is past. What we have seen, through this accomplishment by Mojave Aerospace, is that this may be a vehicle to achieve new goals in space, and we will be looking into this. Hopefully, it will encourage further achievements that will help the United States and all of humankind set new records and push the frontiers.

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

Mr. LAMPSON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I might consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the resolution by the chairman of the Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics congratulating the winners of the Ansari X Prize on their intrepid voyages to the edge of space.

A century ago, as Orville Wright dropped down to the sand at Kitty Hawk after his 12-second flight into history, the impact of aviation on the world was only dimly seen. Yet, today, we take for granted that the other side of the world is only a mere few hours from our front door. Now, we honor the next Orville and Wilbur, Mike Melvill and Brian Binnie, pilots of SpaceShipOne's prize-winning flights.

In the space of a week, they have shown us all a new opportunity. If you are not satisfied with reading about space, well, the day is not far off when you can go there yourself.

SpaceShipOne did not get very far into space, but then, neither did Alan Shepard on his first Mercury flight. So let us not forget, though, that Alan Shepard later made it to the moon.

The resolution before the House also honors Burt Rutan, the pioneering designer at the head of Mojave Aerospace Ventures. Some 40 airplanes share Rutan's distinctive designs, and if one visits the National Air and Space Museum here on the mall, they can see his Voyager, which flew around the world nonstop in 1986.

That it was Rutan who broke the barrier of affordable access to space probably does not surprise many in the aviation fraternity, but as Tom Wolfe so memorably put it in The Right Stuff, ''No bucks, no Buck Rogers.''

Without Paul Allen's willingness to commit real money, SpaceShipOne might still be little more than scribbles on a napkin in a filing cabinet. Sometimes we have to look beyond the business case.

There is something about a contest that seems to inspire great deeds. We owe a great deal to Dr. Peter Diamandis, president of the Ansari X Prize Foundation. He set the goal that fired the imaginations of those eager to open space to the rest of us. The House is right to include him in our congratulations.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join the gentleman from California in honoring the achievements of the Ansari X Prize winners and recommend that the House approve this resolution.

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

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume. I have no other requests to speak, and I have just one last thought.

I believe that the investor invested $26 million in this project. We have no doubt that, if this project was just a government-funded project, that it probably would have been in the hundreds of millions of dollars. We will be looking at this X Prize concept of encouraging the private sector to try to achieve specific goals that would be worthy of such prizes and would also be very, very helpful to our whole technological efforts of our country.

So we will be looking at this as a vehicle in the future, and I am looking forward to working with the gentleman from Texas (Mr. LAMPSON) and people on both sides of the aisle, whose goal it is to make sure that America remains the leader in space. This is a great achievement today. We congratulate all those who are involved with SpaceShipOne.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 820, which commends Mojave Aerospace Ventures and their great success capturing the Ansari X Prize on Monday, October 4. I am proud to represent Burt Rutan and his team based in Mojave, California, and it has been a great pleasure to watch their success.

The first private effort to enter space has succeeded. As part of a competition stimulating private enterprise in an area that formerly was totally government-controlled, the Ansari X Prize Foundation and the collaborators of Mojave Aerospace Ventures have proven that private organizations can achieve anything they put their minds to. The sky is no longer the limit.

Although almost 80 years apart, the X Prize is similar to the reward that in part led Charles Lindbergh to fly across the Atlantic in 1927. That achievement sparked the initial age of commercial aviation, and this achievement truly begins the era of commercial space aviation.

I congratulate Burt Rutan, pilots Mike Melvill and Brian Binnie, all the employees of Scaled Composites, and all those community volunteers who worked tirelessly to prepare for this event at the Mojave Spaceport. In recent days they have provided us with an exciting glimpse of the future, and I look forward to their next endeavors.

Mr. SMITH of Washington. Mr. Speaker, today, I wish to extend to Paul Allen and the entire SpaceShipOne team my heartfelt congratulations on their huge achievement. Since Orville and Wilbur Wright first took to the skies, mankind has consistently dreamed of loftier goals and continued to push the edge in manned flight, both commercially and through government endeavors. On October 4, the entire SpaceShipOne team expanded man's dream of commercial flight into space. While a noble achievement, this is but the first step in a long process towards the dream of many on Earth to fly to the reaches of outer space. Some day this dream will be a reality and it is because of the efforts and skills of people like those at Scaled Composites and the visionaries like Paul Allen that will make this dream a reality.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate and commend Mr. Paul Allen, Mr. Burt Rutan and all the men and women of Mojave Aerospace Ventures on winning the Ansari X Prize competition.

On December 17, 1903, Wilbur and Orville Wright made the first sustained, controlled, powered flight of an airplane at Kitty Hawk, NC. Now, a little over a century later Mojave Aerospace Ventures has followed in the footsteps of the Wright Brothers by designing, building and successfully flying the world's first privately funded spacecraft.

