, the ranking member, the whole committee is on their case for even further cuts, but the American people are on our case to make sure that their mail keeps being delivered and that their trusted postal worker is always there.

□ 1300

We shouldn't ask more from the post office in prefunding retiree benefits at a time when I believe you could find nobody in the United States who is prefunding.

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 1 minute.

I would like to comment on the Delegate's statement because it is quite true. Just in the last approximately 18 months, we have added almost 200,000 net Federal workers on the Federal side. The post office is continuing to reduce its workforce, anticipating reducing its workforce by about 30,000, or more than 5 percent per year. We have to do better.

I look forward to working with the majority on finding ways that we can integrate more postal workers into other Federal opportunities so we can retain these good Federal servants, but at the same time right-size the post office.

Having said that, it is very clear, as Ms. NORTON said, that only the post office is really cutting itself in the Federal Government, and that is an unusual situation. They are right-sizing themselves, and I hope all of our Members will be sensitive that we have to right-size them at a rate that allows our high quality service to continue.

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from New

York (Mrs. MALONEY), a member of the committee.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you, Chairman TOWNS, for yielding and for your leadership on this important issue and in so many other areas, and I thank the ranking member.

This bill actually saves taxpayers money. This is not a bailout as we have seen before this Congress many times. No taxpayer funds will be provided to the postal service. The service operates on revenues from sales of its products and services, and it receives appropriations only in reimbursement for free services for the blind and other services.

The post office remains the only government agency or private company that is required to prefund retiree benefits on such an aggressive schedule. The fund now currently contains over \$32 billion.

This amendment to H.R. 22 will lower the payment for 2009 to a level that is close to that recommended by the IG, and it will prevent the post office from defaulting on a \$5.4 billion payment due on September 30. Even with the lower payment for 2009, after including the payments for 2007 and 2008, the postal service will be on track to prefund the trust fund through 2016 by over \$9 billion, more than the IG's recommendation.

This bill is long overdue. It is good government, and I strongly support it.

Mr. ISSA. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, at this time, I would like to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Chicago, Illinois (Mr. DAVIS).

(Mr. DAVIS of Illinois asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to thank the chairman for yielding me this time. I also want to commend him and the ranking member and the members of the subcommittee for the great work that they have done on this bill.

I am very pleased to be a cosponsor, an original cosponsor of H.R. 22. I am basically pleased to have been so because for a number of years we have known that the postal service was operating in a different environment. We have seen the tremendous increase in e-commerce. We have seen the utilization of other means and methods of communicating, and we have always known we were going to have to do something.

The something we have done does not cost the taxpayers any additional money. As Delegate NORTON said, it is not a bailout. It is a sane, rational approach to dealing with the problem, and I want to commend the postal service for their efforts to operate in an environment of diminishing returns.

So, again, I commend the chairman and the ranking member. I strongly support this legislation.

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I would like to inquire from the chairman how many more speakers he has.

Mr. TOWNS. I have one more speaker and the right to close.

Mr. ISSA. I reserve the balance of my time to close before the chairman closes.

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Houston, Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE).

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Let me thank the distinguished chairman for yielding me this time and thank him and the ranking member for what I believe is an astute and important statement on behalf of the United States Postal Service and all of its thousands upon thousands of hardworking postal workers.

H.R. 22 is an effective approach to an organization which has served this Nation for decades, and one which we have respected and has served in many different capacities; the idea of reducing the payment that the postal service has to contribute to the health benefits trust fund from \$5.4 billion to \$1.4 billion, added to their already established resources, allowing them, without taxpayer dollars, to work on some of the new trends that we are facing all over America, new technology and the utilization of email.

No one can doubt the service of the postal service workers and the importance of neighborhood post offices. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I am hoping there will be a modified review of post offices and a respect of neighborhoods and rural communities and urban centers where postal services are very important.

