

and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MAST) for introducing this bipartisan bill, and I urge my colleagues to support this important legislation, which will help all of our congressional districts.

Mr. MEADOWS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support.

I thank the leadership of the gentlewoman from Minnesota (Mrs. CRAIG) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MAST), and I urge all of my colleagues to support it, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. CRAIG. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time and urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

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

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 1331, "The Local Water Protection Act", which provides 200 million annually to support the nonpoint source management grants program administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

I support this legislation because it is necessary to counteract the current crisis of water pollution in our country.

As an Energy and Environment Task Force Co-Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, I understand the necessity of this bill and its funding to managing sources of water pollution.

It is unsustainable to think we can continue to allow runoff that carries pollutants, fertilizers, and sediment from fields; toxins from abandoned mines, and oils and heavy metals from roads, into lakes, rivers, and other bodies of water.

As pollutants in our waters increase, human exposure to toxins will follow in step, toxin exposure is directly linked to cancers and heart disease.

Before the pollutants reach people they reach our waterways, adversely affecting a whole ecosystem, putting 1 to 11 percent of marine species in to extinction every decade.

The strain on the marine life is not the only adverse effect to nature, global warming is also worsened when we turn a cheek to decreasing the pollution of our waterways.

Water pollution is not a topic to be taken lightly and we are reminded of our current privileges of clean water when we look at cities that have experienced the unimaginable, such as Flint, Michigan.

Flint, Michigan has lived in a state of fear, having to drink from bottles of filtered water in order to completely avoid lead poisoning and contamination.

Citizens of Flint, Michigan had to abandon their homes and the residents had to be compensated for their property and their current and future health conditions that arise from the contamination by polluted water.

Water pollution poses a threat in every state, including my home state of Texas.

It was found just recently that in 938 instances, Texas companies released pollution that exceeded the levels permitted by federal clean water laws according to researchers who examined Texas Commission for Environmental Quality data.

Texas was found in 2018 to have the most widespread radiated drinking water contamination affecting more than 3,500 utilities serving 22 million people.

The contamination in Texas included detectable levels of radium-226 and radium-228 in a study conducted by the Environmental Working Group (EWG).

Currently, it is required by law for states to submit reports to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding the current sources of water pollution within their state, as well as plans to manage those sources of pollution.

EPA provides grants for states to carry out their plans to manage water pollution.

Mr. Speaker, we must not wait to take action when the health of our marine life, the state of Global Warming, and the health of our people are being affected.

H.R. 1331 would allow instrumental programs to continue serving as a step in the right direction in protecting and healing our home.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Minnesota (Mrs. CRAIG) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1331.

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

Mrs. CRAIG. 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, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

FEDERAL EMPLOYEES AND NATIONAL URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE RESPONSE SYSTEM TASK FORCES

Mrs. CRAIG. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 639) to amend section 327 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to clarify that National Urban Search and Rescue Response System task forces may include Federal employees.

The Clerk read the title of the bill. The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 639

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

SECTION 1. FEDERAL EMPLOYEES AND NATIONAL URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE RESPONSE SYSTEM TASK FORCES.

Section 327 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5165f) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(p) FEDERAL EMPLOYEES.—Nothing in this section shall be construed to mean that a task force may not include Federal employees. In the case of a Federal employee detailed to a task force, the sponsoring agency shall enter into an agreement with the relevant employing Federal agency.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Minnesota (Mrs. CRAIG) and the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MEADOWS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Minnesota.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. CRAIG. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members

may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 639.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Minnesota?

There was no objection. Mrs. CRAIG. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 639 introduced by the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. HARTZLER).

H.R. 639 is a technical correction bill which will amend section 327 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to explicitly clarify that Federal employees are able to participate in the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System task forces coordinated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

FEMA has developed the National USAR Response System over the last several decades to act as a force multiplier for disaster rescue missions. The system is comprised of 28 task force teams from across the country and includes highly skilled volunteers who are constantly training for a variety of hazard scenarios, both man-made and natural.

Task force teams have proven their effectiveness time and again across this Nation.

Following enactment of the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System Act at the end of the 114th Congress, certain Federal agencies that employ members of some of these task forces have, unfortunately, been misinterpreting language that granted liability protections for non-Federal task force members equal to Federal first responders only when their task force was called into Federal service, resulting in an impediment to those Federal employees serving on a task force.

This bill will simply clarify that nothing in section 327 of the Stafford Act shall be interpreted to mean that a task force cannot include Federal employees and that, in instances where a Federal employee is detailed to a National USAR Response System task force, the sponsoring agency shall enter into an agreement with the relevant employing Federal agency.

The critical emergency services provided by the National USAR Response System and these highly skilled operators are too important for us to delay this fix any longer. I strongly support this bill and urge my colleagues to join me.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. HARTZLER) for her leadership on this legislation. Nothing is so valuable as someone who looks at a problem, sees the problem, and then endeavors to fix it, and that is exactly what the gentlewoman has done.

H.R. 639 clarifies language that was passed in the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System Act of 2016 to ensure, as the gentlewoman was saying, that the Urban Search and Rescue Response Task Force can include Federal employees.

