

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 3872, which would amend the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands, clarifying that all lands acquired by the Federal Government are eligible to be considered for hardrock mineral leasing.

I thank my colleague Representative FALLON for his work on the bipartisan piece of legislation.

Acquired lands comprise 10 percent of the Nation's Federal lands, or 64 million acres. The Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands governs mineral leasing for a wide range of resources on these lands. However, the existing statute leaves out hardrock minerals. As a result, acquired Federal lands holding key critical minerals have effectively been locked up. This includes vast deposits in the Smackover Formation, which spans across the southeastern United States and hosts some of America's best lithium reserves.

Specifically, in northeast Texas, the Bureau of Land Management is currently unable to even consider hardrock mineral leasing for a lithium-rich portion of the Smackover Formation because it is located on land acquired by the Federal Government more than 80 years ago under a statute that does not explicitly allow hardrock mineral leasing.

H.R. 3872 would address this issue by providing a much-needed technical fix to the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands, giving the Secretary of the Interior the authority to tap into our vast mineral wealth across all types of acquired lands.

As we seek to reshape our mineral supply chains, we must ensure that no stone gets left unturned. By allowing greater access to tens of millions of acres of acquired lands, this legislation would help to break our reliance on adversarial nations like China.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, Mr. FALLON, for his work on this commonsense bill. I ask my colleagues to join me in supporting this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3872, a bill to amend the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands, clarifying that all lands acquired by the Federal Government are eligible for potential hardrock mineral leasing.

Most mining on Federal lands operates under a claims system, where U.S. citizens or U.S. subsidiaries of foreign companies can claim certain open areas of public land for their mineral rights. On most acquired lands, which are lands obtained through means other than the original public lands laws, like through a purchase or exchange, hardrock mineral rights are leased, similar to procedures for oil, gas, and coal. However, if the statute used to acquire that land doesn't explicitly authorize hardrock mineral leasing, then mineral leasing can't take place.

This is the case with the Department of Defense lands in Texas, specifically

the Red River Army Depot, which was acquired under various statutes that did not specifically authorize hardrock leasing.

A lithium exploration company applied for a permit to explore at the Army Depot, but the Bureau of Land Management did not have the power to authorize exploration.

The company already has industrial leases on adjacent private lands, and this bill would not grant any specific permits but would give BLM the authority to issue permits and leases if appropriate.

This is a good bill. It is a technical fix that will help us potentially develop lithium resources which are essential for the clean energy transition.

I will add that this bill authorizes hardrock leasing, which is a far better and more responsible practice than the claims staking system we have across the rest of our Federal lands.

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

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FALLON), who is the lead sponsor of this bill.

Mr. FALLON. Mr. Speaker, if critical minerals like lithium are essential to our military and to our national security, if that is the case, then why are we still relying on our number one global adversary to supply them?

China is mining about 18 percent of all the lithium in the world. With the United States, that percentage is less than 1. As far as refining, China is about 67 percent, some estimates up to 80 percent, where the United States is at 2 percent.

For years now, the United States has been overly reliant on the communists in Beijing. It is in America's best national security interest to maintain deterrence against the CCP, not only in the Indo-Pacific, but especially here at home in our supply chains and critical industries. This is why I first introduced H.R. 3872, the MERICA Act, which would allow for the expanded extraction of critical minerals on Federal lands.

□ 1710

In fact, we already have some of these critical minerals in abundance. A portion of the district I am privileged to represent falls within what is known as the Smackover Formation, a geological formation that encompasses areas from east Texas all the way to the Florida panhandle.

Thanks to a recent U.S. Geological Survey-led study, we know there are an estimated 5 to 19 million tons of lithium reserves in the Smackover Formation, and it is ready for extraction.

Lithium is essential for military and defense applications. It includes batteries and power systems used in unmanned aerial systems, such as the ones planning to be assembled under the Army's SkyFoundry Initiative, which is also absolutely critical for our Nation's future defense.

Under current law, these valuable lithium deposits are locked up on Federal lands, preventing their usage. The MERICA Act would amend the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands by adding hardrock minerals as part of the listed deposits subject to leasing so that all federally acquired lands can be considered for hardrock mineral leasing.

The MERICA Act would also give the Secretary of the Interior the authority to follow through on President Trump's executive order by ramping up mineral extraction and production on our own Federal lands.

We can't continue to play into the hands of Beijing by granting them de facto control of the global lithium supply chain—it makes absolutely no sense—whether through domestic mines or ones they have gained through other means, such as the Belt and Road Initiative.

The demand for lithium will only continue to increase as the days go by. We must bolster our national capabilities and work to address the ever-growing burden on our Nation's power grid. By passing the MERICA Act, we would take the commonsense step to utilize Federal lands to their full and utmost potential.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues very much for their consideration. For the sake of America's security, I urge all of my colleagues in this august Chamber to support H.R. 3872.