Many people use money orders. I know some of us would probably wonder about the utilization of those kinds of financial documents, but they are important to certain economic levels of our communities. Many people go to the post office to pick up their mail. They have a post office box. Many companies, for other reasons of commerce, use the postal service as opposed to an email. Sometimes a paper written document is necessary.

I would like to thank the committee for looking intelligently at this issue, and I wanted to rise today to support H.R. 22, as amended, and to particularly salute the postal workers of America who have worked with me side by side in Houston who have been part of the postal food giveaway. They do a lot. I am very glad to have been an original cosponsor of this bill.

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

All that need be said has more or less been said. This is necessary. It scores no cost. It is a reality of our recession and the ongoing reduction in the number of pieces of mail being carried by the post office. I might note in closing, the United Parcel Service, FedEx, DHL and others have experienced even greater reductions in their package carrying. That is part of this recession. This recession will end. But when this recession ends, the use of email and advertising over the Internet rather than your mailbox will continue.

So I look forward to working with the chairman. He and I have forged a very good relationship on these bipartisan issues. We need to create the right size postal system. We need to convert and retain postal workers as Federal employees where there are opportunities. That is what we really need the time to do.

As the chairman and I close, I want to urge all of my colleagues to understand, I am putting down a marker here today that I will not be bringing back the exact same bill next year simply to forestall it. We will monitor the usage at the post office and work with them, work with the Postmaster, and we will work with each other to make sure that we begin in a very, very quick order the kinds of reforms that may cost money but ultimately will right-size the post office.

That is a commitment the American people expect us to make and one we will make. But at the same time, I recognize that the postal service is right-sized to perform an incredibly important constitutional duty, one that none of us would want to see go away. Certainly at a time when a number of States have gone to postal voting, they now represent a key element of democracy even beyond what they have historically done.

I thank the chairman for this bipartisan work, and I thank Mr. MCHUGH who could not be here today for his relentless support and work. I urge strong support that we vote this out of the House on a unanimous basis.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Let me just say, I am really proud that we have come to this moment to move this bill forward. I want to thank the ranking member, Congressman ISSA for his work, and thank Congressman LYNCH and Congressman CHAFFETZ and all of the people who have worked so hard on this, and especially the staff on both sides of the aisle for their work, and to say to you, yes, we still have some more work to do. There is no question about it, because the problem has not been solved, but at least we are able to get to this point. We agree to continue to work to try to bring about a solution. Let's face it, we owe it to the postal workers to be able to try to assist them in finding a solution to this problem.

There is a recession. There is no question about it. We need to make some adjustments. What we are doing here is not costing the government any money. This is just being creative, recognizing the fact that something needs to be done, and we are doing that. So here again, on that note, I want to thank all of the committee for working with me on it. We will be back again trying to see how we can come about with a total solution to this problem.

Mr. MCHUGH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as the proud sponsor of H.R. 22, a bipartisan bill

with 339 cosponsors that would provide immediate but temporary financial relief to the Postal Service. As a Member who has closely followed postal legislative issues for more than 14 years, I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this legislation. I thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. TOWNS) and the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) for their work to bring this legislation to the floor today.

As every Member of Congress and most Americans are aware, the Postal Service faces a crisis of huge and historic proportions, despite extensive efforts to reduce costs. This situation is due to the precipitous decline in mail volume brought about by the deepening recession, changes in technology and society, and the economic condition of the agency's largest customer, the financial services industry.

Additionally, the Postal Service is laboring under a crippling cost burden imposed by a statutory requirement that the Postal Service prefund the health benefits of future retirees, while still continuing to pay annual premiums for its current retirees. The payment for current retirees totals about \$2 billion and is growing each year. At the same time, the annual statutorily-mandated prefunding ranges from \$5.4 billion to \$5.8 billion over the 10-year period from 2007 through 2016.

