

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arizona.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, the Wells Hydroelectric Project, operated by the Public Utility District in Douglas County, provides electricity to approximately 17,000 customers in Washington State. The central feature of the project is a dam on the Columbia River.

The utility district is in the early stages of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's relicensing process. The project's current license was granted in 1962 and will expire in May 2012. An application for relicensing must be submitted by 2010.

H.R. 523 directs the Secretary of the Interior to sell 662 acres of BLM land within the project boundary to the utility district and requires the district to pay the appraised fair market value of the land.

Importantly, the legislation requires that, even after the conveyance takes place, the Secretary of the Interior will retain authority under the Federal Power Act to place conditions on the utility district's new license, if necessary, to protect the natural resources of the area.

Mr. Speaker, we have worked closely with the sponsor and our minority colleagues on the Natural Resources Committee to improve this legislation. We thank them for that and appreciate it very much.

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

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 523 and yield myself such time as I may consume.

First, I would like to thank Committee Chairman RAHALL and Subcommittee Chairman GRIJALVA for scheduling and for pushing this important legislation. This straightforward bill allows for the conveyance of a few small pieces of public land to the Douglas Public Utility District for fair market value and then dedicates the sales proceeds to improving public access to existing Bureau of Land Management lands in Washington State. This conveyance from one public agency to another will better facilitate the use of this land.

Congressman DOC HASTINGS is also to be commended for his work. He has worked and pushed, and it's great to see this all coming to fruition. Congressman HASTINGS is traveling from his district at this time and cannot be here.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Madam Speaker, I strongly support H.R. 523, legislation I introduced to convey certain Bureau of

Land Management land to the Douglas County Public Utility District in Washington state. The Douglas County PUD operates the Wells Hydropower Project on the Columbia River, in North Central Washington. The PUD manages the Wells Hydroelectric Dam and the associated reservoir for multiple purposes, including power generation, fish and wildlife protection, and recreation. Almost all of the land encompassing the project area is owned by the PUD, with the exception of several small BLM holdings.

Passing this legislation enables the PUD to manage the project in a far more efficient manner. It also allows the BLM to concentrate its limited resources elsewhere, in areas where there are large contiguous blocks of BLM land. It is clear that we can achieve a better and more efficient management of our resources with this land conveyance.

In addition, since the Douglas PUD is a public agency under Washington state law, this conveyance simply moves land from the control of one public agency to the control of another agency. It is also important to note that the Douglas PUD has a stellar reputation as a steward of the environment. They worked diligently with federal and state agencies, tribal governments, and environmental groups to develop a model Habitat Conservation Plan for salmon and steelhead. The PUD also protects other forms of wildlife and provides public access wherever possible.

As my colleagues may recall, similar legislation passed the House last year under suspension. There is one important addition to the legislation this year. H.R. 523 calls for the proceeds of this land sale to be used to improve public access to existing BLM lands in Washington state. I am pleased that I was able to reach a consensus with members of the Natural Resources Committee to ensure that the proceeds from this sale will stay in the state where the land conveyance occurred—my home state of Washington. I am also pleased to note that these funds will go towards increasing the ability of our constituents to access their public lands.

It is my intention to see that these funds go towards projects like the Juniper Dunes Wilderness Area in Washington state. Due to its close proximity to the Tri-Cities, Juniper Dunes is a highly popular recreation area for serious hikers as well as families who are looking for an interesting place to explore with their children. Despite its popularity, it is extremely difficult for the public to visit Juniper Dunes. The Dunes are currently surrounded by private lands. Therefore, in order to visit the public area, one has to cross private property. H.R. 523 gives the BLM the financial resources and the flexibility they need to improve access to Juniper Dunes.

Finally, I am pleased that I was able to work with the Resources Committee to include language clarifying that the BLM will retain authority under the Federal Power Act for the current FERC relicensing of the Wells project. This authority will remain with the BLM until a new license is in place, which is expected in 2012.

I want to thank my colleagues on the Natural Resources Committee, specifically Chairman RAHALL, Ranking Member YOUNG and Subcommittee Chairman GRIJALVA and Subcommittee Ranking Member BISHOP and their staffs for all their hard work on this legislation. H.R. 523 will benefit the Douglas County PUD,

the BLM as well as improve vitally needed public access throughout Washington state. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

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

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GRIJALVA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 523, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK SCHOOL LEASE ACT

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 53) to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to enter into a long-term lease with the Government of the United States Virgin Islands to provide land on the island of Saint John, Virgin Islands, for the establishment of a school, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 53

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 "Virgin Islands National Park School Lease Act".

SEC. 2. LONG-TERM LEASE, VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK, SAINT JOHN, VIRGIN ISLANDS.

(a) *LEASE AUTHORIZED.*—The Secretary of the Interior may lease to the Government of the United States Virgin Islands a parcel of real property, including any improvements thereon, located within the boundaries of Virgin Islands National Park on the island of Saint John, Virgin Islands, as depicted on the map entitled "Virgin Islands National Park School Exchange", numbered 161/80,037, and dated September 19, 2007, for the purpose of providing a suitable location for the establishment of a school by the Government of the United States Virgin Islands on the island.

(b) *TERM OF LEASE.*—The lease authorized by subsection (a) may not exceed a term of 99 years.

(c) *AVAILABILITY OF MAP.*—The map referred to in subsection (a) shall be on file and available for public inspection in the appropriate offices of the National Park Service.

(d) *ADDITIONAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS.*—The Secretary may require such additional terms and conditions in connection with the lease under this section as the Secretary considers appropriate to protect the interests of the United States.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands.

□ 1500

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume to explain the bill.