Mr. Speaker, the private support of Paul Allen, for the Mojave Aerospace Ventures was critical in reaching this historical milestone. This accomplishment exemplifies the ingenuity on which our Nation was founded and developed. Mr. Allen has shown that the entrepreneurial spirit which has made America great is alive and well and will continue towards even greater achievements in the future.

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

Mr. LAMPSON. Mr. Speaker, I have no other speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MARIO DIAZ-BALART of Florida). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. ROHRABACHER) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 820, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SPECIALTY CROPS COMPETITIVENESS ACT OF 2004

Mr. OSE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3242) to ensure an abundant and affordable supply of highly nutritious fruits, vegetables, and other specialty crops for American consumers and international markets by enhancing the competitiveness of United States-grown specialty crops, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3242

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 ''Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004''.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

(1) A secure domestic food supply is a national security imperative for the United States.

(2) A competitive specialty crop industry in the United States is necessary for the production of an abundant, affordable supply of highly nutritious fruits, vegetables, and other specialty crops, which are vital to the health and well-being of all Americans.

(3) Increased consumption of specialty crops will provide tremendous health and economic benefits to both consumers and specialty crop growers.

(4) Specialty crop growers believe that there are numerous areas of Federal agriculture policy that could be improved to promote increased consumption of specialty crops and increase the competitiveness of

producers in the efficient production of affordable specialty crops in the United States.

(5) As the globalization of markets continues, it is becoming increasingly difficult for United States producers to compete against heavily subsidized foreign producers in both the domestic and foreign markets.

(6) United States specialty crop producers also continue to face serious tariff and nontariff trade barriers in many export markets.

(b) PURPOSE.—It is the purpose of this Act to make necessary changes in Federal agriculture policy to accomplish the goals of increasing fruit, vegetable, and nut consumption and improving the competitiveness of United States specialty crop producers.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) The term ''specialty crop'' means fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and nursery crops (including floriculture).

(2) The term ''State'' means the several States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

(3) The term ''State department of agriculture'' means the agency, commission, or department of a State government responsible for agriculture within the State.

TITLE I—STATE ASSISTANCE FOR SPECIALTY CROPS

SEC. 101. SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANTS.

(a) AVAILABILITY AND PURPOSE OF GRANTS.—Subject to the appropriation of funds to carry out this section, the Secretary of Agriculture shall make grants to States for each of the fiscal years 2005 through 2009 to be used by State departments of agriculture solely to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

(b) GRANTS BASED ON VALUE OF PRODUCTION.—Subject to subsection (c), the amount of the grant for a fiscal year to a State under this section shall bear the same ratio to the total amount appropriated pursuant to the authorization of appropriations in subsection (i) for that fiscal year as the value of specialty crop production in the State during the preceding calendar year bears to the value of specialty crop production during the preceding calendar year in all States whose application for a grant for that fiscal year is accepted by the Secretary under subsection (f).

(c) MINIMUM GRANT AMOUNT.—Subject to the appropriation of sufficient funds to carry out this subsection, each State shall receive at least $100,000 each fiscal year as a grant under this section notwithstanding the amount calculated under subsection (b) for the State.

(d) ELIGIBILITY.—To be eligible to receive a grant under this section, a State department of agriculture shall prepare and submit, for approval by the Secretary of Agriculture, an application at such time, in such a manner, and containing such information as the Secretary shall require by regulation, including—

(1) a State plan that meets the requirements of subsection (e);

(2) an assurance that the State will comply with the requirements of the plan; and

(3) an assurance that grant funds received under this section shall supplement the expenditure of State funds in support of specialty crops grown in that State, rather than replace State funds.

(e) PLAN REQUIREMENTS.—The State plan shall identify the lead agency charged with the responsibility of carrying out the plan and indicate how the grant funds will be utilized to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

(f) REVIEW OF APPLICATION.—In reviewing the application of a State submitted under subsection (d), the Secretary of Agriculture shall ensure that the State plan would carry out the purpose of grant program, as specified in subsection (a). The Secretary may accept or reject applications for a grant under this section.

(g) EFFECT OF NONCOMPLIANCE.—If the Secretary of Agriculture, after reasonable notice to a State, finds that there has been a failure by the State to comply substantially with any provision or requirement of the State plan, the Secretary may disqualify, for one or more years, the State from receipt of future grants under this section.

(h) AUDIT REQUIREMENTS.—For each year that a State receives a grant under this section, the State shall conduct an audit of the expenditures of grant funds by the State. Not later than 30 days after the completion of the audit, the State shall submit a copy of the audit to the Secretary of Agriculture.

(i) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—For each of the fiscal years 2005 through 2009, there is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Agriculture $44,500,000 to make grants under this section.

TITLE II—SPECIALTY CROP ADVANCEMENT

SEC. 201. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR SPECIALTY CROPS.