In 2008, the Postal Service's total retiree health benefits costs came to \$7.4 billion, with \$1.8 billion of that amount paid for current retirees and \$5.6 billion deposited into the Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund to prefund future premium payments. Without the mandated payments, the Postal Service would have achieved a positive net income in 2008 rather than its actual \$2.8 billion loss. It is important to note that no other entity—public or private—is required to prepay this health benefit obligation at these extremely high levels.

As amended, H.R. 22 would begin to address this serious situation. It would do so by simply accelerating, for just the remainder of fiscal year 2009, a provision in the law to allow the Postal Service to pay the health premiums for current retirees from the Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits fund; this fund already holds in excess of \$32 billion and will continue to grow. H.R. 22 does not require an appropriation or use of any taxpayer monies, but rather involves merely an intragovernmental transfer of funds. It would not increase the health benefit premiums paid by current or future Postal Service retirees, nor would it affect their benefits. Put simply, it is not a bailout.

The Postal Service is in a dire financial situation, and while H.R. 22 is not the full answer to all of the Service's woes, it is an important solution to alleviate the pressure before the agency risks running out of money at the end of this month. According to the committee, the amended version considered on the floor of the House today does not score based on the Congressional Budget Office's (CBO) evaluation. This is not a budget gimmick because the fact of the matter is that the Postal Service cannot adjust its spending for this fiscal year so late. Any cost cutting the Postal Service would have made for the fiscal year ending September 30 has already taken place and cannot be reversed.

Again, the main driver of the Postal Service's debt has been the 2006 Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act's (P.L. 109-435) requirement to prefund 80 percent of its future

retiree health benefit costs, a 75-year liability, in just 10 years. No other business or government entity does that. As I noted, if it had not been for this prefunding, the Postal Service would have had a profit in 2008, in spite of the economic downturn. That is why 339 Members of the House have put their name as sponsors on H.R. 22.

Mr. Speaker, there is a consensus that Congress should enact H.R. 22, which is strongly supported by the Postal Service, all of its unions and management associations. It is also supported by the entire \$900 billion mailing industry, which employs 9 million Americans. Accordingly, I ask my colleagues to support this legislation and work with me to enact it into law.

Mr. LYNCH. Mr. Speaker, as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, I am writing to offer my strong support of H.R. 22, the United States Postal Service Financial Relief Act of 2009, as amended, which would provide short-term relief in the form of a 1-year restructuring of the Postal Service's retiree health benefits payment. The Postal Service, after having overpaid this obligation for the past couple of years, deserves to have this payment restructured, immediately. I need to also mention that the bill before us does not constitute a bailout of the Postal Service, in any form or fashion. Instead, it is intended to provide the Postal Service with some relief from an ill-structured payment schedule that would have required the Postal Service to pay nearly \$5.5 billion into the retiree health benefits fund this year, notwithstanding USPS current financial crisis. The bill before us simply lowers that payment to \$1.4 billion, thereby ensuring that the Postal Service will not default on its financial requirements as defined by the 2006 Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act. Additionally, the bill before us falls in line with calls for a more fiscally responsible government, since the amended version of H.R. 22 does not score.

In 2006, Congress placed an unprecedented burden on the Postal Service by requiring the prepayment of 80 percent of future retiree health benefits—a 75-year liability—in just 10 years. No other Federal agency carries this burden. Our subcommittee has held oversight hearings of the Postal Service in the 111th Congress, and during that time the financial condition of the Postal Service has rapidly gone from bad to worse. The Postal Service is faced with rising costs and unprecedented declines in mail volume. The losses were driven by the nationwide economic recession, diversion of mail to electronic alternatives, and also by the aggressive payment schedule for retiree health benefits required by the 2006 postal reform act. The Postal Service's fiscal year 2008 payment total for current and future retiree health benefits was roughly \$7 billion. It is likely that without these payments last year, the Postal Service would not have reported a net loss of over \$2 billion in fiscal year 2008. The future does not appear to be getting better. Although the Postal Service has targeted \$6.5 billion in savings through closures of administrative offices, an agency-wide hiring freeze, reduction of work hours, and re-adjustment of delivery routes, among other efforts, the Postal Service nonetheless expects losses for this year to exceed \$7 billion.

