

be able to lease its land for up to 99 years, as Congress has previously done for many other Tribes, creating new economic opportunities for the Tribe, which are well-deserved.

Madam Speaker, I thank Ms. MALOY for her work. I urge the passage of H.R. 3073, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WITTMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3073.

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.

MITIGATION ACTION AND WATERMEN SUPPORT ACT OF 2026

Mr. WITTMAN. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4294) to direct the Secretary of Commerce to establish a pilot program with respect to the sale of blue catfish caught within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4294

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 "Mitigation Action and Watermen Support Act of 2026" or the "MAWS Act of 2026".

SEC. 2. BLUE CATFISH PILOT PROGRAM.

Section 307 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Authorization Act of 1992 (15 U.S.C. 1511d) is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsection (e) as subsection (f); and

(2) by inserting after subsection (d) the following:

“(e) BLUE CATFISH PILOT PROGRAM.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, utilizing and coordinating with applicable programs and activities described in subsection (b)(3), shall carry out a pilot program to enter into cooperative agreements with covered entities for such covered entities to purchase, in accordance with paragraph (3)—

“(A) from watermen, blue catfish caught within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed by such watermen; and

“(B) from seafood processors, such blue catfish purchased by seafood processors from such watermen.

“(2) APPLICATIONS.—To be eligible to enter into a cooperative agreement under the pilot program, a covered entity shall submit to the Secretary an application in such form, at such time, and containing such information as the Secretary determines appropriate.

“(3) USE OF AMOUNTS.—A covered entity that enters into a cooperative agreement under the pilot program—

“(A) shall use any amounts awarded under such cooperative agreement to purchase blue catfish from watermen or seafood processors for at least the amount determined by the Secretary under paragraph (5); and

“(B) may use not more than 15 percent of such amounts to offset the cost to transport such blue catfish to manufacturing or processing facilities.

“(4) WATERMAN AND SEAFOOD PROCESSOR ELIGIBILITY.—To be eligible to sell a blue catfish

under the pilot program to a covered entity that enters into a cooperative agreement under the pilot program—

“(A) a waterman shall certify to such covered entity that the waterman caught the blue catfish within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed; and

“(B) a seafood processor shall certify to such covered entity that the seafood processor purchased the blue catfish from a waterman who caught the blue catfish within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

“(5) DETERMINATION OF MINIMUM PURCHASE AMOUNT.—With respect to blue catfish sold by watermen or seafood processors under the pilot program, the Secretary shall determine the minimum price per pound, taking into consideration—

“(A) market factors;

“(B) feedback from watermen, seafood processors, and covered entities that participate in the pilot program, if available; and

“(C) differentiation of price points for fillet and byproduct.

“(6) ABUNDANCE BASELINE.—

“(A) MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this subsection, the Secretary shall seek to enter into a memorandum of understanding with eligible non-Federal partners—

“(i) to compile existing non-Federal data necessary for the Secretary—

“(I) to develop under subparagraph (B) an estimate of the abundance of blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed; and

“(II) to provide the information described in subparagraphs (A) through (D) of paragraph (7) in the report required under that paragraph; and

“(ii) to adjust the collection by such eligible non-Federal partners of relevant data such that such data can be used as described in subclauses (I) and (II) of clause (i).

“(B) ABUNDANCE ESTIMATES.—Not later than September 30, 2027, and annually thereafter through fiscal year 2032, the Secretary shall develop, pursuant to the memorandum of understanding described in subparagraph (A), and make publicly available on the website of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration an estimate of the abundance of blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

“(7) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date on which the pilot program terminates in accordance with paragraph (9), the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report regarding the pilot program, including the following information:

“(A) A summary of available information regarding the size and spawning stock biomass of the blue catfish population in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed prior to and at the conclusion of the pilot program, using the most recent data available.

“(B) A summary of available data regarding the size distribution and diet of the blue catfish population in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed during and at the conclusion of the pilot program.

“(C) The number of blue catfish and the amount of blue catfish (measured in pounds) caught by watermen who participate in the pilot program during the pilot program.

“(D) The effects of the pilot program on species other than the blue catfish in and the environment of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, to the extent known.

“(E) The economic effect of the pilot program on watermen who participate in the pilot program, including—

“(i) the revenue generated by each such waterman by selling blue catfish under the pilot program; and

“(ii) catch data with respect to and revenue generated from other species fished by such watermen during the pilot program.