For each of the fiscal years 2005 through 2009, there is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Agriculture $2,000,000 to carry out section 3205 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (7 U.S.C. 5680). Amounts appropriated pursuant to this authorization of appropriations shall be in addition to any other funds made available to carry out such section.

SEC. 202. REDUCTION IN BACKLOG OF AGRICULTURAL EXPORT PETITIONS.

(a) REDUCTION EFFORTS.—To the maximum extent practicable, the Secretary of Agriculture shall endeavor to reduce the backlog in the number of applications for permits for the export of United States agricultural commodities. In achieving such reduction, the Secretary shall not dilute or diminish existing personnel resources that are currently managing sanitary and phytosanitary issues for—

(1) United States agricultural commodities for which exportation is sought; and

(2) interdiction and control of pests and diseases, including for the evaluation of pest and disease concerns of foreign agricultural commodities for which importation is sought.

(b) REPORT.—The Secretary of Agriculture shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate an annual report specifying, for the year covered by the report—

(1) the total number of applications processed to completion;

(2) the number of backlog applications processed to completion;

(3) the percentage of backlog applications processed to completion; and

(4) the number of backlog applications remaining.

SEC. 203. REPORT ON SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY EXPORT ISSUES.

Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Agriculture shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a report on significant sanitary and phytosanitary issues that affect the export of specialty crops.

TITLE III—SPECIALTY CROP RESEARCH

SEC. 301. METHYL BROMIDE ALTERNATIVES.

(a) PRIORITY.—The Secretary of Agriculture shall elevate the priority of current methyl bromide alternative research and extension activities and reexamine the risks and benefits of extending the phase-out deadline in effect on the date of the enactment of this Act, including the estimated cost to the grower or processor associated with any alternatives proposed.

(b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—For each of the fiscal years 2005 through 2009, there is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Agriculture $5,000,000 to carry out this section.

SEC. 302. NATIONAL SPECIALTY CROP RESEARCH PROGRAM.

Section 1672(e) of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 5925(e)) is amended by adding at the end of the following new paragraph:

''(45) SPECIALTY CROP RESEARCH.—Research and extension grants may be made under this section for the purpose of improving the efficiency, productivity, and profitability of specialty crop production in the United States.''.

SEC. 303. SPECIALTY CROP COMMITTEE.

The National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 is amended by inserting after section 1408 (7 U.S.C. 3123) the following new section:

''SEC. 1408A. SPECIALTY CROP COMMITTEE.

''(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004, the executive committee of the Advisory Board shall establish, and appoint the initial members of, a permanent specialty crops committee that will be responsible for studying the scope and effectiveness of research, extension, and economics programs affecting the specialty crop industry.

''(b) MEMBERS.—Individuals who are not members of the Advisory Board may be appointed as members of the specialty crops committee. Members of the specialty crops committee shall serve at the discretion of the executive committee.

''(c) ANNUAL COMMITTEE REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the establishment of the specialty crops committee, and annually thereafter, the specialty crops committee shall submit to the Advisory Board a report containing the findings of its study under subsection (a). The specialty crops committee shall include in each report recommendations regarding the following:

''(1) Measures designed to improve the efficiency, productivity, and profitability of specialty crop production in the United States.

''(2) Measures designed to improve competitiveness in research, extension, and economics programs affecting the specialty crop industry.

''(3) Programs that would—

''(A) enhance the quality and shelf-life of fresh fruits and vegetables, including their taste and appearance;

''(B) develop new crop protection tools and expand the applicability and cost-effectiveness of integrated pest management;

''(C) prevent the introduction of foreign invasive pests and diseases;

''(D) develop new products and new uses of specialty crops;

''(E) develop new and improved marketing tools for specialty crops;

''(F) enhance food safety regarding specialty crops;

''(G) improve mechanization of production practices; and

''(H) enhance irrigation techniques used in specialty crop production.

''(d) CONSIDERATION BY SECRETARY.—In preparing the annual budget recommendations for the Department of Agriculture, the Secretary shall take into consideration those findings and recommendations contained in the most-recent report of the specialty crops

committee that are adopted by the Advisory Board.

''(e) ANNUAL REPORT BY SECRETARY.—In the budget material submitted to Congress by the Secretary in connection with the budget submitted pursuant to section 1105 of title 31, United States Code, for a fiscal year, the Secretary shall include a report describing how the Secretary addressed each recommendation of the specialty crops committee described in subsection (d).''.

TITLE IV—PEST AND DISEASE RESPONSE FUND

SEC. 401. PEST AND DISEASE RESPONSE FUND.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established on the books of the Treasury an account to be known as the ''Pest and Disease Response Fund''. There shall be deposited into the Fund any proceeds received by the Secretary of Agriculture as reimbursement for services provided by the Secretary using amounts in the Fund.

(b) AVAILABILITY.—Amounts in the Fund shall remain available until expended.

