

REMOVAL OF NAMES OF MEMBERS AS COSPONSORS OF H.R. 1445

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that Representatives RUNYAN, GRIMM, LOBIONDO, and BISHOP of New York be removed as cosponsors of H.R. 1445.

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

There was no objection.

RESPONSIBLE HELIUM ADMINISTRATION AND STEWARDSHIP ACT

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill H.R. 527.

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

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 178 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 527.

The Chair appoints the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. YODER) to preside over the Committee of the Whole.

□ 1403

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 527) to amend the Helium Act to complete the privatization of the Federal helium reserve in a competitive market fashion that ensures stability in the helium markets while protecting the interests of American taxpayers, and for other purposes, with Mr. YODER in the chair.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered read the first time.

The gentleman from Washington (Mr. HASTINGS) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. HOLT) each will control 30 minutes.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Today, I rise in support of H.R. 527. This bill is necessary to protect our economy from the impending helium shortage and to inject free-market principles into our Federal helium program.

The Federal Helium Reserve was first created after World War I, when we imagined a world where blimps would be the future of air travel and vital to our national security efforts. Although this effort took a different course, that didn't stop the Federal Government from spending money on this program and stockpiling helium continuously through the 1980s. By the 1990s, it became clear that the Reserve had a de-

clining usefulness and had racked up a \$1.3 billion debt.

In response, Congress in 1996 passed legislation to implement reforms to the program and require the sale and privatization of the Reserve by 2015, or when the debt was paid off, whichever came first.

However, since this original decision to close the Reserve, both the demand and uses for helium have dramatically changed. This has created a situation where the Reserve's debt will be paid off sooner than expected—nearly 2 years earlier—in October of this year. But, while the debt will have been paid off, there will still be helium in the Reserve. By law then, the current Federal helium program will end and the Bureau of Land Management, or BLM, will no longer have the authority to sell the remaining 11 billion cubic feet of helium. It's important to note, too, Mr. Chairman, that the Reserve contains half of our U.S. domestic supply and 30 percent of the world's helium supply.

If Congress fails to act before October, we will artificially drop the helium supply and cause a global helium shortage that will cost jobs and severely disrupt our economy. Despite what many think, helium is not just used for party balloons. It is essential to our 21st century economy. Without helium we wouldn't have lifesaving MRI machines, computer chips, fiber optic cables, or other devices used for defense needs.

The bill before us today is truly a bipartisan plan that I'm pleased to have worked on with the lead Democrat on the Natural Resources Committee, Mr. MARKEY from Massachusetts, as well as our other colleagues on the committee, Mr. FLORES of Texas and Mr. HOLT of New Jersey.

First, this bill would implement a new operating system for the Federal Helium Reserve over the next decade that would include semiannual auctions. This will ensure that we prevent a helium shortage and that the Reserve stays open until nearly all of the helium supply is sold.

□ 1410

Second, it will build on the reforms made in 1996 and inject more free market principles into the sales process to get a better and fairer return for American taxpayers.

Over the last decade, the Federal Government has been selling helium from the Reserve significantly below market price. As you can see from this chart—and this is based on BLM data—the new demands for helium have caused the market price to rise much higher than the Federal Government's pricing formula and much faster than BLM's ability to track market prices.

So, as a result, this has cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars. This has been confirmed by reports and testimony from both the Government Accountability Office, the GAO, and the Department of the Interior Inspector

General. The big gap is right here. This is what we are selling it for, and this is what the market price is.

In addition, the current program restricts sales to only a few companies through an allotment system that is essentially an oligarchy for Federal helium. Nearly 100 percent of our helium supply is being put into the hands of four refiners that directly benefit from the low Federal pricing formula while other competitors are locked out. The current cheap price of helium gives an unfair market advantage to these handful of companies.

Implementing semiannual helium auctions will inject much-needed competition into the program and help establish a fair market price for helium. According to the CBO, this bill will bring in over \$340 million to the Treasury over the next 10 years. The bill also includes important reforms to increase transparency and to prevent supply disruptions.

Now, Mr. Chairman, over 20 groups representing the end users of refined helium—and these are high-tech manufacturers of semiconductors, aerospace technologies, medical devices, chemicals, fiber optics, and scientific research—all have called for the passage of this legislation. Although this bill enjoys broad bipartisan support, I do want to take a moment to directly address some concerns that have been raised throughout this legislative process.