“(F) The market response to the pilot program, including—

“(i) the total amount awarded under the pilot program to covered entities that enter into cooperative agreements under the pilot program; and

“(ii) trends in the types of such covered entities.

“(G) With respect to the manufacturing or processing practices of each covered entity that enters into a cooperative agreement under the pilot program, information regarding whether each such covered entity—

“(i) uses internal or third-party manufacturers or processors;

“(ii) uses, for each type of food product produced by the covered entity, whole fish, fillet, or byproduct; and

“(iii) if the covered entity uses only part of the fish, sells the remainder to third parties.

“(H) How each covered entity that enters into a cooperative agreement under the pilot program transports blue catfish purchased by the covered entity, including—

“(i) whether the covered entity freezes such blue catfish;

“(ii) how often the covered entity picks up such blue catfish; and

“(iii) whether the covered entity uses a seafood transport company that is local to the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

“(I) Policy recommendations regarding—

“(i) the continuation of the pilot program in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed; and

“(ii) the expansion of the pilot program to other watersheds, including—

“(I) best practices;

“(II) specific recommendations regarding invasive species of carp in the Mississippi rivershed;

“(III) with respect to other aquatic species and watersheds that may benefit from the pilot program; and

“(IV) other strategies with respect to the mitigation of aquatic invasive species for Congress to consider piloting.

“(J) Additional data necessary for Congress to shape related policy, including—

“(i) data—

“(I) the Secretary was unable to collect; or

“(II) is not collected by eligible non-Federal partners; and

“(ii) recommendations for congressional action to support the collection of relevant data sets.

“(8) BRIEFINGS.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this subsection and quarterly thereafter until the date on which the pilot program terminates in accordance with paragraph (9), the Secretary shall provide to the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate briefings on the status of the implementation of this subsection.

“(9) DURATION.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall carry out the pilot program during the 2-year period that begins on the first day of the fiscal year immediately following the later of the fiscal year in which the Secretary—

“(i) first makes publicly available the first abundance estimate under paragraph (6); and

“(ii) issues guidance under subparagraph (B).

“(B) CRITERIA.—Not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment of this subsection, the Secretary, in consultation with the Chesapeake Bay Program Invasive Catfish Workgroup and the heads of relevant Federal agencies with experience administering similar programs, shall issue guidance for the pilot program.

“(10) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

“(A) ANIMAL FEED.—The term ‘animal feed’—

“(i) means an article that is intended for use—

“(I) for food for an animal other than man; and

“(II) as a substantial source of nutrients in the diet of such an animal; and

“(ii) is not limited to a mixture intended to be the sole ration of such an animal.

“(B) AQUACULTURE FEED.—The term ‘aquaculture feed’—

“(i) means an article that is intended for use—

“(I) for food for an aquacultural species, including any species of finfish, mollusk, crustacean (or other aquatic invertebrate), amphibian, reptile, ornamental fish, or aquatic plant that is propagated and reared in a controlled or selected environment; and

“(II) as a substantial source of nutrients in the diet of such an aquacultural species; and

“(iii) is not limited to a mixture intended to be the sole ration of such an aquacultural species.

“(C) *BLUE CATFISH*.—The term ‘blue catfish’ means the species *Ictalurus furcatus*.

“(D) *CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERSHED*.—The term ‘Chesapeake Bay Watershed’ means the region that covers—

“(i) the Chesapeake Bay;

“(ii) the portions of the States of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia that drain into the Chesapeake Bay; and

“(iii) the District of Columbia.

“(E) *COVERED ENTITY*.—The term ‘covered entity’ means a person engaged in the business of manufacturing or processing—

“(i) pet food;

“(ii) animal feed; or

“(iii) aquaculture feed.

“(F) *ELIGIBLE NON-FEDERAL PARTNER*.—The term ‘eligible non-Federal partner’ means—

“(i) Maryland;

“(ii) Virginia; and

“(iii) research institutions, including research institutions with expertise in—

“(I) blue catfish research in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed; or

“(II) acting in coordination with the Invasive Catfish Workgroup of the Chesapeake Bay Program.

“(G) *PILOT PROGRAM*.—The term ‘pilot program’ means the pilot program established under paragraph (1).