(c) USE OF FUND.—In implementing the Animal Health Protection Act (7 U.S.C. 8301 et seq.) and the Plant Protection Act (7 U.S.C. 7701 et seq.), the Secretary of Agriculture shall have complete discretion regarding the use of amounts in the Fund to support emergency eradication and research activities in response to economic and health threats posed by pests and diseases affecting agricultural commodities.

(d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—For each of the fiscal years 2005 through 2009, there is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Agriculture $1,000,000 for deposit in the Fund.

SEC. 402. IMPORT AND EXPORT REGULATION REVIEW.

(a) PEER REVIEW.—The Secretary of Agriculture shall enter into an agreement with the National Plant Board to obtain a peer review of the procedures and standards that govern the consideration of import and export requests under section 412 of the Plant Protection Act (7 U.S.C. 7712). The peer review shall be consistent with the guidance by the Office of Management and Budget pertaining to peer review and information quality.

(b) ELEMENTS OF REVIEW.—The peer review required by subsection (a) shall address, at a minimum—

(1) the preparation of risk assessments; and

(2) the sufficiency, type, and quality of data that should be submitted to the Secretary of Agriculture.

(c) SUBMISSION OF RESULTS.—The results of the peer review conducted under subsection (a) shall be submitted to the Secretary and Congress not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 403. MAINTENANCE OF FREDERICKSBURG INSPECTION TRAINING CENTER.

For each of the fiscal years 2005 through 2009, there is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Agriculture $1,500,000 for the maintenance of the Agricultural Marketing Service inspection training center in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. OSE) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. OSE).

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

(Mr. OSE asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks, and include extraneous material.)

Mr. Speaker, I will include in the RECORD at this point an exchange of letters between the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Ways and Means regarding H.R. 3242.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS,
Washington, DC, October 6, 2004.

Hon. BOB GOODLATTE,
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture, Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN GOODLATTE: I am writing concerning H.R. 3242, the ''Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004,'' which is scheduled for floor consideration today.

As you know, the Committee on Ways and Means has jurisdiction over matters concerning the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR). Section 301 of the introduced bill establishes at least one position within the USTR having sole responsibility over trade matters concerning specialty crops, and thus falls within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means.

Because you have removed this provision during Committee action, and in order to expedite this legislation for floor consideration, the Committee will forgo action on this bill. This is being done with the understanding that it does not in any way prejudice the Committee with respect to the appointment of conferees or its jurisdictional prerogatives on this or similar legislation.

Thank you for your letter which confirms this understanding with respect to H.R. 3242, and I would ask that a copy of our exchange of letters on this matter be included in the Congressional Record during floor consideration.

Best regards,

BILL THOMAS,
Chairman.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Washington, DC, October 4, 2004.

Hon. WILLIAM M. THOMAS,
Chairman, House Committee on Ways and Means, Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: I would like to take this opportunity to share with you a copy of H.R. 3242 as amended and passed by the Committee on Agriculture. As you know, the Committee on Ways and Means received an additional referral of this legislation and I am respectfully requesting that this legislation be discharged from your committee. This legislation, sponsored by Representative OSE, would ensure an abundant and affordable supply of nutritious fruits, vegetables, and other speciality crops for the American consumers and international markets by enhancing the competitiveness of the United States-grown speciality crops, and for other purposes.

As the committee of primary jurisdiction, on September 30, 2004, the Committee on Agriculture favorably reported this legislation by an affirmative voice vote. As this bill prepares to move to the floor I am asking for your discharge to move this legislation forward.

This discharge in no way affects your jurisdiction over the subject matter of the bill and it will not serve as precedent for future referrals. In addition, should a conference on the bill be necessary, I would support your request to have the Committee on Ways and Means represented on the conference committee. I would also include this letter and any response in the bill report filled by the Committee on Agriculture.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter and look forward to working with your committee in the future.

Sincerely,

BOB GOODLATTE,
Chairman.

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

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

As my colleagues know, there are over 250 specialty crops produced throughout the United States, from blueberries in Maine to pineapples in Hawaii, potatoes in Idaho to pecans in Texas. In 2003, fruits, vegetables and tree nuts earned U.S. farmers close to $30 billion in sales at the farm gate alone.

As markets for fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops become more global, it is becoming increasingly difficult for U.S. growers to compete against heavily subsidized foreign producers in both domestic and foreign markets.

H.R. 3242 has been a long-time coming and serves as a good first step towards addressing the needs of the specialty crop grower through Federal policy changes in both domestic and international trade issues.

These issues will no doubt continue to be discussed and debated as we prepare for the 2007 farm bill. Writing a farm bill is truly an exercise in balancing the equities between all commodity groups, and when the committee begins its deliberations on the next farm bill, this will provide a solid foundation upon which to construct the provisions dealing with specialty crops.

Let me take this opportunity to thank my colleague, the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. CASE) for his thoroughness and hard work to ensure that the unique products from his State are included within the scope of this bill.

