

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 909, the gentleman from California (Mr. CARDOZA) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. CARDOZA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, my district in California has been especially hard hit by the current economic crisis. Even if nationwide indicators begin to reveal a healthier national economy in the coming months, it is clear that my district and others in California's Central Valley region will suffer from severe economic underdevelopment for years to come. The 18th Congressional District's struggling economy is the reason I continue to try to use every available opportunity to push for amendments and legislation that will spur job creation and economic development and provide relief to the hardest-hit communities in the country. The Bureau of Labor Statistics ranks the metro area of Merced, Modesto, and Stockton with some of the highest unemployment rates in the Nation. All three are above 15 percent, and all three well above the national unemployment rate of 10.2 percent.

My amendment simply provides a little more direction during the grant writing process by including unemployment rates in the criteria used to evaluate these various grant applications. This will provide a little extra help to communities like Los Banos and Merced to maintain and improve their fire protection services. These and many other cities in my district and across the country have critical needs that they cannot meet under the current financial stress that they are having. Instead of hiring additional personnel and boosting employment, they are forced to lay off valuable employees and risk the safety of their communities.

I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this commonsense amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of Nebraska. Mr. Chairman, I rise to claim time in opposition to the amendment. Although I am not necessarily opposed to this, I do have some concerns.

The Acting CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from Nebraska is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. SMITH of Nebraska. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This amendment would require that local unemployment rates be considered as a factor in awarding grants to fire departments. While I understand the current state of the economy should make this a concern in bills we consider, the Fire grant program has, since its inception 8 years ago, awarded grants competitively based upon the potential of the applicant's proposal to enhance a fire department's ability to

respond to fires and related hazards. I am somewhat concerned that this change may result in an upset in the delicate balance of consideration that has been achieved over the years.

The factors used by FEMA in evaluating these proposals have been carefully developed and refined in consultation with national fire service organizations. They include, for example, a department's geographic response area, its population served, unique hazard vulnerabilities, and its budgetary situation. All of these factors directly impact the department's ability to respond to hazards and, thus, are appropriate criteria.

I believe the gentleman's amendment is well intentioned, but I am concerned that the unemployment rate of the locality a department protects is simply not directly related to fire hazards or the department's ability to respond to them. While a fire department's operating budget could potentially be indirectly impacted by a poor local economy that impacts tax revenues, this factor is already explicitly noted in the legislation based on need.

Further, I would caution generally against the practice of Congress dictating the specific criteria to be used by FEMA in making awards. This bill codifies consideration of high-level factors that were developed by the fire service and are currently used by FEMA, but it does not attempt to incorporate new ones based on particular interests. If we begin to open up this program to congressional direction of this sort, we risk adding a level of prescription that could transform the current highly competitive process to one driven by interests unrelated to the needs of the fire service.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CARDOZA. Mr. Chairman, I will respond to my friend and colleague that we have taken and watered this language down so that it applies to all areas. Severe unemployment is only one of many criteria that can be considered and only when the situation is a desperate situation.

We talked about our area in central California being the Katrina of California where we have such devastating consequences that we may not be able to meet some of our fire needs in our communities as they just collapsed financially. So if we find situations where we're not meeting the fire protection needs of those communities, we think that it's very important. This has just become one of many criteria in evaluating these grants. Not the sole criteria, not the most important criteria, but certainly to allow those individuals who are making the decisions to just take this into consideration. That's the purpose of my amendment.

The communities of Merced and Los Banos, in particular, have contacted my office, indicating that this is something they feel is a necessary imperative. But I can imagine cities across the country—Miami, Detroit, other places—where they may find them-

selves in similar kinds of economic situations. It might be your State by the time this bill becomes law.

So I would just say that I think it's something that is important for everyone to have as a capability to be taken into consideration. It's not something that will override the other considerations that the gentleman has outlined.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of Nebraska. Mr. Chairman, I certainly want to be sensitive to the economic conditions that hit some parts of the country harder than others, and I want to be mindful of the wise use of resources at the Federal level. I don't want to get into other policies that might impact our economy in any a very negative way. I don't have enough time to do that right now. But I certainly hope that we can arrive at good policy decisions today and down the road so that we don't stand in the way of the wise use of government and taxpayer resources.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. CARDOZA). The amendment was agreed to.

Mr. GORDON of Tennessee. Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee do now rise.

The motion was agreed to.

Accordingly, the Committee rose; and the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. JACKSON of Illinois) having assumed the chair, Mr. SERRANO, Acting Chair of the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, reported that that Committee, having had under consideration the bill (H.R. 3791) to amend sections 33 and 34 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974, and for other purposes, had come to no resolution thereon.

□ 1415

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken later.

WELCOMING INDIAN PRIME MINISTER MANMOHAN SINGH

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 890) welcoming the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh, to the United States.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 890

Whereas the Republic of India achieved its independence from the British Empire on