

a comprehensive overhaul of the Superfund Program to ensure that we do not perpetuate the brownfields problem across the country. The Congress needs to address liability issues, remedy selection concerns, and other matters that have prevented Superfund from accomplishing more in its 17-year existence. I am both dissatisfied with the current pace of NPL site cleanups convinced that the roots of many of the brownfields problems lie throughout the Superfund statute.

I look to the chairman of the Commerce Committee, Mr. BLILEY, and the chairman of the Finance and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee, Mr. OXLEY, for leadership on comprehensive Superfund reform. These two chairmen ably fought for Superfund reform in the last Congress, but the process unfortunately broke down in the mire of election year politics. I hope that 1997 offers more promise, and that they will consider including the Land Recycling Act as part of their Superfund reform package.

MAKING GOVERNMENT AGENCIES MORE ACCESSIBLE

HON. JAMES P. MORAN

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 27, 1997

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation that will amend the truth in savings law to make Government agencies more accessible to the public.

In recent years State and local governments, along with the Federal Government, have made a conscientious effort to improve the quality and efficiency of their customer services.

Public expectations now focus on convenience, quickness, and completeness when receiving public services.

Given the option, many people would prefer to register their car, pay their water bill, or their real estate and personal property taxes over the telephone with a credit card.

It is quick, convenient, and spares people the time and expense of visiting the motor vehicle office or tax office and spending their time waiting in long lines.

Payment of taxes with credit cards has the added benefit of enabling taxpayers to avoid the stigma and added expense of late tax payments, since the card holder can avoid the late penalty fee and extend their payments out over several months.

This legislation is necessary because the major credit card companies insist that public agencies be treated the same as department stores and restaurants who are prohibited by the credit card companies from passing the cost of credit card transactions directly onto the customer.

Merchants must swallow this cost or pass this cost on to their cash paying customer through higher prices. Few merchants complain because they can raise their prices and encourage their customers to buy more on credit than they could pay with cash.

Public agencies are different.

The Government should not raise everyone's taxes to pay for credit card user fees.

Moreover, State and local law may prohibit or restrict public agencies from absorbing or spreading this cost.

If the Internal Revenue Service were to allow the public to pay taxes with a credit card, it could not absorb the 3-percent service charge per credit card transaction.

Under Mastercard and Visa's policy, the IRS would have to absorb the \$300 million in service charges the two companies would collect on \$10 billion worth of credit card tax payments. State and local government agencies face a similar obstacle.

The legislation I am introducing will remove this obstacle and provide the public a convenient option for conducting their business with public agencies at a minimum of expense.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE UNITED STATES-PUERTO RICO POLITICAL STATUS ACT

HON. DON YOUNG

OF ALASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 27, 1997

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, today, I'm pleased to introduce the United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act (H.R. 856). This landmark legislation will end 100 years of uncertainty for the people of Puerto Rico and allow them to determine the political status for themselves and future generations.

The text of the legislation is identical to the updated version of the bill introduced as H.R. 4281 in the 104th Congress on September 28, 1996. This bill reflects the efforts of many of my colleagues during the last 2 years to formulate a fair, clear, and complete process that will once and for all, provide for the final resolution of Puerto Rico's political status. This is the starting point in the process which is long overdue and the people of Puerto Rico deserve.

The Legislature of Puerto Rico has once again asked the Congress to take action to resolve Puerto Rico's political status. Two weeks ago, a bipartisan delegation from Puerto Rico personally delivered copies of the resolution, asking the 105th Congress—and I quote:

to respond to the Democratic aspirations of the American citizens of Puerto Rico in order to attain a process which will guarantee the prompt decolonization of Puerto Rico, through a plebiscite sponsored by the Federal Government, which shall be held no later than 1998.

This bill answers the Legislature's request by providing for a vote on Puerto Rico's political status before December 31, 1998.

As the only Representative from Alaska—a State that made the transition from territorial status to full self-government—I know first hand that the process does work. This bill provides the process by which Congress and the residents of Puerto Rico define and approve politically acceptable options through a multi-staged Democratic process. This allows for the political will of the United States and Puerto Rico to be determined freely and democratically.

The U.S. Congress and the President have a moral obligation to act so the people of Puerto Rico can finally resolve their status. We are taking action today by re-introducing the United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act. Today marks the beginning of a historic

effort by the Congress to actually solve Puerto Rico's political status.

I appreciate the strong bipartisan support for this legislation by such a large number of Members of Congress during the 104th Congress, and now in the 105th Congress. I particularly want to thank Speaker GINGRICH for his involvement and support of this measure since its inception. Puerto Rico's delegate, Resident Commissioner CARLOS ROMERO-BARCELÓ, has been working side-by-side with the sponsors of this bill, and his cooperation and leadership has been critical to this endeavor. My colleague from New York, JOSÉ SERRANO, has also been particularly supportive and helpful in this process. I also want to thank Chairman GALLEGLY, Chairman GILMAN, Chairman BURTON, Chairman POMBO, and Mr. KENNEDY from Rhode Island for their outstanding efforts to address Puerto Rico throughout the 104th Congress; Chairman SOLOMON of the Rules Committee for his excellent work on the fast track procedures, as well as all the other distinguished co-sponsors for both political parties.

Resolving Puerto Rico's political status is a top priority of the Committee on Resources Oversight Plan for the 105th Congress. The leadership of the House also recognizes this as a matter of the highest priority.

To demonstrate the commitments of this Congress to act quickly on this matter, three hearings have been scheduled on this legislation. The first will be held in Washington, DC, on Wednesday, March 19, 1997 to enable the leaders of the Government of Puerto Rico and the political parties to express their views regarding their preferred status. I will also ask the Clinton administration to present their formal position regarding the legislation at this hearing. In addition, two hearings will be conducted in Puerto Rico, the first in San Juan on April 19 and the second in Mayaguez on April 21.

Those hearings will be dedicated to allow Congress to hear directly from the widest possible spectrum of views of the people of Puerto Rico. No proposal or idea will be excluded from the process, but we intend for Congress to work its will on this question in 1997.

That is what the people of this Nation, including our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico, deserve from the 105th Congress, and in my view that is what the national interest requires us to do.

Following is the text of House Concurrent Resolution 2, enacted by the Puerto Rico Legislature of January 23, 1997, which asks the 105th Congress and the President to sponsor a vote in Puerto Rico on political status before the end of 1998:

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 2

To request of the One Hundred Fifth Congress and the President of the United States of America to respond to the democratic aspirations of the American citizens of Puerto Rico, in order to achieve a process that guarantees the prompt decolonization of Puerto Rico by means of a plebiscite sponsored by the Federal Government, which must be held no later than 1998.

STATEMENT OF MOTIVES

As the present century draws to a close and a new millennium full of hope is about to begin, men of good will must act affirmatively to leave any colonial vestige behind them.