I would also like to thank the gentleman from California (Mr. OSE) and the gentleman from California (Mr. DOOLEY) for their hard work and attention with this endeavor. They have worked closely with the U.S. specialty crop growers to identify various areas of Federal agricultural policy that should be improved to promote the competitiveness of this diverse industry throughout the United States.

It is important that we have a strong domestic specialty crop industry. I encourage my colleagues to support H.R. 3242.

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

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

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

Mr. OSE. Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize the able assistance of certain members, both majority and minority staffs, specifically Brent Gattis and Elizabeth Parker on the majority staff, and Ms. Lisa Kelley on the minority staff.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the United States speciality crop industry; an industry united behind a strong beginning to what will eventually become great changes in the history of Federal agricultural policy. I rise to support H.R. 3242 and a united specialty crop industry.

This industry is comprised of fruits and vegetables, nuts and nursery crops as well as many other agricultural niche markets. This industry represents the largest farm gate value in the country, $58.7 billion according to USDA's Economic Research Service. It also represents the largest nutritional value in the Nation, providing over 60 percent of the recommended daily servings for the United States. This industry does not receive price support payments and is frequently subjected to foreign price support mechanisms. Due to the industry's diverse array of products, the specialty crop industry in the United States faces a higher number of emerging pests and diseases every month than any other market in the world. This problem is compounded by frequent trade restrictions and the imposition of sanitary and phytosanitary barriers placed on our commodities to protect other countries from the very pests we are attempting to keep out of our borders. Despite these sweeping problems, the growers, shippers, and packers remain committed to participating in this vital agricultural sector.

For these reasons I introduced H.R. 3242, along with my colleague, CAL DOOLEY. This bill seeks to expand on successful domestic policies, not by undermining our neighbors here at home, but by beating back the competition that seeks to crush our domestic producers. The concepts contained within H.R. 3242 are about exporting product; the movement of product out of the United States, to meet the global competition head on. To liberalize trade outside the boundaries of the United States and within, our domestic producers must be given the proper tools to compete. A viable specialty crop industry is imperative to maintaining the concept of liberalized trade.

The future of U.S. agriculture, both at home and abroad is entirely dependent on the industry as a whole cooperating and communicating to build successful Federal policies together. Fighting here at home amongst ourselves diminishes the strength of a U.S. domestic policy and makes us vulnerable to our competitors who view this as weakness. This industry must learn to beat back competitors together, accomplish objectives together, and ultimately take back the market share that has been lost.

This is a small step, however significant to giving a sector of the industry the opportunity to compete globally, export internationally, and create or expand niche markets here at home. H.R. 3242 also provides a venue for an exchange of ideas on different levels of success in all areas of agriculture. This bill that I have offered here today seeks to lay a foundation for success for all of our producers.

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

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from California (Mr. FARR).

Mr. FARR. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me time.

I want to thank the sponsors of this bill, the gentleman from California (Mr. DOOLEY) and the gentleman from California (Mr. OSE), for introducing H.R. 3242, of which I am an original cosponsor.

I stand as the representative of the most productive agricultural land in the world. It is in the State of California, and it is the Central Coast Valley. We produce what this bill is talking about, specialty crops.

Specialty crops are essentially those crops that we eat every day in salads, the lettuce, the artichokes, the strawberries, the grapes. We grow flowers. We grow everything that is not essentially in the commodity world, and we grow that just with market forces; that is, if there is not a good price for the crop, the farmer loses.

So what this bill does is bring the specialty crop, which frankly last year made more money than the commodity crops did, and California being the leading State, and almost all of the agriculture in California is in specialty crops, it is a remarkably important bill for our State and for all the people of the country who are in farming in specialty crops, as the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) pointed out.

Our specialty crops have no price supports. There are no direct payments. There are no marketing loans. There are no countercyclical payments. All we are asking for in this bill is for some help with research money and market promotion.

I supported the bill in its original form, and I am a little disappointed the way it has come to the floor. Nonetheless, it is a step in the right direction.

The authorization for expenditure in this bill is $43 million, compared to what is authorized to the commodity crops which is $12 to $13 billion. So the message here, and I know that it is late at night, but I hope that the agriculture community will see that we, for a long time, have been a part of the big family of agriculture.

This is the time when we are raising the flag to say that the specialty crops out there need some help, and I am, as appropriator, looking forward to getting the support of everybody who supports this bill, to getting money appropriated for this program and hopefully moving in the direction ahead to raise the authorization to a much higher standard and to appropriate a great deal of money. I hope that we do not have a battle in agriculture, where we have to rob Peter to pay Paul. Nonetheless, the growing markets in the world are in the specialty crops, and as I said, the sales of specialty crops last year exceeded that of commodity crops.

So I thank the members of the Committee on Agriculture for bringing this bill to the floor. I look forward to working with them as an appropriator, and it is a step in the right direction.

I thank very much the gentleman from California (Mr. OSE), and I thank very much the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM).

