

And, secondly, the idea in this bill comes from the Clinton administration from 20–25 years ago. It was part of Al Gore's reinventing government initiative. So it has a bipartisan history that goes back decades. Emotional diatribes against the President, I think, are not germane to what this bill is really all about.

I would like to conclude, Mr. Speaker, by pointing out that this also has strong environmental protections. In no way is any environmental law eroded, and it does not allow those who wish to pursue title transfer to do so unless they adhere to Federal environmental statutes. Section 5 of the bill simply states that the Secretary develop a categorical exclusion process consistent with NEPA.

This section is in no way a NEPA waiver, nor is it a congressionally mandated categorical exclusion. This provision simply requires the Secretary to develop a checklist so that the agency can quickly identify any possible conflicts with the Endangered Species Act or any other environmental factors that need to be addressed in the NEPA process.

Section 8 of the bill specifically states that after conveyance into this act, the receiving entity must still comply with all applicable Federal, State, and local laws and regulations.

Finally, I think it is worth noting two additional criteria set forth in this legislation. The transfer must not have an unmitigated, significant effect on the environment, and the receiving entity must operate the property consistent with current operations under the Bureau of Reclamation.

So any thought that there is an evasion of environmental protections is simply false. At this point, I would urge my colleagues to support this commonsense legislation. There are plenty of good safeguards that are put into place on a bipartisan level. This is a bipartisan piece of legislation with decades of support from both parties. I would urge my colleagues to adopt H.R. 3281, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. All time for debate has expired.

Pursuant to House Resolution 985, the previous question is ordered on the bill.

The question is on the engrossment and third reading of the bill.

The bill was ordered to be engrossed and read a third time, and was read the third time.

MOTION TO RECOMMIT

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have a motion to recommit at the desk.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is the gentleman opposed to the bill?

Mr. HUFFMAN. I am in its current form.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Clerk will report the motion to recommit.

The Clerk read as follows:

Mr. Huffman moves to recommit the bill H.R. 3281 to the Committee on Natural Re-

sources with instructions to report the same back to the House forthwith with the following amendment:

At the end of the bill, add the following:
SEC. 10. PROHIBITION AGAINST CONFLICT OF INTEREST.

The Secretary may not relinquish ownership of an eligible facility to a qualifying entity if the entity employed the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of the Interior as a federally registered lobbyist within the past 3 years.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California is recognized for 5 minutes in support of his motion.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, this is the part where I give the usual stipulation that this is the final amendment to the bill which will not kill the bill or send it back to committee. If adopted, the bill will immediately proceed to final passage, as amended.

This amendment is simple. The underlying bill allows the Department of the Interior to dole out publicly owned infrastructure and other public assets to water districts.

My amendment simply says, the Department of the Interior can't give away public assets to a water district if that district has employed the Secretary or the Deputy Secretary of the Interior as a lobbyist in the previous 3 years.

Put another way, the Secretary and Deputy Secretary can't give away public infrastructure to those who recently signed their lobbying paychecks. It should go without saying that this basic ethics requirement is needed, particularly in this administration, where conflicts of interest and corruption run so rampant.

The Department of the Interior has been mired in scandals. The Interior Secretary's actions have triggered at least 10 government investigations. It was also recently revealed that the Secretary and/or his family, are currently in a business partnership to develop a former industrial site with the chairman of the energy company, Halliburton. Halliburton, of course, has a lot of business pending before the Department of the Interior. This is an outrageous conflict of interest, and demonstrates how hollow the President's pledge to drain the swamp has been.

Further, Mr. Speaker, Interior Deputy Secretary Bernhardt, the number two official at the agency, was most recently employed as a Federal lobbyist and had a long list of clients with business before the Department, including clients who stand to gain with the passage of this bill by taking ownership of public infrastructure. We must not allow such blatant conflicts to stand.

□ 1600

It is time for Congress to exercise some oversight over this administration and install some basic rules of accountability and ethics.

If my Republican colleagues are serious about exercising their oversight responsibilities, they will support my

amendment. It simply makes sure that the public's assets cannot be given away to big business and narrow special interests if those same interests employed agency leadership in the past 3 years.

Mr. Speaker, I urge an "aye" vote, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. LAMBORN. Mr. Speaker, I claim the time in opposition to the motion.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Colorado is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMBORN. This motion, Mr. Speaker, is just a procedural gimmick to delay passage of this important bipartisan legislation.

If the amendment made by this motion was of critical importance to the minority, they could have offered this as an amendment when the Natural Resources Committee marked up the bill or filed this amendment with the Rules Committee. They did not in either case.

This bill is a commonsense, bipartisan bill that supports local infrastructure and gives local communities the ability to seek private financing through equity to improve local, vital water infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I urge rejection of the motion to recommit, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the previous question is ordered on the motion to recommit.

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion to recommit.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the yeas appeared to have it.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 4 o'clock and 1 minute p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1645

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. BYRNE) at 4 o'clock and 45 minutes p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, proceedings will resume on questions previously postponed.