Again, H.R. 22, as amended, provides the Postal Service some much needed short-term

relief and improves the organization's cash position. As currently structured, the Postal Service is almost entirely self-sustaining. In fact, less than 1 percent of the Postal Service's budget is appropriated by Congress. While the measure being considered today should not be substituted for a longer-term solution to the Postal Service's financial problems, it is, nevertheless a critical component to a mix of strategies to assist the Postal Service in these dismal economic times. In the coming months, our subcommittee will continue to provide oversight of the Postal Service, including an in-depth examination of the Postal Service's business model to help determine what longer-term changes may be necessary to help the Postal Service return to financial viability.

In closing, I would like to thank Representatives JOHN MCHUGH of New York and DENNY DAVIS of Illinois for introducing this bill and for their hard work in advancing this bill through the House. Additionally, I would like to thank Chairman EDOLPHUS TOWNS, the House leadership, and the House Budget Committee for their tireless efforts to bring the bill to the floor. Lastly, I want to recognize Representatives DARRELL ISSA and JASON CHAFFETZ for their ongoing assistance on this important piece of legislation. I again express my strong support, Mr. Speaker, of approving H.R. 22 as amended, and I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I thank Congressman MCHUGH for his leadership on this bill and I am proud to be a cosponsor of this important legislation. H.R. 22 provides necessary financial relief for the United States Postal Service (USPS) by temporarily allowing it to prefund its future health care obligations out of the Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund instead of its operating funds.

As an ardent supporter of the Post Office, I am deeply concerned about USPS' financial condition and appreciate the difficult decisions the Postal Service must make in order to ensure its survival. I am committed to ensuring the viability of the USPS and to the unique, irreplaceable services it provides to Americans.

It is that commitment that fuels my concerns that the Postal Service is making decisions to close post office branches across the country without full community participation and input. I am concerned that people in my community and communities across the country will face a significant reduction in services that the Postal Service provides. I am concerned that closures of USPS retail branches will mean an increase in the privatization of the same services that Northeast Ohio relies on.

In recent weeks, I have received a number of calls from people voicing concerns regarding the possible closure of their neighborhood postal retail facility. In particular, constituents from vulnerable communities who may not have access to transportation or the internet have raised concerns that they may not be able to easily access another USPS retail facility should the one in their neighborhood close. The Postal Service must ensure that they are given a seat at the table and ensure that universal access to the crucial services provided by the USPS remains.

I will continue to fight for the U.S. Postal Service and the people they serve. I strongly urge passage of this bill.

Mr. TOWNS. On that note, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. TOWNS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 22, 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. BROUN of Georgia. 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.

ALLOWING UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE TO ACCEPT DONATIONS FOR PLAQUES

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3137) to amend title 39, United States Code, to provide clarification relating to the authority of the United States Postal Service to accept donations as an additional source of funding for commemorative plaques.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3137

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

SECTION 1. DONATIONS FOR COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 401(7) of title 39, United States Code, is amended by striking “business;” and inserting “business, including monetary donations made (in such manner as the Postal Service may prescribe) for the funding of plaques in connection with the commemorative designation of postal facilities;”.

(b) DESIGNATIONS.—The donor of a monetary donation described in the amendment made by subsection (a) may specify the postal facility with respect to which such donation is to be used.

(c) REQUIREMENT.—The United States Postal Service shall provide for a suitable plaque, in the case of any postal facility which has been designated by law to commemorate a particular individual, no later than 120 days after the date as of which—

(1) a law has been enacted providing for the designation of the postal facility involved; and

(2) sufficient amounts have been received, in the manner described in subsection (b), to provide for such plaque.