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

I am familiar with the marvelous bounty of the previous speaker's district, and I understand his concern. I welcome his cosponsorship of this bill because it has been an important part of our success.

I also want to make sure that all parties know the integral part that the chairman and the ranking member played in getting this bill to this point. They have been most accommodating in providing us with guidance and insight as to the art of the possible, and I think we have achieved that.

I know that everybody on the committee when we had markups spoke very positively about the days ahead, as we work together within the agricultural family so that all of our producers have the opportunity to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, I have no additional speakers, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, encourage the passage of H.R. 3242, and I yield back the balance of my time.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. OSE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 3242, the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act is a step in the right direction in promoting profitable agribusiness in the United States that incorporates responsible land use and levels the playing field for producers.

Specialty Crop production is big business in Oregon, accounting for $905 million a year in revenue for the State of Oregon. There are over 30,000 producers of specialty crops in Oregon, dozens of processing/packing companies, and over 250 vineyards.

These specialty crops, which are not currently subsidized by the Federal Government, stand in stark contrast to sugar, cotton, and the other major crops that cost taxpayers billions of dollars each year and hamper the economies of developing nations.

Oregon has been a pioneer in maintaining an urban growth boundary that preserves valuable farmland that can be used to raise these niche climate crops that have a growing demand, both domestically and internationally, Not only does this benefit the Oregon economy, but our world famous pears, wines, berries, hazelnuts, and other specialty crops bring communities together in farmers market settings that benefit 64 communities in Oregon.

I urge my colleagues to usher in a new era of responsible crop production and vote for H.R. 3242.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 3242, the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act of 2004.

The specialty crop sector is comprised of a diverse group of commodities produced across the Nation and is a vital portion of our agricultural community. Because of their hard work, Americans have access to a healthful and wholesome diet which includes fruits and vegetables. The 6th District of Virginia, which I represent, is home to a wide variety of these

producers. They are part of the larger specialty crop sector, which makes the United States the second largest importer and exporter of fruits, nuts, vegetables and other horticultural products.

I would like to take the opportunity to commend Mr. OSE of California for his commitment to the fruit and vegetable sector. His hard work with the industry, as well as his colleagues here in Congress, has been fundamental to moving this bill forward. Mr. OSE has diligently represented his constituents and I am sure they will miss his leadership upon his retirement.

H.R. 3242 is the culmination of many months of hard work in developing a consensus document. While the markup of this legislation proceeded quite smoothly, it did outline some issues that need additional attention.

However, it is clear from the quality of the discussion among Committee Members, that we understand the importance of the specialty crop sector in production agriculture.

I believe this bill represents a first step in what will undoubtedly be a lengthy conversation leading up to the next Farm Bill. Some issues in this bill will likely be revisited as we proceed forward with this process. For example, I still have some reservations about the block grant system and whether or not it is the best way to address the long term goals of the agriculture community. However, I remain open to further consideration of this point and I believe this is a good faith effort to begin the conversation about improving the competitiveness of specialty crop producers in the context of the Farm Bill.

Again, I'd like to thank Mr. OSE for his commitment to this complex effort and would like to reiterate my support for passage of H.R. 3242.

Mr. CARDOZA. Mr. Speaker I rise in support of H.R. 3242, the ''Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act''.

While I remain concerned about the funding levels—my colleagues from California, Mr. OSE and Mr. DOOLEY, must be commended for their dedication and hard work over the past year on this legislation to bring the specialty crop industry long overdue recognition from Congress.

I especially want to mention my strong support for provisions in the bill that address methyl bromide use by specialty crop growers. Continued use of methyl bromide as a fumigant is of utmost importance to a number of crops in my district and throughout California and I greatly appreciate the House Agriculture Committee bringing this issue to the forefront of the debate.

As you may know there are over 250 specialty crops produced in the United States and the industry as a whole is vitally important to the continued prosperity of our farm economy. In 2002, specialty crops had a collective value of nearly $52 billion or about 53 percent of the value of all agricultural crops. Their farm-gate value continues to rise as growers throughout the United States consistently produce the most abundant, highest quality crops of their kind in the world.

Currently however, specialty crops do not enjoy the same support from the Federal Government as do traditional ''program'' crops. Their main source of government assistance is not through marketing loans, direct payments, or counter-cyclical payments but instead they are supported—albeit in much smaller proportions—through programs like the Market Access Program, conservation programs like EQUIP, and through research funding.

The honest truth is that the majority of the specialty crop industry does not want a traditional subsidy program as cotton, corn, rice and others enjoy. Instead, they simply desire a seat at the table and recognition for their hard work and contribution to the farm economy. H.r. 3242 does just that, it improves upon previous Farm Bill programs aimed at specialty crops and proposes a reinvigorated block grant program that will allow each State Department of Agriculture to apply for, and administer, marketing assistance programs tailored specifically to the needs of their respective crops.

