

DISPENSING WITH CALENDAR WEDNESDAY BUSINESS ON WEDNESDAY NEXT

Mr. CHABOT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the business in order under the Calendar Wednesday rule be dispensed with on Wednesday next.

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

There was no objection.

SENSE OF CONGRESS ON HAGUE CONVENTION ON CIVIL ASPECTS OF INTERNATIONAL CHILD ABDUCTION

Mr. CHABOT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on International Relations be discharged from further consideration of the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 69) expressing the sense of the Congress on the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and urging all contracting states to the Convention to recommend the production of practice guides, and ask for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the concurrent resolution.

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

There was no objection.

The Clerk read the concurrent resolution, as follows:

H. CON. RES. 69

Whereas 20 years ago, the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction was a bold step forward to provide a uniform process for resolving international child abduction cases;

Whereas over the past 2 decades, the Convention has had increasingly important and positive effects and has grown in terms of the number of Contracting States and the level of interest of other nations;

Whereas there has been an increase of multinational marriages and a corresponding increase of international abductions of children by parents;

Whereas as travel becomes faster and easier, and as multinational marriages become more common, the Convention is more significant than ever;

Whereas on 2 occasions, the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children have convened professionals and experts in international child abduction to examine their experiences with the Convention;

Whereas on both occasions, the participants affirmed their overwhelming commitment to the Convention, but were also unified in the conclusion that there are serious shortcomings in its implementation;

Whereas the shortcomings include—

(1) a lack of awareness by policy makers and the general public of the Convention and of the problem of international child abduction, making the successful resolution of cases more difficult;

(2) the fact that, in too many instances, the process for resolving an international child abduction is too slow;

(3) a lack of uniformity in the interpretation of the Convention from nation to nation;

(4) the fact that key exceptions provided in the Convention to ensure reason and common sense have in some cases ceased to be viewed as exceptions, have instead become the rule, and are frequently used as justifications for not returning abducted children;

(5) the increasing difficulty of enforcing access rights for parents under Article 21 of the Convention;

(6) the need of parents for significant personal financial resources to obtain legal representation and proceed under the Convention and, in many places, the lack of assistance for parents who do not have such resources;

(7) a serious lack of training, knowledge, and experience for judges in international child abduction cases, because there are too many courts hearing these cases and in most instances few such cases for each court; and

(8) in many instances, the lack of enforcement of court orders for the return of children; and

Whereas the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children has promised to support an effort to produce practice guides to provide a framework for applying the Convention; Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That—*

(1) it is the sense of the Congress that—

(A) the original intent of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction—to provide a uniform process for resolving international child abduction cases—is more important than ever;

(B) practice guides should be developed for the Convention that build on recognized best practices under the Convention and provide a framework for applying the Convention;

(C) the Convention itself need not be modified;

(D) the practices identified and included in the practice guides should not be legally binding on Contracting States to the Convention and should be based on research and the advice of experts to help ensure the most effective process possible;

(E) the practice guides should be developed in 3 stages: comparative research and consultations, meetings of expert committees to develop drafts, and consideration of the drafts by a future Special Commission; and

(F) the Permanent Bureau of The Hague should organize the process of developing the practice guides; and

(2) the Congress urges all Contracting States to the Convention to adopt a resolution recommending that—

(A) the Permanent Bureau of The Hague produce and promote practice guides to assist in the implementation and operation of the Convention; and

(B) such a proposal to produce practice guides be adopted by the Fourth Special Commission at The Hague in March 2001.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. CHABOT) is recognized for 1 hour.

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

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the distinguished chairman of the Committee on International Relations, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HYDE), for making it possible for the House to consider this resolution on the eve of the Fourth Special Commission on the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

I want to commend the author of the resolution, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. LAMPSON), with whom I have worked very closely on this issue. He has been a real leader, working on be-

half of stolen American children and their left-behind parents.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be a principal Republican cosponsor on this important bipartisan legislation, and I look forward to traveling to The Hague next week to present this resolution to the 60 member countries represented at the Commission.

H. Con. Res. 69 expresses the sense of the Congress on the Hague Convention on the civil aspects of international child abduction and urges all contracting states to the convention to recommend the production of practice guides.

The resolution stresses that providing a uniform process for resolving international child abduction cases is more important than ever, and urges that practice guides be developed for the convention that build on recognized best practices under the convention. Adoption of this resolution today, I believe, will send a strong message to representatives of those Hague Convention signatories who will be meeting over the next several days that the United States Government is serious about insisting that all contracting parties to the Hague Convention comply fully with both the letter and the spirit of their international obligations under the convention. By adopting the practice guides suggested in the resolution, Hague countries can create a better environment for the eventual safe return of abducted children to their custodial parent. The Hague Convention provides for a child that has been abducted to or retained in a country other than his or her country of habitual residence to be speedily returned to the country of habitual residence.

□ 1430

Sadly, the process has not always worked well. The State Department reports that there are at any given time more than 1,000 open cases of American children either abducted or wrongfully retained in a foreign country. Thousands more are thought to go unreported. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children estimates that there are 165,000 parental kidnapping cases each year and that approximately 10 percent involve a parent who has taken a child abroad without permission.

Mr. Speaker, the production and promotion of practice guides as proposed in this thoughtful resolution can provide great assistance in the implementation and operation of The Hague Convention. Last year this House adopted a resolution that I authored with the gentleman from Texas (Mr. LAMPSON) that urged noncomplying countries to take the necessary measures to bring themselves into compliance with The Hague Convention. Let us take another step today to help these stolen children and their left-behind parents. Let us adopt this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. LAMPSON). I also want to