“(H) *SEAFOOD PROCESSOR*.—The term ‘seafood processor’ means a person engaged in the business of preparing or packaging fish or fish products (including fish harvested by the processor) for sale.

“(I) *SECRETARY*.—The term ‘Secretary’ means the Secretary of Commerce, acting through the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WITTMAN) and the gentlewoman from Maryland (Ms. ELFRETH) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WITTMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 4294, the bill now under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4294, the Mitigation Action and Watermen Support Act, also known as the MAWS Act of 2026, the legislation I was proud to cosponsor with Congresswoman ELFRETH.

Having grown up on the Chesapeake Bay, I understand firsthand how important it is to protect our marine wildlife and restore the bay’s ecosystem. In fact, I worked in the commercial fishing realm and recreational fishing

realm for a number of years there, and my son today is also a commercial fisherman, knows the bay well, and knows how problematic the blue catfish is to the Chesapeake Bay.

Unfortunately, the blue catfish has become an invasive species that poses a growing threat to the biodiversity of the Chesapeake Bay’s waters and the seafood industries that depend on a healthy bay. These fish are aggressive predators that consume many of the species that define the Chesapeake Bay, things like blue crabs, striped bass, and other native fish that are vital to the Chesapeake Bay’s ecological balance and to the watermen whose lives depend on them.

I hear daily from watermen across the spectrum saying how harmful the blue catfish are to the Chesapeake Bay. When I have had a chance to go out there and see the number of blue catfish in the bay watershed, it is astounding the biomass that is there. It is a wonder anything in the bay can survive based upon the volume of the blue catfish that are there.

This does have an impact on watermen up and down the bay, not just in Virginia, but also there in Maryland.

While positive steps we know have been taken to address this issue, more has to be done. The MAWS Act establishes a pilot program within the Chesapeake Bay office aimed at tackling the growing threat that these invasive blue catfish pose to the Chesapeake Bay and the fisheries that sustain our coastal communities. It is key to our economics to make sure we have crabs that people go to restaurants to enjoy and that we have striped bass that people go to restaurants to enjoy. If not, then these blue catfish will be the only thing left in the Chesapeake Bay.

By supporting increased harvesting of blue catfish and studying its impact on the bay’s biodiversity, this program will help protect valuable native species like blue crabs and striped bass and the watermen who depend on them.

The legislation also explores practical uses of these harvested fish, including in the pet and animal food industry. This will help ensure their removal while making sure that we have sustainable commercial fishing industries there in the Chesapeake Bay.

We know we want to do all we can to support the hardworking men and women who make their living on the bay.

This is a bipartisan, commonsense approach that supports our watermen while helping to restore the balance to one of America’s most important ecosystems. The Chesapeake Bay, by far, is the most diverse and productive water system on the face of the Earth. This imbalance is causing big problems in the bay. This will go a long way to make sure we create those opportunities for our watermen and also open up more economic opportunities for the commercial fishing industry.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this measure, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. ELFRETH. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I am grateful that H.R. 4294, the MAWS Act, is included in today’s suspension package, a piece of legislation I was so proud to work in partnership in crafting with the gentleman from Virginia.

The Chesapeake Bay, the largest estuary in the Nation that is responsible for \$100 billion in annual economic value, is facing a critical, albeit delicious threat, the invasive blue catfish. These blue catfish were introduced into tidal areas of the bay in the 1970s for recreational purposes under the assumption that they would stay in the freshwater and not venture into the brackish water of the larger bay. That assumption has turned out to be catastrophically wrong. Blue catfish are now not only in every tidal area of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, but they are the most abundant biomass in many of them, and the threat is real.

Blue catfish can live up to 20 years. They can weigh up to 100 pounds. They eat approximately 10 percent of their body weight every day and have an extremely fast metabolism. The imbalance my colleague from Virginia just spoke about in our ecosystem has created a situation where because they eat so much, their meals frequently consist of staples of our seafood industry and staples of Maryland and Virginia’s culture: baby blue crabs, rockfish, even oysters, causing significant economic damage to our seafood industry at large, which is a central part of our economies in the bay region.

Making matters worse, these blue catfish, because they are invasive, have no natural predators in the bay to control that population growth. Because of this, they now estimate there are tens of millions of these fish throughout the entire Chesapeake Bay region, and that is growing rapidly.

The good news, Madam Speaker, is that blue catfish are nutritious and delicious, and they are high in protein and omega-3s. According to a new report from bay scientists, these catfish do not retain PFAS like other fish.