First, doing nothing is not an option. While I recognize that many people don't believe that the Federal Government should be in the helium business—and I would agree—we must recognize the realities of our current situation. Helium is too essential to our economy to essentially cut off the valve at the Reserve. We need this bill to protect our economy from severe disruptions and to provide additional time for the new development of alternative domestic helium resources so that our country and economy are prepared for when the Reserve does close. However, this bill will make sure that we are building on the reforms of the 1996 act and that we are managing and selling the helium in a more responsible manner.

Second, maintaining the status quo is not an option. Under conditions in the current law, the entire program comes to an end this October. Simply authorizing the continuation of the current program does nothing to address the current issues with the Federal pricing formula and the need to implement free market reforms. We cannot keep selling helium to a handful of companies. Instead, we need an open helium market that encourages more bidders, more competition, and more accurate pricing in order to get the best return for the taxpayers.

What we need then, Mr. Chairman, is no more lucrative handouts, no more government picking winners. What we need is good ole American competition.

Finally, this bill will do absolutely nothing to interfere with private business contracts, and it will not create instability within the helium market. With or without this legislation, the existing helium program and existing contracts all will end in October of this year. This bill violates no contracts because none will exist when certain conditions in current law expire, which we think will be this October. This is why Congress must act before October to establish a new helium program to finalize the sell-off of the helium from the Reserve.

The bill will protect our economy from a harmful helium shortage and implement much-needed reforms to update the Federal Helium Program so that it better reflects the uses and demands for helium in the year 2013.

Mr. Chairman, this is a good bill, and it's a bipartisan bill. I'm glad I had support in working with my colleagues across the aisle on the committee, and I urge the passage of this legislation.

With that, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 527, and I begin by commending and thanking Chairman HASTINGS for his outstanding bipartisan leadership on this legislation and on other things before the committee. This bill was drafted in close cooperation with the Democratic minority, and I thank the chairman of the committee. He worked with Ranking Member MARKEY and me and with Representative FLORES; and we've put together, I think, a solid piece of legislation. The legislation is an example of how we can work together. I wish it were moving faster on the floor today and tomorrow, but it is a cooperative undertaking.

As the chairman said, helium is critical for magnetic resonance imaging, MRI machines; for NASA rocket operation; for high-tech manufacturing; and for all sorts of scientific research. For many of these applications, there is no replacement for helium with its truly unique properties. Farsighted legislators established a Federal stockpile many decades ago, which was good; and as important uses of helium were recognized over the decades, we can be thankful that the stockpile existed.

The frenzy of privatization under the Gingrich era in Congress has now made this legislation necessary. Our Nation's Federal Helium Reserve supplies nearly half of the helium used in the United States; and if Congress fails to pass this legislation, by the end of the current fiscal year, the Interior Department's authority to continue operating the Reserve will expire. If this is allowed to happen, nearly half of America's helium supply would be cut off overnight, creating truly a crisis in health care, in research, in electronic manufacturing, and in many other areas. That's the immediate problem that this legislation would solve; but there is a second, potentially more severe, problem to be addressed.

At the current withdrawal rates, we have only 5 to 7 years of helium available from the Reserve. Reviews by the National Academy of Sciences, by the Government Accountability Office, and by the Interior Department Inspector General's Office have all concluded that we are not selling the Nation's helium at market prices. Since Federal helium comprises such an enormous percentage of the global supply, with the price set and controlled by the Interior Department as required under the guidelines established some years back, the global price of helium is artificially low.

The current system isn't just a bad deal for taxpayers; it has also distorted the global helium market. If we continue to avoid a solution, as some have advocated, we could find ourselves facing even more severe helium shortages and price spikes when the Federal Reserve is largely exhausted a few years from now and when there may be insufficient alternative supplies to turn to.

That's why we must reform our Nation's helium policy, put the market-based signals in place that will help provide an incentive to bring new supplies on line. The failure to enact reforms of the helium program, such as those contained in this legislation, could mean an increased reliance on insecure and irregular helium supplies from Russia, Algeria, Qatar, and other foreign sources. It could mean higher prices for American industry and for researchers.

There have already been interruptions in supply. National labs have testified before our committee that helium deliveries necessary for their research have already been subject to interruptions.