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

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, this is a great bill that would provide a much-needed technical fix to the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands. I again thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FALLON) for his work on this bipartisan piece of legislation. I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. STAUBER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3872, as amended.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### REAUTHORIZATION OF JUNIOR DUCK STAMP CONSERVATION AND DESIGN PROGRAM ACT OF 1994

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1098) to reauthorize the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program Act of 1994, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1098

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

**SECTION 1. REAUTHORIZATION OF JUNIOR DUCK STAMP CONSERVATION AND DESIGN PROGRAM ACT OF 1994.**

(a) **DEFINITION OF STATE.**—Section 5 of the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program Act of 1994 (16 U.S.C. 719b-1) is amended—

(1) by inserting “and” after “Guam.”; and

(2) by striking “, and any other territory or possession” after “Virgin Islands”.

(b) **AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**—Section 6 of the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program Act of 1994 (16 U.S.C. 719c) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a), by striking “2006 through 2010” and inserting “2025 through 2031”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following:  
“(c) **NO ADDITIONAL FUNDS AUTHORIZED.**—Funds authorized under subsection (a) may, as provided in appropriations Acts, only come from within amounts authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary to carry out the duties of the Federal Duck Stamp Office.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. STAUBER) and the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. HERNÁNDEZ) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Minnesota.

**GENERAL LEAVE**

Mr. STAUBER. 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 H.R. 1098, the bill now under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1098 to reauthorize the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program Act of 1994, sponsored by Representative SCHOLTEN from Michigan.

Participants in the Junior Duck Stamp program take part in a waterfowl-themed art competition, and the winning artwork is transformed into collectible stamps. The proceeds from these stamps support efforts to connect the next generation of Americans to the outdoors.

The legislation before us would reauthorize the program through fiscal year 2031. I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 1098 would reauthorize the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program, a small but mighty initiative that has inspired young conservationists for over three decades.

As the Fish and Wildlife Service puts it, this dynamic art and science curriculum reaches students from kindergarten through high school, teaching

them about wetland and waterfowl conservation through hands-on learning and artistic expression. It is education at its finest, combining creativity with conservation, art with action.

What makes this program truly special is how it is funded. One hundred percent—every single penny—of revenue from Junior Duck Stamp sales goes directly back into supporting environmental education activities for students and recognizing students for their conservation efforts.

This isn't government waste or bureaucratic overhead. This is a program that pays for itself while delivering real results. At a time when we are seeing declining connections between young people and nature, when screen time often outweighs green time, programs like this are more important than ever. It is exactly the kind of targeted, effective investment we should be making.

I commend Representatives SCHOLTEN and YAKYM for their bipartisan leadership on this issue. The Junior Duck Stamp program represents the best of what government can do: inspiring young people, supporting education, and protecting our natural heritage, all while operating efficiently and transparently.

Our children deserve the chance to connect with nature, to understand their role as stewards of the environment, and to express that connection through art and learning. This program gives them that chance.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 1098. I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from Michigan (Ms. SCHOLTEN), the sponsor of the bill.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman and ranking member for hearing my bill today. It is such a critical piece of legislation.

Those of us from Great Lakes States know how important it is to connect our young people back to the water that surrounds them, to nature, and to get off their phones and into the great outdoors.

I rise today in support of this incredible piece of bipartisan legislation that I cosponsored with another great midwesterner, RUDY YAKYM, the Reauthorization of Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program Act.

This program is an art- and science-based curriculum that educates children on the importance of wetlands and waterfowl conservation. The Junior Duck Stamp curriculum is a program during which students can develop an understanding of waterfowl anatomy and habitats, culminating in the Junior Duck Stamp art competition, where participants may draw or paint a picture of an eligible North American waterfowl species.

The winning image of this contest then goes on to be featured on the Jun-

ior Duck Stamp itself, with proceeds of the stamp being redirected to educational activities for the students participating in the program.

As was mentioned, this program has been in existence for 30 years, and the benefits have been proven. This bill will provide an extension of the Junior Duck Stamp program through 2031, empowering our children to learn more about conservation and their world around them. If we do not act today, we could lose all the good that comes from this program.

I am fortunate to come from an outdoorsy household, where we are a camping, hiking, hunting, and fishing family. These experiences have been critical to my own sons, James and Wesley, in their upbringing. The extension of this program will ensure that other households have consistent access to exploring our environment, as well.

We must encourage our children to connect with the environment to understand how to preserve the natural world that makes Michigan and the entire United States such a wonderful place to live. That is what the Junior Duck Stamp program is all about, and I am thrilled to lead this legislation to ensure future generations of children can learn about conservation while tapping into their artistic skills.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

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

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, this bill reauthorizes an important program that invests in the next generation and encourages them to continue our country's great outdoor and sporting legacy. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. STAUBER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1098, as amended.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1720

**PIT RIVER LAND TRANSFER ACT OF 2025**

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2400) to take certain Federal land in the State of California into trust for the benefit of the Pit River Tribe, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2400

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