

Act, legislation sponsored by our colleagues along the U.S.-Mexico border, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. HINOJOSA), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BONILLA), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GONZALEZ), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ORTIZ), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ).

The legislation will authorize 14 irrigation improvement projects necessary for the continued viability and prosperity of farmers throughout the lower Rio Grand region. Eight of these projects will improve irrigation in Hidalgo County; three will help Cameron County; others will help Maverick County, El Paso County, and Hudspeth County.

Farmers in the lower Rio Grand Valley are being hit hard by both an international dispute over water obligations with Mexico and a serious 8-year drought, the longest on record in the valley region. For anyone needing proof for this desperation of valley farmers, I advise them to visit the mouth of the Rio Grand River where the flow has ceased to reach the Gulf of Mexico twice in the last 2 years and often only manages a trickle. The land in the lower Rio Grande Valley is among the most fertile, producing cotton, grains, vegetables, citrus, including the legendary pink grapefruit.

However, without water, farmers have accumulated billions in losses and tens of thousands of jobs have been lost. While drought has and always will challenge farmers, those in the lower Rio Grande Valley have had more than 1.5 million acre feet of water, or an incredible 488 billion gallons of water, withheld from them by the Mexican state of Chihuahua since 1992. At the same time, the state of Chihuahua has used this U.S. water to produce crops of their own in the desert. This violation of the 1944 U.S.-Mexico treaty regarding the Rio Grande and Colorado Rivers is admitted by the Mexican authorities and no party claims that the U.S. has ever failed in its reciprocal obligation to provide water to Mexico from the Colorado River.

While I consider Mexico to be a friend and strong ally of the United States, I have consistently argued that the State Department needs to resolve this issue of great importance to the economy of the lower Rio Grande Valley before moving on to other more controversial foreign policy issues between the United States and Mexico.

The matter of Mexico's adherence to the 1944 treaty and mounting water debt should be the Bush administration's top bilateral priority with respect to Mexico. Unfortunately, the administration's efforts to date have been deficient, as has been shown by the recent signing of the wholly inadequate water deal known as Minute 308.

A minute is a clarification to an existing treaty but is not a formal amendment. Signed by the representatives of the United States and Mexican governments to the International

Boundary and Water Commission on June 28, 2002, Minute 308 calls for improved water infrastructure in Mexico and the U.S., but it makes no meaningful attempt to address the mounting water debt that Mexico is accumulating.

Farmers in the lower Rio Grande Valley, while welcoming any attention to this issue, have overwhelmingly rejected Minute 308 as close to useless. I am disappointed that the U.S. representatives to the commission, who were in direct communication with high ranking administration officials, would not force stronger action.

With each passing day of inadequate administration action, the risk increases that this mounting debt will not be repaid, and more and more Texas farmers watch as their crops wither and die under the hot Texas sun.

Mr. Speaker, the twin factors of drought and politics have hit valley farmers hard. All are praying simultaneously for a good rain and a resolution of the dispute before the latest deadline of September 30, 2002. Even if this deadline is met, it will be too late for many. In the meantime, valley farmers will be encouraged that this House is coming to their aid by increasing the irrigation opportunities in the region throughout this legislation before us today. However, the administration needs to hear our debate today and to make sure that we have some water to use in these important projects.

I want to thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. HINOJOSA) for introducing this legislation. I encourage my colleagues to vote "yes" in suspending the rules and passing H.R. 2990, the Lower Rio Grande Valley Water Resources Conservation and Improvement Act.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to offer my full support for passage of HR 2990, the Lower Rio Grande Valley Water Resources Conservation and Improvement Act of 2001. This bill would authorize additional projects critical to the improvement of water quality and infrastructures in South Texas while encouraging the federal government to focus more resources on the border region.

South Texas faces a grave water crisis. Even as counties to the north suffer from flooding that has caused millions of dollars in damage to businesses and homes, the border region suffers from a terrible lack of water. It is evident that we need to take a long, hard look at our water management practices and find new ways to improve our water resources.

In the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, communities continue to battle with an eight-year drought. The land is parched. The crops have died. The Rio Grande River has literally stopped flowing into the Gulf of Mexico. How can I express the seriousness of the situation to my colleagues? The lack of water in South Texas has all but destroyed the way of life for the farmers and ranchers of the region.

During this same time period, Mexico has accumulated a substantial water deficit. Under terms of the 1944 U.S.-Mexico Water Treaty, Mexico now owes us close to 1.7 million acre-feet of water. This is water that could have provided enormous relief to South Texas.

Farmers and water district managers had held out hope that Mexico would release a portion of water owed so they could make it through the summer.

We were recently informed that the Administration had struck a deal with Mexico for the release of a mere 90,000 acre-feet. As South Texans have said, this is too little water, too late. To add insult to injury, the agreement gives Mexico access to substantial loans without requiring a firm payment schedule for water still owed. While we need substantial investment on both sides of the border to improve our water resources, we need Mexico to meet its treaty obligations to offer immediate relief to the parched lands of the Texas Valley.

We have a real opportunity to provide some needed relief today. HR 2990 will direct badly needed resources to South Texas to improve water quality and infrastructure. I ask for my colleagues support of this important bill.

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

Mrs. CUBIN. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CULBERSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Wyoming (Mrs. CUBIN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2990, 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

Mrs. CUBIN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous materials in the RECORD on the six bills just considered: H.R. 4870, H.R. 3258, H.R. 3401, H.R. 3048, H.R. 2990, and H.R. 3917.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Wyoming?

There was no objection.

VETERANS HEALTH CARE AND PROCUREMENT IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2002

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3645) to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for improved procurement practices by the Department of Veterans Affairs in procuring health-care items, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3645

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the "Veterans Health Care and Procurement Improvement Act of 2002".

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

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

Sec. 2. References to title 38, United States Code.