□ 1420

The bipartisan legislation before us today would address both of these impending crises. H.R. 527 would extend the life of the Federal Helium Reserve past the end of this year and ensure a fair return to taxpayers on this federally-owned resource. It would generate more than \$300 million for American taxpayers as estimated by the Congressional Budget Office. The bill will increase competition, transparency, and participation in helium markets, which will help shift commercial helium reliance from the Reserve to private sources.

The principles of this bill are consistent with the recommendations made by the National Academy of Sciences in 2010 to improve the helium program by expanding participation and openness in helium markets.

It will protect Federal users, such as NASA and the National Labs, as well as the scientific community by ensuring that they have priority access to this federally-owned resource in the short term and exclusive access in the longer term.

This bill was created with input from the Department of the Interior, the White House Office of Science and

Technology Policy, and many scientific researchers. It has the support of the American Physical Society and many other groups and many helium users, such as corporations like General Electric, Siemens, Philips, Intel, Applied Materials, Dow Chemical, IBM, Texas Instruments, and many others. It's a product of close work between the majority and the minority members of the committee.

Again, I thank the majority for providing that collaboration with us. It's a good bill. It provides a workable solution to a real problem. I urge its adoption.

I wish we could deal with this bill promptly and all the amendments promptly. We could be done in less than an hour, and then we could turn our attention to other concerns that Americans have, such as jobs and education, training for workers, a conference committee to reconcile the differences between the House and the Senate budget resolutions, removing the thoughtless sequester that the majority imposed on the country affecting air traffic control and food inspections and Head Start slots and medical research and many other things. But instead, we will postpone the consideration of the amendments until tomorrow, I'm sorry to say, and eat up valuable time that we could spend dealing with America's pressing problems. Nevertheless, I look forward to the passage of this bill, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

With that, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Chairman, I'm very pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WITTMAN), a valuable member of the Natural Resources Committee.

Mr. WITTMAN. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of H.R. 527, the Responsible Helium Administration and Stewardship Act.

H.R. 527 is important legislation for our Nation's high-tech, defense, medical, and scientific industries. It will ensure the continued operation of and sales of helium from the Federal Helium Reserve, providing a stable and secure supply of a critical material for the next several years.

This legislation represents a significant step forward in addressing the concerns associated with the helium supply from the Federal Helium Reserve. This also creates a situation where we have a reliable source of helium that's critical to the strategic interests of this Nation.

This bill also provides for the continued operation of the Reserve and the sale of helium to private entities, thereby helping to ensure a stable and secure supply of helium in the near term.

It provides price transparency through clear reporting requirements

for both the Bureau of Land Management and for those who purchase helium. And for many industries throughout the United States, this reliability and transparency is absolutely critical.

H.R. 527 is important and is urgently needed to address this Nation's helium supply in making sure, too, that we keep in mind the implications it has for both our national and our homeland security.

I'd like to applaud Chairman HASTINGS and Ranking Member MARKEY for their work on this bill, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Chairman, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. JOHNSON).

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Chairman, like a kid at a carnival, I rise in full support of H.R. 527, the Responsible Helium Administration and Stewardship Act of 2013.

Mr. Chairman, I'm relieved, and I'm sure that the American people are relieved as well, that Congress is finally going to do something about one of the most pressing issues of the day, that is, we've got to ensure access to helium for all.

Surely, those harmed by sequestration and those harmed by the Republican failure to appoint budget conferees appreciate the House spending 2 full legislative days on this most critical issue. The American people certainly understand the fact that 48 hours of this House's precious time was necessary to pass such a noncontroversial bill.

I'm pleased to support this bill, which shows that this Tea Party Congress will make the tough choice to keep children's birthday parties on schedule and give industries that rely on helium the lift that they deserve. Imagine, Mr. Chairman, a world without balloons. How can we make sure that there is not the injustice of there being no helium for comedians to get that high-pitched voice that we all hold near and dear to our hearts? Imagine a world without balloons. To date, the House has chosen to just simply float above it all.

Finally, we are going to do something for the American people, and we should all pat ourselves on the back for that. Too often lately, this body has sat deflated, not for a lack of hot air, mind you, but seriously, ladies and gentlemen, unlike a noble element, this House has failed to act on Americans' real concerns.