This legislation could not come at any better time. As many of you know, specialty crop growers across the United States are currently in the midst of an industry crisis. They are facing a number of challenges in international trade, caused by lack of market access, rapidly increasing import competition and efforts by our trading partners to keep our products out of their markets. Additionally, our foreign competitors routinely employ considerably cheaper labor and liberally use pesticides that are banned here at home.

In my home State of California, the situation worsens. Growers are constantly dealing with new environmental regulations, which often require costly compliance measures such as purchasing new equipment and machinery or applying for Federal and State permits. Furthermore, the cost of land, water, labor and pesticides are significantly higher in California compared with other larger specialty crop States. It is no wonder that prime agricultural land is disappearing at such a rapid rate, right before our eyes.

H.R. 3242 will finally direct Federal support to specialty crop growers in a proactive manner, to promote consumption of specialty crops at home and abroad and increase the competitiveness of growers in the aggressive global market.

One of the key components to H.R. 3242 is Title 1, the Specialty Crop Block Grant program. In 2001, Congress approved a block grant program from which California received roughly $64 million and one of the first things I did as a member of Congress was to convene a forum of California's specialty crop industry to determine how the program was implemented and what the benefits were. The results were outstanding—milk vending machines were placed in schools, the California Grown program was a success, research programs for pest disease and prevention were completed and countless other important programs were funded for the first time in decades. Block grants worked in California and they will work in the United States but they only work if we adequately fund them.

There is no doubt in my mind that my colleague from California, Mr. OSE, fought the good fight to retain the full authorization included in the original Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act but the bill we are voting on tonight falls pathetically short of what is needed for this industry. The original H.R. 3242 allocated $470 million for the specialty crop block grant program, a number that may seem substantial at first but that one that is dwarfed by the billions of dollars spent annually on program crops. It is unfortunate that important legislation such as H.R. 3242 was not adequately funded and I remain committed to rectifying this inequity in the future.

Regardless of my concerns, I will be support H.R. 3242 tonight. I firmly believe that H.R. 3242 is an important first step in acknowledging the strength and important of our Nation's specialty crop industry and I urge my fellow members of the House of Representative to join me in approving this important legislation.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 3242, the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act of 2004, which is intended to improve Federal agricultural policy in order to ensure that American consumers continue to have access to an abundant and affordable supply of nutritious fruits, vegetables, nuts, and other speciality crops. I thank Mr. OSE, Mr. DOOLEY, and House Agriculture Committee Chairman GOODLATTE for their efforts to develop this legislation.

This legislation is important to my constituents in the 22nd Congressional District of California, who collectively produce agricultural products with a farm gate value in excess of $3 billion, with specialty crops accounting for more than two-thirds of that value. Unlike other crops and many of their foreign competitors, U.S. specialty crop growers do not receive direct government support despite the fact that they face increased competition from imports; since 1995, imports of fruits, vegetables, and nuts have increased 80 percent, from $4.6 billion to $7.4 billion in 2002.

It is important to note that during the same period of time, while U.S. exports of fruits, vegetables, and nuts have increased since 1995, they have only increased 17 percent, from $5.2 billion to $6 billion. Moreover, U.S. producers continue to encounter sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) barriers when they seek to export their goods to foreign markets. Accordingly, in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means, I am extremely interested in efforts to open and expand foreign markets through the reduction of SPS barriers and the negotiation of multilateral and bilateral trade agreements.

H.R. 3242 seeks to assist U.S. specialty crop growers by authorizing funding that could be used by State departments of agriculture to create consumer demand for specialty crops, enhance food safety efforts, and to support production-related research. H.R. 3242 also seeks to help U.S. producers break down SPS barriers and reduce the number of pending export petitions for agriculture goods. With regard to those pending export petitions, I look forward to working with Chairman GOODLATTE to ensure that the process is more transparent so that Congress can enhance its ability to conduct oversight.

H.R. 3242 is strongly supported by over thirty organizations, including the Western Growers Association, Wine Institute, California Table Grape Commission, California Farm Bureau Federation, California Winegrape Growers Association, United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, and Sunkist Growers. I encourage my colleagues to support H.R. 3242.

Mr. CASE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my strong support for H.R. 3242, the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004. I am a proud co-sponsor of this bipartisan bill, and I congratulate its author, Congressman OSE, and his staff for this significant accomplishment.

I represent a rural agricultural district spread over the 7 inhabited islands of Hawai'i, where all of our crops are specialty crops. Except for sugarcane, the great majority of Hawai'i's crops are not grown in any other State, nor are they the traditional Farm Bill ''program crops.'' Therefore, programs to assist Hawai'i's specialty crop producers of crops like pineapple, tropical flowers, coffee, algae, cacao, and vanilla are very limited. And even though we have crop insurance programs for only two crops—macadamia nuts and nursery crops (fewer than any other State)—we are not designated as one of the States underserved by crop insurance programs.

