

That would be in the interest of the American people.

I feel privileged to be a part of the Subcommittee's efforts. I want to thank you for allowing me to testify here before you today and I will now be glad to answer any questions.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell my colleagues what he said. He is a gentleman who has worked for 30 years on obesity in this country, and he said, "Through working with obese patients, I have learned that the worst thing one can do is to blame an outside force to get themselves 'off the hook,' to say it's not their fault, and that they are a victim. Congress has rightly recognized the danger of allowing Americans to continue blaming others for the obesity epidemic. It is imperative that we prevent lawsuits from being filed against any industry for answering consumer demands. The fact that we are addressing the issue here today is a step in the right direction."

Mr. Speaker, I will tell my colleagues that the Republican House and the Republican Senate are addressing the issues. We are doing those things that not only Members find of interest to people back home, but also in the interest of what is the right thing for America to do.

I feel like what we are doing today is right in line with what all 50 States have and that is a law that says we will not take these fast food restaurants to task, to go and have a lawsuit against them, and the Federal Government, we, as members of Congress, are going to affirm that, to avoid a problem before it becomes one. We have been warned about the problems. We are trying to do aggressive things and the right thing for it.

I support this rule. I support this underlying legislation, and I think that it will win overwhelmingly because this is the best answer.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, we are fat. America is the fattest nation on the planet and getting fatter all the time. It is estimated that as many as one in five Americans is obese, a condition defined as being more than 30 percent above the ideal weight based on height.

Being overweight and obese in the United States occurs at higher rates in racial and ethnic minority populations, such as African Americans and Hispanic Americans, compared with White Americans. Persons of low socioeconomic status within minority populations appear to be particularly affected by being overweight and obese. Also, according to the surgeon general, women of lower socioeconomic status are about 50 percent more likely to be obese than their better-off counterparts.

Obesity is fast becoming our most serious public health problem. Indeed, obesity is linked to disease such as type-2 diabetes, heart disease and certain types of cancer. An estimated 300,000 Americans die each year from fat-related causes, and we spent \$117 billion in obesity-related economic costs just last year, according to U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher.

Congress should consider comprehensive legislation aimed at America's obesity epi-

dem. Instead, Mr. Speaker, here I stand debating a closed rule for a bill that pre-determines that in no plausible circumstance do food companies bear responsibility for their acts.

This bill is so overbroad that it provides immunity even where most would think liability is appropriate.

For instance, as an observant Hindu, Mr. Sharma considers cows sacred. Not surprisingly, Brij Sharma did not eat at fast food restaurants. But in 1990, when McDonald's announced that it was switching from beef fat to "100 percent vegetable oil" to cook its French fries, Mr. Sharma began going to the fast food chain to eat what he believed were vegetarian fries.

Imagine Mr. Sharma's terror when he read in a newspaper the following heading, "Where's the beef? It's in your french fries." He was outraged to learn that McDonald's french fries are seasoned in the factory with beef flavoring before they are sent to the restaurants to be cooked in vegetable oil.

McDonald's has apologized, admitted wrongdoing and agreed to pay more than \$10 million to charities chosen by vegetarian and Hindu plaintiffs. Is it not preposterous that this bill would bail out the fast food industry from liability for wrongdoing such as this? Of course it is.

In addition, this bill is an unnecessary, premature, overly broad affront to our judicial system and to our system of federalism. Congress is preemptively taking away the ability of judges and jurors to consider the particular facts and evidence of cases, and a plaintiff's ability to have his or her day in court.

Mr. Speaker, regardless of one's position on the merits of lawsuits against the industry, the line drawn between the responsibility of an individual end and society's start should be answered by judges and juries, and not by legislators in the pockets of campaign contributors.

This incredibly large portion of legislative junk food, being served to feed Republican special interests, is as unhealthy as the industry it attempts to protect.

I urge my colleagues to oppose this ill-conceived legislation.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, 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.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. REHBERG). Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote is objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

RECORD votes on postponed questions will be taken later today.

STATE JUSTICE INSTITUTE REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2004

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and

pass the bill (H.R. 2714) to reauthorize the State Justice Institute, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 2714

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "State Justice Institute Reauthorization Act of 2004".

SEC. 2. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

Section 215 of the State Justice Institute Act of 1984 (42 U.S.C. 10713) is amended to read as follows:

"AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS

"SEC. 215. There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out the purposes of this title, \$7,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008. Amounts appropriated for each such year are to remain available until expended."

SEC. 3. TECHNICAL AMENDMENTS.

(a) STATUS OF INSTITUTE.—Section 205(c) of the State Justice Institute Act of 1984 (42 U.S.C. 10704(c)) is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(3) The Institute may purchase goods and services from the General Services Administration in order to carry out its functions."

(b) STATUS AS OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES OF THE UNITED STATES.—Section 205(d)(2) of the State Justice Institute Act of 1984 (42 U.S.C. 10704(d)(2)) is amended by inserting ", notwithstanding section 8914 of such title" after "(relating to health insurance)".

(c) MEETINGS.—Section 204(j) of the State Justice Institute Act of 1984 (42 U.S.C. 10703(j)) is amended by inserting "(on any occasion on which that committee has been delegated the authority to act on behalf of the Board)" after "executive committee of the Board".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER) and the gentleman from California (Mr. BERMAN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER).

□ 1200

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2714, the bill currently under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CULBERSON). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Wisconsin?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, Congress established the State Justice Institute as a private nonprofit corporation in 1984. Its purpose is to improve judicial administration in the State courts. SJI accomplishes this goal by providing funds to State courts and to other national organizations or nonprofits that support State courts. SJI also fosters cooperation with the Federal judiciary in areas of mutual concern.

Pursuant to oversight legislation passed in the previous Congress, the