There are serious reasons to support this bill, and I do look forward to supporting it. The substance of this bill is not the focus of my sarcasm today, Mr. Chairman. My point is that America would be much better off if this Tea Party Republican Congress brought to the floor issues that mean the most to Americans, like appointing a conference committee to work out a budget with the Senate.

The CHAIR. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. HOLT. If the gentleman needs more time, I gladly yield an additional 30 seconds.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Sadly, Republicans are just blowing in the wind and can't seem to tether themselves down to take on such an important task. They float off in different directions unable to appoint conferees to negotiate with the Senate.

Yesterday, despite the gravity of the matter, the Tea Party Republicans couldn't even agree on their own health care bill, which was named the Helping Sick Americans Now Act. With a title like that, I'm helium flabbergasted that they could not pass that bill.

□ 1430

Yesterday we spent all day debating that bill, and today after their failure to pass it, they've pretty much decided that sick Americans can wait. We need laughing gas because of the inability of the Republican House to deal with the difficult issues. It's real sad; we need some laughing gas. The sequestration is delaying flights and harming our economy.

The CHAIR. The time of the gentleman has again expired.

Mr. HOLT. I yield an additional 15 seconds to the gentleman.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. With sequestration delaying flights and harming our economy, our Nation needs a little gas. Say what you will, but this is just the best thing that we can do here. So I'd like to float a simple idea: stop wasting our time. Let's get to the business that is meaningful for Americans. I support this bill.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Chairman, I want to ask my friend from New Jersey, I have at this point no further requests for time. One additional speaker may be coming, but I'm prepared to close.

Mr. HOLT. We have at least one more speaker, and my closing.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HOLT. I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Mr. TONKO) who counts among his constituents many who work in technical industries and laboratories who depend on helium and understand that although there are a lot of easy jokes about helium, this is a serious matter. It is a serious matter that we should move along with promptly.

Mr. TONKO. Mr. Chairman, I thank Representative HOLT. I want to thank Chairman HASTINGS and Representative MARKEY and Representative HOLT and other members of the Natural Resources Committee for working steadfastly together to bring this important bill to the floor.

The Federal Helium Reserve was created in 1925, long before today's many uses of helium were envisioned. Now this element has become an essential ingredient to our Nation's research, medical, technology, manufacturing, space, and defense activities. Helium is

used in welding and in the manufacturing of fiber optic cable and semiconductors. Medical imaging has become a vital tool in the health care system, and every MRI requires helium. The list of applications for this element is long and touches many important industries.

When the current law passed in 1996, the situation with respect to helium's value and usage was quite different, and there was an expectation that additional private sources of helium would be developed and then of course enter the market. For a variety of reasons, that has not yet happened on a sufficient enough scale to ensure a stable supply of helium to meet our national demand for this basic element.

The Federal Government, through the Bureau of Land Management, needs to remain engaged in this market for an additional period of time. The United States reserve is about 40 percent of the worldwide supply of helium. The many industries and research institutions that rely on helium cannot afford a disruption in its supply.

The national storage facility is unique, and there are many characteristics of the helium market that are distinctly different from the markets of most commodities. These factors are likely the reasons a more robust private supply of helium has not yet emerged to replace our Federal Government's role. H.R. 527 provides additional time to phase down the Federal Government's role in the helium market and to allow a private market to develop.

There is no substitute for helium in many of its crucial applications. Passage of this legislation is critical to maintaining high-wage, high-skilled jobs in my district, the 20th Congressional District of New York, throughout New York State for that matter, and in many other States across our great country. It is essential that we work with the Senate to get a law signed this year to provide certainty to helium suppliers and users.

I recognize there are some who are uncomfortable with certain aspects of this legislation. It is not a perfect bill, and if the expected development of private supplies of helium does not occur, we need to revisit this issue in the future.

For the present, though, this bill offers a reasonable compromise that keeps helium flowing onto the market, and that is what we need now. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 527 and maintain a reliable supply of this vital ingredient for the sake of research and industry.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. LAMBORN), the chairman of the subcommittee dealing with this issue.

Mr. LAMBORN. I thank the chairman of the full committee for allowing me to speak. I rise in strong support of H.R. 527, the Responsible Helium Administration and Stewardship Act.

