

As the second largest container shipping port in the U.S., the Sound is extremely important to the State and Nation as a whole.

The watershed that feeds the Sound includes several large population centers, but is also home to significant agriculture production, including many specialty crops including raspberries, flower bulbs and vegetable seeds. Agriculture contributes \$5.6 billion to Washington State's economy, establishing its rank in agriculture production as 12th in the Nation.

Unfortunately, the Puget Sound region is undergoing tremendous change as more people move into the region and water quality and soil concerns increase. The bill before us today helps address these environmental concerns by encouraging agricultural producers in the region to adopt voluntary conservation practices.

The bill also requires a comprehensive plan to encourage cooperation among the multiple agencies and landowners in the region. Many farms in the Puget Sound are adjacent to endangered salmon-bearing streams and bear the brunt of protection for these and other endangered species.

These regulatory requirements place significant burden on producers struggling to stay on the land. We must continue to encourage cooperation and proactive partnerships with producers in this region, as well as the other heavily agricultural regions in the country, helping to keep producers on the land and keep the Nation's agricultural economy healthy and diverse.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

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

Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, I yield as much time as he may consume to the gentleman from Washington, (Mr. LARSEN), an original co-sponsor of the bill.

□ 1715

Mr. LARSEN of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN for speaking on behalf of this critical legislation. I want to thank the chairman and the ranking member of the Committee on Agriculture as well for helping bring H.R. 3184 to the floor.

The livelihoods of many families in Washington State depend upon the health and vitality of the Puget Sound. Unfortunately, as we already heard, there is no denying the health of the Puget Sound has been declining. Salmon and other species call the sound home and are either threatened or endangered. Water quality is extremely poor in certain places, and some aquatic species have shown harmful levels of toxins.

Agriculture is a large and important part of the economy in the Puget Sound region, and I represent much of it; and we do not want to see our ag economy decline either. Ag producers face the constant challenge of keeping good ag land in production while being

responsible stewards of the land and of the Puget Sound watershed. That is why the State of Washington and our State's Governor Chris Gregoire have led the charge in pulling together ag producers, business, industry, and local nonprofits and many others to develop long-term strategies to restore the Puget Sound.

However, our State cannot do it alone. This legislation takes a first step, and only a first step, to provide critical Federal support to those efforts by developing a competitive, comprehensive, conservation program to help determine the right conservation planning efforts for local agriculture producers. As well, again, this is only a small piece of the puzzle. Most of that puzzle will come from State and local governments.

These types of efforts have been done or are being done in other areas of the country. The results of comprehensive conservation planning helps ag producers make smart conservation decisions and investments, and, in turn, takes important steps restoring the health of the Puget Sound. This bill will provide the capacity that local conservation districts simply do not have in meeting the unique challenges of this critical watershed.

Ag producers in Washington State have a role to play in protecting the health of the Puget Sound, and they are more than willing to do their part, but we need a comprehensive conservation strategy to get that job done, and that is what H.R. 3184 helps us do. I urge the passage of H.R. 3184 and again thank the chairman and the ranking member of the committee for helping to bring this to the floor.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3184, a bill to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out a competitive grant program for the Puget Sound area to provide comprehensive conservation planning to address water quality.

For generations, Puget Sound has been the most important geographic feature driving human settlement in the region—first Native American communities followed by the 4 million people who now call it home. With 2,500 miles of shoreline and 2,800 square miles of inland marine waters, it is the second largest estuary in the United States after Chesapeake Bay. Puget Sound is environmentally, culturally and economically linked to Washington State's way of life and it is truly one of America's most spectacular bodies of water, with more than 200 species of fish, 25 kinds of marine mammals, 100 species of sea birds as well as clams, oysters and shrimp.

But the health of Puget Sound is in decline—its waters are experiencing the stress of growth and development and its ability to sustain the abundant fishery we've always enjoyed is in doubt. Around the Sound we have detected low levels of oxygen and increasing concentrations of toxic substances in aquatic animals. With the overall health of this great ecosystem in decline, we have launched a cooperative effort involving all of the local government entities around the Sound, as well as the State and Federal governments, to curtail any harmful substances from being introduced

into its waters, to change unwise industrial and agricultural practices and to continue aggressively our research into the causes of pollution in this historically pristine inland sea.

One of our responses must be to encourage innovation and action at the local level and to help local communities recognize the importance of incremental actions in the overall solution. Congressman RICK LARSEN and I have introduced H.R. 3184, the "Puget Sound Watershed Comprehensive Conservation Project Act of 2007." This legislation is supported by all Members of the Washington State congressional delegation. It would authorize a total of \$25 million in grants to assist non-Federal governmental or non-governmental organizations, Tribes, and individuals in implementing land management practices and projects that improve water quality and habitat for fish and wildlife in the Puget Sound watershed.

H.R. 3184 authorizes conservation projects that will target innovative conservation measures where they do the most good. The program is intended to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production.

Mr. Speaker, the Federal government is playing a very important role in restoring the health of Puget Sound, and I believe H.R. 3184 can make a vital contribution to this effort. I urge adoption of the resolution.

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

Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from South Dakota (Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3184.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the bill just adopted.

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

There was no objection.

EXTENSION OF AUTHORIZATION OF SMALL BUSINESS PROGRAMS

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3206) to provide for an additional temporary extension of programs under the Small Business Act and the Small Business Investment Act of 1958 through December 15, 2007, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3206

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