For these and other reasons, my State receives less Federal support for agriculture as a percentage of the value of its agriculture than any other State. At the same time, we face unique challenges due to our distance from markets, quarantine requirements, and a transition from plantation to small-scale diversified agriculture. This transition has been extremely painful for many who traditionally were employed in good agricultural jobs in sugar or pineapple as well as for our rural island economies. I requested assignment to the House Agriculture Committee during my first full term in Congress to do what I can to enhance the future of agriculture in my State and to see that my State receives its fair share of assistance.

For this reason, I come to the floor today to extend a sincere mahalo to Chairman GOODLATTE and Ranking Member STENHOLM and their staffs for their assistance in ensuring that Hawai'i's specialty crops, from coffee to ginger root to kava, will be in fact be covered by this worthy bill.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. OSE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3242, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 0145

HOMELESS VETERANS ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2004

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4248) to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make grants to expand or modify existing comprehensive service programs for homeless veterans, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 4248

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 ''Homeless Veterans Assistance Act of 2004''.

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2005.

Section 2013 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking ''$75,000,000'' in paragraph (4) and inserting ''$99,000,000''.

SEC. 3. PERMANENT AUTHORITY FOR SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO OPERATE SEXUAL TRAUMA COUNSELING PROGRAM.

Section 1720D(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1), by striking ''During the period through December 31, 2004, the'' and inserting ''The''; and

(2) in paragraph (2), by striking '', during the period through December 31, 2004,''.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MARIO DIAZ-BALART of Florida). Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume, and I rise in strong support of H.R. 4248, as amended, the Homeless Veterans Assistance Act of 2004.

I point out to my colleagues that this legislation builds on the historic law signed by President Bush, the Homeless Veterans Assistance Act of 2001. I also want to point out to my colleagues and remind them that as we wrote those provisions and held several hearings to ascertain the need, the best practices, the policies that are more likely to work to try to mitigate the problem of homelessness, all of us, on both sides of the aisle, were utterly struck by the large number of veterans who were indeed homeless. The number that seemed to be most accurate at the time was something on the order of 275,000 homeless veterans on any given night.

Many of these men, some are women, but most are men, had post-traumatic stress disorder or some problem with alcohol or drugs or both or all three. We decided working with the VA, working with the NGOs, with the VSOs, Veterans Service Organizations, and others, to devise legislation that would comprehensively try to mitigate and hopefully end this terrible problem of homelessness among our veterans.

The good news is that the number, and it is still unconscionably high, has dropped precipitously over the last several years since enactment of the law. Secretary of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Tony Principi, testified at the beginning of this year that he believes that the number has dropped to about 200,000. Still too high, but far less than the 275,000, again, on the streets on any given night.

The legislation we have before us is a bipartisan piece of legislation, and I want to thank my good friend, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), who has played a key role in working with us on this. I also want to thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ), who has also played a very important role, and the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SIMMONS), the chairman of our Subcommittee on Health, and all of the Members who have tried to contribute to make this an important piece of legislation.

Let me point out to my colleagues specifically on the legislation that the VA's Homeless Grant and Per Diem program is authorized to provide competitive grants to community-based, including faith-based, organizations that offer transitional housing or service centers for homeless veterans. This program has proven to be the most economical, flexible, and innovative method to provide time-limited or transitional housing with supportive services for homeless veterans in all 50 States and the District of Columbia. Over 6,000 transitional housing beds are now available to veterans through the grant and per diem program.

In 2003, 66 percent of the veterans discharged from these programs were discharged to either independent housing or residential program housing, and 43 percent of all treatment episodes were documented as successful. This successful rate is the highest combined level of success ever achieved and ever recorded and remarkable, given the serious psychiatric disorders or substance abuse problems that often challenge recovery for homelessness.

The current authority for the grant and per diem program expires on September 30, 2005. In testimony before the Subcommittee on Health earlier this year, however, the administration stated that the total amount of grants made under this program was expected to exceed the current $75 million authorization in fiscal year 2005. To meet this growing demand for services for homeless veterans, the President's budget proposal requested an increase in the authorized level from $75 million to $100 million for the 4 years. Section 2 of H.R. 4248, as amended, would increase the authorization to $99 million for 2005. It will be up to the next Congress to extend the authorization beyond its September 30 expiration date.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003, the VA reported that more than 31,000 males and 27,000 female veterans responded to relevant screenings indicating unwanted sexual experiences that occurred during their military service time. Under current law, the authority to provide sexual trauma counseling for eligible veterans expires on December 31 of this year. H.R. 4248, as amended, would recognize the continuing need for these programs within the VA by permanently authorizing the counseling and treatment authority.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all the Members again who have worked on this.

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

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume, and I rise in support of the Homeless Veterans Assistance Act of 2004.

Let me first of all take this opportunity to thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), our chairman, for his activities in this area end his support of this particular piece of legislation.