Our House Natural Resources Committee passed this bipartisan legislation by voice vote, and I encourage my colleagues in the full House to do the same. The Responsible Helium Administration and Stewardship Act adds free market reforms to the current system. The current system allows a small number of companies to have access to and benefit from the taxpayer resource, which is helium, but it's a good thing to broaden the base of those who are most benefiting from this resource.

There is currently some instability in the marketplace for American companies that are the end users of helium. These companies employ thousands of Americans, and they rely upon a dependable supply of helium for their business every day. This includes defense companies, medical companies, manufacturing companies, and a variety of users.

Numerous government reports—from the Department of Interior Inspector General to the Government Accountability Office to the National Academy of Sciences—have all come to the same conclusion: we need to reform the current system.

The current system allows a select group of companies to buy a critical Federal resource at significantly below market value to the exclusion of other companies. There are historical reasons how this situation developed, but we have to look to the future and what's best for the economy moving forward.

As a result, the American people are potentially being denied tens or even hundreds of millions of dollars of additional revenue because this Federal taxpayer resource is sometimes being sold at under-market values.

It should be noted that over 20 organizations and end-user companies representing high-tech manufacturers of semiconductors, aerospace technologies, life-saving medical devices, chemicals, fiber optic, and scientific researchers who require helium as an essential part of their daily business support this bill. H.R. 527 will ensure that these industries employing thousands of Americans and vital to the United States can obtain a reliable and secure source of helium while ensuring American taxpayers that they receive the best possible market value for this taxpayer resource.

H.R. 527 will end the current allotment system and add free market components to the BLM helium program. This will increase transparency between companies and the BLM and ensure that purchasers of helium will have timely access to the pipeline to ensure delivery of the helium that they have purchased.

This bill is supported by the ITI, and I urge your support of this legislation.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
INDUSTRY COUNCIL,
Washington, DC, April 25, 2013.

Hon. JOHN BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

Hon. NANCY PELOSI,
Democratic Leader, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SPEAKER BOEHNER AND LEADER PELOSI: On behalf of the Information Technology Industry Council (ITI), I write to express the importance of H.R. 527, the Responsible Helium Administration and Stewardship Act to the high-tech industry. ITI supports the passage of H.R. 527 and we will consider scoring votes in support of final passage of the bill in our 113th Congressional Voting Guide.

Helium is critical to a variety of advanced, high-tech manufacturing processes, as well as cutting-edge scientific research. It is irreplaceable in many of these processes, as there is no known substitute. The Federal Government controls 40% of the world's helium supply, and without Congress enacting legislation by the end of this fiscal year, the Federal Government's authority to sell helium to the private sector will expire. Such a supply disruption would be catastrophic to the private sector entities that require helium for their manufacturing processes. H.R. 527 would prevent such a problematic situation by ensuring the Federal Government has authority to continue selling helium to the private sector through an auction process.

The United States' information technology industry is the strongest in the world, driving economic growth, creating new businesses, and generating jobs. On behalf of ITI's member companies, I thank you for bringing this legislation to the floor to prevent any possible helium supply disruptions, and urge you and your colleagues to pass H.R. 527, the Responsible Helium Administration and Stewardship Act.

Sincerely,

DEAN C. GARFIELD,
President and CEO.

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the comments of the gentleman from Colorado, the chair of the Energy and Mineral Subcommittee. He reiterates the important uses of helium, and I would add that any American patient or doctor who uses MRIs, which depend on helium, or any American who uses modern electronics whose manufacture depends on helium, or anyone who depends on so many other things for which helium is essential, should be grateful that decades ago farsighted legislators created the stockpile to preserve helium.

We now have before us the need to make sure that helium isn't sold at fire-sale prices. We need to make sure that we have a reliable supply for these important uses. We need to make sure that the Interior Department is not forced out of the business prematurely. The Interior Department has expressed support for the approach taken by this legislation.

Again, I commend and thank the chairman for his bipartisan leadership to bring this sensible legislation to the floor. I hope that the other body will act quickly and follow our lead and pass this legislation so we do not experience supply disruptions and price spikes later this year. I urge passage of this bill.

I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1440

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, as has been pointed out on both sides, this is a very important piece of legislation. Our free economy is made up of a lot of different parts, and it's hard—as a matter of fact, it's impossible—to regulate all of those parts. The market does it a whole lot better.