The market for human consumption has grown significantly across the region, due to a concerted marketing campaign, processors who make bold investments, chefs who are willing to take a risk with blue catfish dishes popping up in restaurant menus, and fillets on sale at your local market.

However, that market has a few critical limitations that are inhibiting our ability to control this catastrophe. First, blue catfish are the only fish inspected by the USDA. All other fish are under the jurisdiction of the FDA, and this adds significant hurdles for seafood processors and watermen who want to sell blue catfish for human consumption.

I would be remiss, Madam Speaker, if I didn’t highlight that this very red

tape, this bureaucracy, is a limitation placed on the industry by the Congress itself.

Second, State health regulations indicate that blue catfish filet is safe for human consumption in fish no larger than 25 pounds. This means there are tens of millions of fish over 25 pounds or up to 85 pounds actually, that watermen struggle to sell because they cannot be processed for human consumption, and the market is not there.

Fortunately, they are completely safe for inclusion in the pet food industry.

Third, on the other end of the spectrum, there are millions of more than 1- to 2-pound blue catfish that are not big enough to filet and consequently aren't sold for processing for people. The smallest fish are among the most aggressive predators of the species that our industry relies on, stealthily eating eggs in otherwise hard-to-access habitats.

We have made significant critical progress like the USDA grant program which provides financial support to processors and food banks, but there remains the problem that only the very narrow window of 2- to 25-pound fish can be sold for human consumption.

We are left without a solution to the question: What are watermen supposed to do with every other size?

They can't just throw them back.

We can do our part, everybody here, and everybody watching at home, including my mother, can do their part in ordering the blue catfish when we see it on a menu. Again, it is delicious and nutritious. This is not a problem we are capable of eating our way out of.

□ 1700

That is why I introduced the bipartisan MAWS Act, alongside House Natural Resources Vice Chairman WITTMAN, to invest funds to address invasive blue catfish and strengthen our local seafood economy, while also providing a new source of protein to pets nationwide.

The MAWS Act establishes this pilot program within the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office to facilitate a market for Chesapeake Bay blue catfish in the pet and animal food industry.

This program will complement the growing market for human consumption by forging new partnerships with pet and animal food manufacturers nationwide that otherwise do not have a footprint in the Chesapeake Bay, and it would establish a sustainable outlet for fish that are outside the window for human consumption by giving watermen and processors more opportunities to sell the smallest and largest blue catfish.

NOAA will enter into cooperative agreements with pet and animal food manufacturers to ensure watermen and processors are properly incentivized to catch blue catfish in the bay, and establish transportation, processing, and manufacturing structures for that long-term market need.

By having a customer base with consistent and reliable price points, watermen can feel confident that it is worth their while to catch blue catfish of all shapes and sizes, knowing there will be somebody at the end of the dock to buy it for a fair price.

Price points for this pilot program will be established in a collaborative effort between watermen, processors, manufacturers, scientists, and economists.

We spent a year crafting this bill, compromising to make sure that everybody's voices were heard and everybody had a seat at the table, ensuring every corner of the industry has a seat and a voice in the decision of what the baseline market price for fillet, by-product, and whole fish will be for this program.

Additionally, in the many months of engagement on this bill with watermen, processors, and manufacturers, we learned that transportation mechanisms are a complex web of coordinated pickups, often with processors going right to the front door of the homes of watermen to pick up their daily catch.

In order to make participation in this program feasible and promote the establishment of long-term transportation processes, 15 percent of the total grant funding can be used by grantees to establish these new routes across the Chesapeake Bay in partnership with established routes led by processors.

Throughout this 2-year pilot program, NOAA will collect data on the ecological and economic impacts of the program. NOAA will report back to Congress on best practices, lessons learned, and recommendations for additional species in other watersheds that may benefit from this program.

Our seafood industry across the Chesapeake Bay is the heart of our economy, but many factors far outside the control of watermen and processors have left the industry in a dire situation. Extreme weather, deep freezes, unexpected waterway discharge, and a national affordability crisis are threatening the livelihoods of our watermen, not to mention the ever-increasing blue catfish population.

The MAWS Act, again, is the result of intensive collaboration and creativity of stakeholders across the watershed as we sought to address the ecological and economic damage of the invasive species in a way that complements—again, complements—and strengthens the growing market for human consumption.