I want to thank the Chair of the Subcommittee on Parks for coming to the Virgin Islands and having a hearing in St. John on this important bill.

This bill, H.R. 53, was introduced by me on January 4 of this year to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to lease land on the island of St. John to the Government of the United States Virgin Islands to build a public school. The legislation is strongly supported by the people of the Virgin Islands, particularly the residents of St. John.

The Virgin Islands National Park was authorized by Congress in 1956 and established largely by an initial land donation by Laurance Rockefeller through the Jackson Hole Preserve, Incorporated. In 1962 and 1978, the park was enlarged by Congress so that it now takes up almost two-thirds of St. John, which is only 22 square miles.

For at least the past three decades, the Government of the Virgin Islands and the National Park Service have been discussing the question of securing suitable land on the island of St. John to construct the public school. Since the 1970s, public school enrollment on St. John has more than doubled, and the U.S. VI Government owns no land on the island to expand either of the two public schools that now exist or to build a new one.

The two existing public schools, Julius E. Sprauve and the Guy H. Benjamin Elementary School, only accommodate children up to the ninth grade. St. Johnian high school children have to travel to St. Thomas, 20 minutes by ferry over open ocean to complete their secondary education.

The Julius E. Sprauve School is in the middle of a heavily trafficked area, which really threatens and puts the lives of our children at risk as they come to and from school. About 2 years ago, a second-grade student was killed leaving a Christmas party. The schools are not in the best location; especially that school is not in the best location for our students.

It is clear that with limited land and the continued growth and population, this legislation is critically needed.

I want to thank Chairman RAHALL and Ranking Member DON YOUNG and Subcommittee Parks Chairman RAÚL GRIJALVA and Insular Affairs Subcommittee ranking member, LUIS

FORTUÑO, for their support to have this legislation considered on the floor today.

I also have to thank the One Campus Group in St. John, Kirstin Cox, Lorelei Monsanto, Alvis Christian, Ronnie Jones and all of the others for the work that they have done to get us this far and to bring the community together in support of the process that is outlined in H.R. 53 when all else failed.

I urge my colleagues to support the people of St. John and to support H.R. 53.

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

Mr. GOHMERT. I do thank my colleague from the Virgin Islands for outlining H.R. 53.

Two-thirds of the island of St. John is comprised of the Virgin Islands National Park. The park's dominant size is negatively impacting the quality of life for the growing population there at St. John. Without utilizing the park land, there is no other suitable property to build a school on St. John.

I urge my colleagues to support the bill. We had hoped to consider an amendment to convey the property outright for the school, as was offered, but then withdrawn by Congressman JEFF FLAKE during our committee consideration of this bill.

However, Chairman RAHALL has given his support for other long-term leases, and this bill does establish an important precedent for the National Park Service.

We support the bill. It is for a great purpose. I would urge my colleagues to support this, since we don't have an amendment to give it outright to my colleague, but, in the meantime, we support this bill and wish the project well.

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

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. I thank the gentleman for his support.

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 the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 53, as amended.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

REFUGE ECOLOGY PROTECTION, ASSISTANCE, AND IMMEDIATE RESPONSE ACT

Ms. BORDALLO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 767) to protect, conserve, and restore native fish, wildlife, and their natural habitats at national wildlife refuges through cooperative, incentive-based grants to control, mitigate, and eradicate harmful nonnative species, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 767

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 "Refuge Ecology Protection, Assistance, and Immediate Response Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.

(a) FINDINGS.—The Congress finds the following:

(1) The National Wildlife Refuge System is the premier land conservation system in the world.

(2) Harmful nonnative species are the leading cause of habitat destruction in national wildlife refuges.

(3) More than 675 known harmful nonnative species are found in the National Wildlife Refuge System.

(4) Nearly 8 million acres of the National Wildlife Refuge System contain harmful nonnative species.

(5) The cost of early identification and removal of harmful nonnative species is dramatically lower than removing an established invasive population.

(6) The cost of the backlog of harmful nonnative species control projects that need to be carried out in the National Wildlife Refuge System is over \$361,000,000, and the failure to carry out such projects threatens the ability of the System to fulfill its basic mission.

(b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this Act is to encourage partnerships among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, other Federal agencies, States, Indian tribes, and other interests for the following objectives:

(1) To protect, enhance, restore, and manage a diversity of habitats for native fish and wildlife resources within the National Wildlife Refuge System through control of harmful nonnative species.

(2) To promote the development of voluntary State assessments to establish priorities for controlling harmful nonnative species that threaten or negatively impact refuge resources.

(3) To promote greater cooperation among Federal, State, and local land and water managers, and owners of private land, water rights, or other interests, to implement ecologically based strategies to eradicate, mitigate, and control harmful nonnative species that threaten or negatively impact refuge resources through a voluntary and incentive-based financial assistance grant program.

(4) To establish an immediate response capability to combat incipient harmful nonnative species invasions.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

For the purposes of this Act:

(1) ADVISORY COMMITTEE.—The term "Advisory Committee" means the Invasive Species Advisory Committee established by section 3 of Executive Order 13112, dated February 3, 1999.

(2) APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES.—The term "appropriate Committees" means the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Environment and Public Works of the Senate.

(3) CONTROL.—The term "control" means, as appropriate, eradicating, suppressing, reducing, or managing harmful nonnative species from areas where they are present; taking steps to detect early infestations on at-risk native habitats; and restoring native species and habitats to reduce the effects of harmful nonnative species.

(4) ENVIRONMENTAL SOUNDNESS.—The term "environmental soundness" means the extent of inclusion of methods, efforts, actions,