Any donations received by the Postal Service under subsection (b) in excess of the total amount needed in order to provide for a suitable plaque may, with the consent of the donors involved, be used for the funding of a plaque in the case of any other postal facility as to which a law (as described in paragraph (1)) has been enacted.

(d) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this section shall be considered—

(1) to affect the authority of the United States Postal Service with respect to any requirements concerning the design, placement, and limitation on costs relating to commemorative plaques (as described in the preceding provisions of this section), so long

as such requirements are applied in a uniform manner; or

(2) to limit, supersede, or render inapplicable any other authority or duty which (but for this Act) the United States Postal Service would otherwise have had with respect to the commemorative designation of a facility or the funding, commissioning, or installation of a plaque in connection with such a designation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New York (Mr. TOWNS) and the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York.

GENERAL LEAVE

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

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

There was no objection.

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

As chairman of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, I am pleased to present H.R. 3137 for consideration. This legislation will clarify the authority of the United States Postal Service over the receipt of monetary donations for post office commemorative plaques. I want to commend my ranking member, Congressman ISSA, who really, really brought this idea forth. I think that it goes into what we are doing. We are trying to reserve, we are trying to save money, and I think this legislation is a very creative way of being able to do that.

Congress routinely passes legislation to designate post offices throughout the country and honor deserving individuals, and I think that is a great idea.

Under current practice, the United States Postal Service subsequently purchases dedicatory plaques, at its own expense, out of the agency's operating budget. I think this is something that we will be able to eliminate and save money. I think that is one way to do that.

H.R. 3137 simply seeks to reduce and to eliminate the financial burden imposed on the United States Postal Service with regard to the purchase of commemorative plaques by clarifying current law in this area. Specifically, the legislation would amend the United States Code to make clear that the postal service may accept monetary donations offered for the funding of postal facility commemorative plaques.

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In addition, H.R. 3137 provides that monetary donors may specify the postal facility at which their donations will be used. Moreover, when the amount of a donation exceeds the cost of a specified facility's commemorative plaque, H.R. 3137 would also allow, with a donor's consent, for the use of the excess donations towards the purchase of a

plaque needed for another postal facility.

I think that is a great idea. I think it's a very creative way to be able to sort of save money and, at the same time, not to have to cut back on doing what we know is right based on the fact that they do not have the funding.

On that note, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

I thank the chairman for bringing this bill to the floor today. The genesis of this bill was in fact a recognition that the Postal Service funds all of its operations out of its own revenue. In no other area would the Federal Government essentially mandate a burden on a government agency over which it provides no funding, and yet here we do.

More importantly, most post offices are either named after fallen heroes in our own district, former Members of the House or Senate, or, in some cases, other notable people, and even, once in a while, a postmaster.

The fact is we make those decisions. We name those post offices. Those plaques cost money to procure and to maintain, and a recognition that in fact communities' involvement should be there, there should be a real upswelling of support.

Myself, I named a post office after the first Indo American Member of Congress, Dalip Singh Saund. I was proud to do it. And on the day that we put the plaque up, I had Members from all over California, and actually a few outside of the Indo American community, proud that the first Indo American—and the only one, except for Bobby Jindal—was being honored at a post office.

The fact is, that community would have been more than happy to not only pay for the plaque, but to help design it and to be more involved in it. That kind of support is something that we're missing because we didn't take this opportunity.

The legislation is relatively small. It perhaps would only save a few hundred thousand dollars a year to the post office, but I think it makes the kind of statement that the post offices and the names on them are important community activities and that in the future the procurement and perhaps the ongoing support will come from the community, with the enabling language here.

It also is a small but meaningful step toward the kind of reform of the post office that they want to do and that we want to help them do, and, that is, if they're going to have to live on their own revenue, Congress should not be adding to their cost of doing business.

With that, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TOWNS. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the financial condition of the United States Postal Service is dismal, at best, and the agency is faced with a continually