This is not an either/or approach. This is a yes/and, all-hands-on-deck approach.

If this innovative approach is successful, it is our hope that a similar tool can be utilized to combat invasive aquatic species in other waterways across the Nation. Think carp that are wreaking havoc in the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes. Think snakeheads that are invading North

Carolina, Missouri, Arkansas, and more.

I am proud to lead the effort of this one-of-a-kind legislation in partnership with my colleagues from Virginia, Representative WITTMAN and Representative KIGGANS, as well as Representative HOYER.

I thank the chair and his staff for providing such technical assistance to this bill, and I thank my colleagues for supporting this bill.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WITTMAN. Madam Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SELF).

Mr. SELF. Madam Speaker, I rise in opposition to H.R. 4294, and I am here to represent the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HARRIS) in his opposition to H.R. 4294.

I include a letter titled "Coalition Letter from Maryland Blue Catfish Processors Opposing the MAWS Act."

MARCH 12, 2026.

COALITION LETTER FROM MARYLAND BLUE CATFISH PROCESSORS OPPOSING THE MAWS ACT

We write as a coalition of small, family-owned seafood processing businesses, which are among the only facilities in Maryland actively processing blue catfish for human consumption, to express our serious concerns with the proposed MAWS Act introduced by Representative Sarah K. Elfreth and co-led by Representative Robert J. Wittman.

For several years, our businesses have worked alongside the Maryland Department of Agriculture and other state and federal partners to invest significant time and financial resources into building a viable commercial market for wild-caught blue catfish. This effort has required overcoming longstanding public stigma and educating consumers that blue catfish is not only safe, but a high-quality and desirable protein-rich seafood product. Progress has been hard-won.

The MAWS Act, however well-intentioned, risks undermining this progress by shifting public messaging toward the use of blue catfish primarily for pet food or similar byproducts. Headlines suggesting that blue catfish is destined for pet food damage consumer perception and directly threaten the emerging market for human consumption—the very market that sustains Maryland watermen, processors, and our Bay communities. Our shared goal has always been to add value to this fishery, increase demand, and raise dockside prices so that watermen are incentivized to harvest more invasive blue catfish from Maryland waters.

It is also important to note that the utilization of processing byproducts for rendering or pet food is already occurring through existing private-sector relationships that we have worked hard to establish, typically at prices between \$0.10 and \$0.20 per pound. Government subsidies directed toward a new, bureaucratically-selected recipient would therefore not create innovation, but instead introduce market distortion and unfair competitive advantage—jeopardizing long-standing partnerships and destabilizing an industry that is only beginning to succeed.

Currently, many processors struggle to secure sufficient supply to meet growing consumer demand. Introducing a government-funded competitor capable of paying above-market prices for whole fish would further strain supply chains and place small Maryland processors at significant risk. Fish in

the one- to two-pound range, as well as larger specimens, are already valuable components of our processing operations and product lines, despite misleading claims made by entities like the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

We are equally troubled by the legislative process that produced this proposal without meaningful consultation from the processors who have pioneered Maryland's on-the-ground response to the blue catfish invasion. Members of our coalition attempted outreach to Representative Elfreth's office but were unfortunately met with a resistance to engage in substantive dialogue regarding the bill's impacts on private industry.

Ultimately, we share the goal of addressing the ecological challenges posed by invasive blue catfish and strengthening Maryland's seafood economy. However, we believe public funds would be far more effective if directed toward initiatives that can help the watermen, the processors, and the people in our working waterfront communities. For example, USDA grant funding secured by Congressman Andy Harris has helped several Maryland processors to make investments into costly new facilities upgrades that we otherwise would not have been able to make. New programs should build upon, not undercut, investments that have already been made by taxpayers.

Without a strong processing sector, Maryland cannot sustain a viable blue catfish industry. We remain ready and willing to work collaboratively with Representative Elfreth, Representative Wittman, and other sponsors of this legislation to identify policies that genuinely support watermen, processors, and working waterfront communities while continuing to remove invasive blue catfish from the Chesapeake Bay.

Sincerely,

NICK HARGROVE,
Tilghman Island Sea-
food, Tilghman, MD.
STEPHANIE PAZZAGLIA,
J.J. McDonnell Sea-
food, Elkridge, MD.
AMANDA WILLIAMS,
BSA Seafood,
Grasonville, MD.
PATRICK WELSH JR.,
Reliant Fish Company,
Jessup, MD.