But in this situation, because of past actions of Congress, there was a stockpile of Federal helium, and it became more and more valuable; but market prices weren't being got for that available commodity. This issue addresses that until the markets can catch up in several years in order to make sure there is a supply of helium.

And I'm glad to have worked in a bipartisan way with my colleagues on the Natural Resources Committee. We'll deal with the amendment process tomorrow. That's why we have a rule. There are several Members who wanted to improve, from their point of view, this piece of legislation, and you can't do that, obviously, on a suspension calendar, as has been suggested. You have to go through the rule process, and we will do that tomorrow.

So, in the meantime, Mr. Chairman, I urge adoption of this legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chair, I rise in support of the Responsible Helium Administration and Stewardship Act, a bipartisan bill that will prevent a global helium shortage that could limit high-tech manufacturing and critical scientific research.

Recognizing the value of our helium resources, the government established a Federal Helium Reserve in the 1960s. In 1996, Congress enacted legislation to privatize the Reserve and sell off its supply. Unfortunately, that sale has been conducted at below-market rates even as demand for helium, which is critical for hospitals, manufacturing, and research, has increased. Moreover, under that 1996 law, the Reserve will have to stop operations this October, cutting our domestic supply by nearly half and causing a worldwide shortage.

Today's legislation creates a new, auction-based program for selling helium from the Reserve, preventing the shortage and ensuring that taxpayers get fair value for this resource. It's a common sense solution to a serious problem and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chair, I rise today in support of H.R. 527, the "Responsible Helium Administration and Stewardship Act," which will renew the Department of the Interior's (DOI) authority to continue operating the Federal Helium Reserve beyond this fiscal year.

I want to thank Chairman HASTINGS and Ranking Member MARKEY for their hard work in shepherding this legislation, which enjoys strong bipartisan support, to the floor.

Mr. Chair, I support H.R. 527 because it is an important first step in updating our nation's helium policy by increasing transparency and

fostering competitive helium markets, while providing a better return for American taxpayers.

Currently, the United States is the largest helium producer in the world. The most recent data from the United States Geological Survey indicates that at over 20 billion cubic meters, the total helium reserves and resources of the United States represents roughly 40 percent of the world's helium supply.

Helium is primarily used in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) devices in hospitals, but is also used as a coolant for superconductors, as well as in cryogenics, welding, chromatography, and various other uses.

The Federal Helium Reserve is a strategic reserve located at the Cliffside Storage Facility in Potter County, Texas, near the city of Amarillo. Created in 1925, its original function was to ensure supplies of helium to the federal government for defense, research, and medical purposes.

Through the Helium Privatization Act of 1996, the Federal Helium Reserve evolved to serve four purposes: (1) operating and maintaining a helium storage reservoir and pipeline system view map; (2) providing crude helium gas by contract with private companies; (3) evaluating the Nation's helium-bearing gas fields; and (4) providing responsible access to federal land for managed recovery and disposal of helium.

While the Interior Department currently has the authority to continue funding and operating the Federal Helium Reserve, this authority is set to expire at the end of this fiscal year. Upon expiration, and absent Congressional action, our national supply of helium faces severe turmoil in the form of substantial price increases and market disruptions for American consumers and businesses.

Moreover, the Federal Helium Reserve, which constitutes a large portion of the global supply, is instrumental in controlling price. The large quantity of helium in the reserves means that the Interior Department effectively determines prices paid for helium around the world.

Numerous reports indicate that the Interior Department may be selling helium at below market value, which may have the effect of stifling private investment in new helium supplies. As a result, we risk facing a shortage in coming years as helium supplies diminish.

H.R. 527 addresses this problem by transitioning helium sales to a competitive auction system, thus ensuring a steady supply of helium and allowing users to bid on crude helium from the reserve. Consequently, the law of supply and demand would dictate price rather than having the price controlled by a central authority.

Ideally, I would have liked to see more discretion afforded to the Secretary of the Interior in this bill, particularly with respect to the minimum price charged for crude helium.

The bill requires the Secretary to make a determination as to the minimum sale price at auctions in accordance with various factors, including a confidential survey of domestic helium transactions with the reserve, as well as recent market prices as reflected by auction sales.

Currently under the bill, the Secretary would have the discretion to adjust the minimum price by up to 10 percent if the survey is not reflective of the current market value of helium or if a higher minimum price may result in greater conservation of helium.

