

I have always been a friend and supporter of NASA and the U.S. program. I, like so many other Americans, have relished in the Earth-shaking rumbling of powerful shuttle engines launched from the Kennedy Space Center. The instant illumination of the night sky still sends a rush of excitement throughout the United States. Children and adults alike dream of the day when they will have an opportunity to see our Earth from beyond its atmosphere.

The U.S. space program has done so much for Americans, not just inspiring and educating us on space exploration, but constantly improving our quality of life. The returns on those investments are accrued all around us. Technologies of NASA's space program have had and continue to have a profound effect on the U.S. and its people. Many products utilized in our homes and workplaces and used for health, fitness and recreation are the direct result of space technology spin-offs.

It is important for Congress to be aware of the issues facing NASA when it comes to hiring and retaining the best and brightest minds of the scientific community. NASA's workforce differs significantly from other Federal agencies in that more than 60 percent of its makeup is scientists and engineers. These statistics place NASA in a difficult position as the number of graduates in the physical sciences, both under- and post-graduate, continues to decrease.

The NASA Workforce Flexibility Act allows NASA to suit up and engage in the fierce competition with the private sector for the most qualified candidates, thus allowing it to become more competitive in recruiting and retaining the kind of workforce NASA will need in the 21st century.

But while NASA suits up, so must Congress. We must provide guidance to this important Federal agency to ensure that it is recruiting and signing up the most qualified candidates from all colleges, universities and the private sector.

Our colleague, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE), offered an amendment to the underlying bill in committee that would have reinstated the Minority University and Research Programs as a division after NASA demoted it to program status. The amendment was, unfortunately, defeated. While I have been told that this program has not been stripped of any of its abilities to carry out its mission, I certainly hope that the defeat of this amendment is not the beginning of a striptease.

NASA scholarship opportunities should be equally distributed among institutions of higher education, including minority-serving institutions. Programs such as the one the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) sought to reinstate provide the necessary outreach needed to bring the most qualified and diverse candidates to the table.

Mr. Speaker, despite the progress that has been made, it is critical that

we continue to move forward in diversifying the workplace. Lags have been particularly visible for minorities in the math and physical sciences. Democrats stand united and prepared to work with the majority to further ensure that Federal agencies, NASA included, are held accountable for their recruiting and hiring practices. Agencies must not only make good-faith efforts to recruit, employ, train, promote and retain members of underrepresented groups, but they must also show us results.

Mr. Speaker, I too want to thank the members of the Committee on Science, in particular the gentleman from New York (Chairman BOEHLERT) and the ranking member, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. GORDON), for their incredible work. I also want to thank the members of the Committee on Government Reform, particularly the gentleman from Virginia (Chairman Tom Davis) and the ranking member, the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), for all of their good work.

As I mentioned previously, I support the underlying legislation and I will not oppose the rule. I urge my colleagues to do the same.

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

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, reiterating my support for the underlying legislation as well as the rule, I ask my colleagues to support both.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1035

#### RECESS

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

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 36 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

□ 1055

#### AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART) at 10 o'clock and 55 minutes a.m.

#### NASA FLEXIBILITY ACT OF 2003

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 502 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the Senate bill, S. 610.

□ 1056

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the Senate bill (S. 610) to amend the provision of title 5, United States Code, to provide for workforce flexibilities and certain Federal personnel provisions relating to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and for other purposes, with Mr. ISAKSON in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered as having been read the first time.

Under the rule, the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOEHLERT) and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. GORDON) each will control 20 minutes; and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) each will control 10 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOEHLERT).

Mr. BOEHLERT. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of S. 610 and I urge my colleagues to approve it and send it to the White House for the President's signature.

This measure is a top priority of the entire administration, especially, of course, of the NASA Administrator. We have taken more than long enough to turn the bill into law.

The need for this bill, it seems to me, is beyond dispute. Events of the past year have highlighted NASA's need to attract and retain the best workforce imaginable, and yet NASA is on the brink of losing the talent that it already has.

Within just 5 years, 5 years, fully one-quarter of NASA's workforce will be eligible to retire. It is no wonder that the General Accounting Office has repeatedly cited strengthening human capital as one of NASA's top management challenges. We must stem the tide of the brain drain. S. 610 is a targeted, carefully crafted, moderate approach to giving NASA additional tools to meet that challenge. The bill does not make any radical departures from current law. Rather, it modifies and expands existing workforce authorities so that NASA can compete with the private sector in the labor market. That is just common sense.

Will changes in civil service laws solve all of NASA's workforce problems? Of course not. But NASA will not be better prepared to recruit and retain the workforce it needs if it is competing with one hand tied behind its back, as it is with current law.

This bill began as a proposal from NASA. We went over that proposal with a fine tooth comb, accepted some provisions, rejected others, and modified many more to clarify and target the new authority.

As a result of those negotiations and additional work in the other body, we