Ms. ELFRETH. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

Madam Speaker, again, I reiterate my appreciation to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WITTMAN), the committee staff, and all the stakeholders who spent the last year crafting this creative solution to a problem that threatens the economy and ecology of the greatest natural resource we have in Maryland and Virginia, the Chesapeake Bay.

This is an innovative solution. When you visit with other folks who are policymakers, what we hate to hear is, "We have always done it this way," or, "We have never done it that way."

This moment, this crisis that we are experiencing in the Chesapeake Bay, requires innovation, creativity, partnerships, and collaboration. That is exactly what the MAWS Act represents, and I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

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

Mr. WITTMAN. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

Madam Speaker, as we have heard, this bill does quite a bit to open up free markets for fishermen who want to be able to use this very abundant resource. Blue catfish are incredibly abundant—in fact, to the detriment of other species that everybody loves.

Opening up free markets and opening up opportunities for those fishermen is incredibly important. What this also does is to take down bureaucratic impediments.

We know, right now, because of the structure that USDA has to inspect these plants that process catfish, it creates an inordinate stress on that industry. For many of them, because they don't predominate in processing blue catfish, they can't afford to have a full-time USDA inspector in their plant.

What this will do is to say: Let's look at other ways to be able to utilize it. This is a great source of protein. As the world today looks for protein—remember, there is a protein deficit around the world, and we have an overabundance of protein here in the Chesapeake Bay with these blue catfish—we ought to be looking at other ways to do that, not just for human consumption.

As Ms. ELFRETH talked about, there is a place for human consumption of these fish, but there is also a place outside of that that commercial fishermen could fill if we allow them to be used for other purposes, especially for pet food.

If you look at one of the industries today that is the fastest growing industry in the United States, it is the pet industry. Why wouldn't we look at these opportunities that will help our watermen, help the environment, and help other populations like crabs and striped bass? We want to do that. We want to make sure we are doing those things that will help our economy and that will alleviate some of the bureaucratic impediments for these individuals to work hard and make a living on the water.

As I said, my son is a waterman. He goes out every day with no assurance about what he will catch. He is one of the true last independent businesspeople left in the United States. When you go out today, you are not sure if you are going to catch anything.

If you have something that creates undue pressure on what you are relying on to make a living, then you want to try to alleviate that and create that balance there. This does that.

This takes some of the pressure off the blue crab population that, for the last decade, has been under tremendous pressure in the Chesapeake Bay. It takes pressure off the striped bass populations that right now are in decline.

Watermen in Virginia and Maryland rely on the striped bass. It is a heavily managed fishery, but when you have these other pressures on there, we want to make sure that we have the right balance.

What this does is to open up the door to make sure that those things happen,

that we look to enhance coastal economies that right now are under significant duress. Watermen struggle and have to fish multiple species in order to make a living. This would be a great enhancement for them.

If we can do this, it helps the area economically. It also takes away some of the burdens on seafood processors that have those burdens. Sometimes, they can't get into this industry because of the regulatory burdens. This is a great way for us to do that.

The economic impact is going to be significant, I would argue, not just for the Chesapeake Bay but also for the surrounding areas that rely upon the bounty that comes out of the Chesapeake Bay.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 4294, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WITTMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4294, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the yeas have it.

Mr. SELF. Madam 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.

□ 1710

GATEWAY PARTNERSHIP ACT

Mr. WITTMAN. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5254) to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to enter into an agreement with the Gateway Arch Park Foundation to host private events in Gateway Arch National Park buildings, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5254

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 "Gateway Partnership Act".

SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) FOUNDATION.—The term "Foundation" means the Gateway Arch Park Foundation, a nonprofit organization that serves as the official philanthropic partner of the Park.

(2) PARK.—The term "Park" means Gateway Arch National Park.

(3) PARK BUILDING.—The term "Park building" means—

(A) the Arch Visitor Center;

(B) the Old Courthouse; and

(C) any other building administered or managed by the Secretary as part of the Park that is open to the public.

(4) SECRETARY.—The term "Secretary" means the Secretary of the Interior.

SEC. 3. GATEWAY ARCH NATIONAL PARK PARTNER AGREEMENT PILOT PROJECT.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, in accordance with subsection (b), may enter into a one-