FEMA's National Urban Search and Rescue Response System was established in 1989. The system is composed of some 28 task force teams, and the teams include members from the Federal, State, local, and private sector, all of those personnel responding together to meet the needs in times of disaster.

The teams are locally supported but can be called up by FEMA when a disaster strikes. These men and women are the ones who head into collapsed buildings and conduct search and rescue missions to save disaster survivors.

For a long time, the committee worked to clarify protections for these team members who put their lives literally on the line to serve their community; and, in 2016, Congress passed the National Urban Search and Rescue Response Systems Act to do just that. However, there was one technical fix that needed to happen to make sure that Federal participants in these teams can continue to be deployed as part of these task forces.

I want to thank the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. HARTZLER) for her leadership there because this bill, indeed, does clarify this. I would suggest that it should have tremendous bipartisan support.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. CRAIG. Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support this, and I reserve the balance of my time as well.

Mr. MEADOWS. Mr. Speaker, I yield as much time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. HARTZLER) for her explanation of what this bill does.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge passage of H.R. 639, the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System Task Forces Act.

I want to thank the gentleman from the North Carolina (Mr. MEADOWS) and the gentlewoman from Minnesota (Mrs. CRAIG) for their kind remarks about this bill and their support.

I also want to thank Chairman DEFAZIO and Ranking Member GRAVES for bringing the bill to the floor today, as well as my colleagues GERRY CONNOLLY and BLAINE LUETKEMEYER for cosponsoring this legislation and the International Association of Fire Chiefs for endorsing the bill.

My bill, as has been said, is a commonsense technical correction that makes clear that Federal employees can serve on FEMA Urban Search and Rescue teams.

Over the past three decades, FEMA has developed the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System, which consists of a network of task force teams of dedicated volunteers

who respond quickly when disaster strikes.

Currently, 28 task force teams across the country utilize their unique skills and resources of local volunteers to act as a force multiplier for disaster rescue missions. These teams train constantly for a variety of situations, including rescuing survivors from collapsed buildings or giving airlift rescue operations.

They are ready to deploy within hours of being called up in response to floods or tornadoes, and they can be pre-positioned in advance of covering disasters, such as hurricanes.

I am proud to represent Missouri Task Force 1, based out of Columbia, Missouri. In September, they received a call to deploy to North Carolina to pre-position search and rescue resources for Hurricane Florence.

As the team prepared to deploy, one of their members, who had spent years training and working as a dog handler on the team, was forced to stay home not because of a physical inability or family conflict, but because he works out of a regional office for a Federal agency as his normal day job. Due to a new interpretation of Federal statute, a willing, able, and trained volunteer who could have helped save lives was forced to stay home.

Unfortunately, FEMA has interpreted the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System Act of 2016 to mean that Federal employees are not allowed to serve on Federal task forces, despite the fact that they did for years.

This goes against congressional intent. The 2016 legislation codified non-Federal employee benefits and liability protections, but failed to specifically list Federal employees. This was not intended to mean that FEMA should preclude Federal employees from participation.

Since passage, FEMA has issued mixed guidance on several occasions on whether Federal employees can serve, and this has created confusion and frustration for our dedicated search and rescue volunteers.

My legislation is a commonsense solution to resolve this problem by simply clarifying that Federal employees can serve on these vital task forces. Congress must resolve this issue swiftly so our dedicated volunteers can respond at full strength when the next disaster strikes.

So once again, I want to thank my colleagues who have spoken in support of this, for those who have cosponsored it, and I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on H.R. 639.

Mr. MEADOWS. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close, and I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. HARTZLER) for her leadership.

It is a good testimony for all of America when we see the efforts of our first responders coming from Missouri to North Carolina, coming from North Carolina to California, and in between.

Mr. Speaker, we need to understand that they need our support. This is an important piece of legislation.

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

Mrs. CRAIG. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MEADOWS), and I encourage all of my colleagues to support this legislation.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Minnesota (Mrs. CRAIG) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 639.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1730

COLORADO RIVER DROUGHT CONTINGENCY PLAN AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2030) to direct the Secretary of the Interior to execute and carry out agreements concerning Colorado River Drought Contingency Management and Operations, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2030

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 "Colorado River Drought Contingency Plan Authorization Act".

SEC. 2. COLORADO RIVER BASIN DROUGHT CONTINGENCY PLANS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law expressly addressing the operation of the applicable Colorado River System reservoirs, immediately upon execution of the March 19, 2019, versions of the Agreement Concerning Colorado River Drought Contingency Management and Operations and the agreements attached thereto as Attachments A1, A2, and B, by all of the non-Federal parties thereto, the Secretary of the Interior shall, without delay, execute such agreements, and is directed and authorized to carry out the provisions of such agreements and operate applicable Colorado River System reservoirs accordingly.

(b) EFFECT.—Nothing in this section shall—

(1) be construed or interpreted as precedent for the litigation of, or as altering, affecting, or being deemed as a congressional determination regarding, the water rights of the United States, any Indian Tribe, band, or community, any State or political subdivision or district of a State, or any person; or

(2) exempt the implementation of such agreements and the operation of applicable Colorado River System reservoirs from any requirements of applicable Federal environmental laws.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GRIJALVA) and the gentleman from Utah (Mr. BISHOP) each will control 20 minutes.