

The toll that these natural disasters took on the private sector placed an extra burden on an already over-bloated government sector and increased the obstacles to our struggle to downsize or right-size.

Even though government revenues are still not where they should be because of the problems yet being faced by our private sector, steps are being put in place to reduce government spending and increase revenues in order to begin to reduce our deficit. Initiatives are also in progress to stimulate our economy.

The bill before us today is an important part of this effort. But there are other important areas in which we look to Congress for support and assistance.

The first is lifting the current cap on the return of Federal excise taxes on Virgin Islands-produced rum, as provided for in our Organic Act, or our working constitution. I cannot overstate the importance of the funds that lifting the rum cap would provide to the Virgin Islands. It is essential that we receive these additional funds if we are to have any success at all in recovering from the current fiscal crisis.

We have certainly appreciated the passage of my bill to revive a watch industry that has been the mainstay of employment for many on the island of St. Croix, and I thank my colleagues, but that will not be enough.

We also need for my colleagues to provide full funding to the territories under the Children's Health Insurance Program or CHIP. Full funding under CHIP to the territories, based on our populations, was proposed by the administration when the program first began. However, decisions made by this body as a result of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, provided us with less than what is necessary to ensure that our children receive medical care, and this causes an undue strain on our already beleaguered local treasury.

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Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ), and I have a bill to provide full funding for the territories under CHIP, and I hope that all my colleagues will support its passage.

There are incipient discussions on several other initiatives for which, when further researched and developed, we may ask later for your assistance and support as well.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2841 would allow the government of the Virgin Islands to avoid a costly two-step financing arrangement. In the absence of such legislation, the outdated limitations in the Government's general obligation authority would cause the government of the Virgin Islands to incur extraordinary costs in excess of \$6 million in order to complete this process.

Additionally, the new authority that the bill provides will expire on December 31, 1999, if the government of the Virgin Islands and the Secretary of the Interior do not reach an agreement on

various fiscal and accountability standards for reducing the islands' deficit. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

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

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume to note that, as the gentlewoman has just pointed out, this is a bill which is intended to provide, we hope, the economic stimulus necessary for the Virgin Islands to do a better job economically in order to benefit the constituents of the gentleman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN).

But beyond that, I would like to say that the gentlewoman has worked so hard to bring this bill to the floor, and I hope that her constituents are mindful of the great effort that she has put into this bill. So, Mr. Speaker, at this time I would just like to commend her for it and ask all my colleagues to support the bill.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume to just thank again the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG), the ranking member of the committee, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER), and my colleague, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON), as well as my staff and the staff of the committee for the hard work in assisting me to get this bill to the floor today.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in favor of H.R. 2841 which provides the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) greater fiscal autonomy. I commend my colleague, Representative DONNA CHRISTENSEN for ensuring that the voices of the people of the USVI are heard in Congress. I also thank Chairman DON YOUNG and Ranking Member GEORGE MILLER for making certain that this legislation moved quickly and without resistance through the Committee.

As is the condition with most other U.S. Territories, such as Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, the USVI is also experiencing financial difficulties. For the past several years, while the U.S. has been able to boast of low unemployment and increased revenues, the U.S. territories have not been as fortunate. For the economies of Guam and the CNMI, which are largely dependent on tourism, our downturn has been a condition of Asia's financial crisis. Other Territories remain diligent and continue to explore new ways to attract businesses to their island. The USVI, however, has been placed at a disadvantage of providing themselves the opportunity for more economic activity.

H.R. 2841 will help with USVI get back on their feet and provide them the opportunity to diversify and expand their economic opportunities. This same authority exists with other U.S. Territories but was not included in USVI's Revised Organic Act. H.R. 2481 corrects this oversight and extends them the ability already enjoyed by the other territories.

I encourage my colleagues to vote in favor of H.R. 2481.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. UPTON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2841, 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.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SAXTON. 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. 2841, S. 944, S. 323, S. 293, and H.R. 1934, the five bills just debated.

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

There was no objection.

PRESERVING AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR SENIOR CITIZENS AND FAMILIES INTO THE 21ST CENTURY ACT

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 202) to restructure the financing for assisted housing for senior citizens and otherwise provide for the preservation of such housing in the 21st Century, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 202

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE AND TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the "Preserving Affordable Housing for Senior Citizens and Families into the 21st Century Act".

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

- Sec. 1. Short title and table of contents.
- Sec. 2. Regulations.
- Sec. 3. Effective date.

TITLE I—CONVERSION OF FINANCING AND REFINANCING FOR SECTION 202 SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY

- Sec. 101. Conversion of financing
- Sec. 102. Prepayment and refinancing.

TITLE II—AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS FOR SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- Sec. 201. Supportive housing for elderly persons.
- Sec. 202. Supportive housing for persons with disabilities.
- Sec. 203. Service coordinators and congregate services for elderly and disabled housing.

TITLE III—EXPANDING HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ELDERLY AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- Subtitle A—Housing for the Elderly
- Sec. 301. Matching grant program.