However, market fluctuations in recent years have often been in excess of 10 percent. Providing the Secretary with greater discretion to adjust the minimum price in accordance recent trends is desirable to ensure that prices track market value as closely as possible.

In my view, the bill would be improved if the Secretary's discretion were enlarged to authorize adjustments to the minimum price by an amount not to exceed 20 percent.

But taken as a whole, H.R. 527 is a positive step in the right direction. And I want to express my appreciation again to Chairman HASTINGS and Ranking Member MARKEY for their good work.

Mr. Chair, I urge my colleagues in joining me in voting for H.R. 527, "Responsible Helium Administration and Stewardship Act."

Mr. PAULSEN. Mr. Chair, I rise in support of this important legislation which will ensure U.S. manufacturers of medical devices, computer chips, and balloons continue to have reliable access to helium. Helium is a critical element to the manufacturing and operation of these innovative and competitive industries and their products.

The Federal Helium Reserve is scheduled to close this year. If that should happen, a global helium shortage would disrupt business in these industries and could cause the loss of thousands of American jobs.

In my home state of Minnesota, a large balloon company continues to manufacture their products here in the United States. They depend on reliable access to helium not only to stay in business, but also to continue research and development, innovative engineering, manufacturing, and quality control for their balloon products.

But a helium shortage would negatively impact more than just balloon manufacturing. It would also harm the high tech and medical device communities as well. Approximately 250,000 Americans are employed in the manufacturing of computer chips using helium. These chips are used in GPS, smart phones, and MRI machines. Helium is also used to cool the magnets in MRI machines.

We must pass this legislation to prevent major shocks to these important industries. I urge my colleagues in the Senate to act soon to ensure critical access to helium for the medical device, IT, and balloon industries and to protect these American jobs.

The CHAIR. All time for general debate has expired.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. 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. BRIDENSTINE) having assumed the chair, Mr. YODER, 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. 527) to amend the Helium Act to complete the privatization of the Federal helium reserve in a competitive market fashion that ensures stability in the helium markets while protecting the interests of American taxpayers, and for other purposes, had come to no resolution thereon.

THE GOSNELL TRIAL

(Mr. STUTZMAN asked and was given permission to address the House

for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STUTZMAN. Mr. Speaker, Kermit Gosnell is a real-life Hannibal Lecter. Gosnell operated an abortion clinic that severed the necks of hundreds of babies and stuffed their bodies into freezers, plastic bags, and cat-food tins. Soon, a jury in Pennsylvania will decide his fate.

Mr. Speaker, the Gosnell case must give us a moment of reflection. Have 40 years of abortion on demand seared our national conscience and given us a false refuge behind euphemisms like "choice"?

More than 3,000 unborn children die in abortion clinics every day in this country. While none of these deaths attract the headlines of the Gosnell case, each loss is a tragedy. Each of these defenseless babies is just as innocent as Gosnell's victims, just as human as you and I, and just as precious as our own children.

There is no moral distinction between killing a baby 5 minutes after birth or ending her life 5 minutes or even 5 days before delivery.

In the coming weeks, more questions will be asked: Who referred patients to Gosnell's house of horrors, and what can be learned from these atrocities?

Today, we all ought to re-examine our national conscience.

THE GOSNELL TRIAL

(Mr. ROSS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, every day, over 3,200 children are aborted in this great country, the same country that is called the land of the free and the home of the brave. This isn't just unacceptable; it's a horrific tragedy.

And my heart goes out to all women who feel that abortion is the only option. God made them special and made their children special too. These children aren't free and will never have the option to be brave.

Currently, in Philadelphia, Kermit Gosnell, an abortion doctor, is on trial for multiple counts of murder. One count is for a woman who died during an abortion at his clinic.

The horrific findings in Mr. Gosnell's clinic serve as just one more devastating wake-up call. As a country, we should work to protect everyone, including women and children.

When will we be bold enough to enact serious changes?

These children are precious and are truly gifts. We should not use any taxpayer dollars to fund abortion. And I also believe that we should prohibit abortions for unborn babies who are more than 20 weeks old in-utero, which is why I recently cosponsored the District of Columbia Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act.

THE GOSNELL TRIAL

(Mr. SMITH of New Jersey asked and was given permission to address the