

which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken after 6:30 p.m. today.

**PROVIDING ADDITIONAL AUTHORITIES TO SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION**

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 615) to provide additional personnel authorities for the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

The Clerk read the title of the Senate bill.

The text of the Senate bill is as follows:

S. 615

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

**SECTION 1. ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL AUTHORITIES FOR THE SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION.**

Section 1229(h) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (Public Law 110-181; 122 Stat. 381) is amended by striking paragraph (1) and inserting the following:

“(1) PERSONNEL.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—The Inspector General may select, appoint, and employ such officers and employees as may be necessary for carrying out the duties of the Inspector General, subject to the provisions of title 5, United States Code, governing appointments in the competitive service, and the provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of such title, relating to classification and General Schedule pay rates.

“(B) ADDITIONAL AUTHORITIES.—

“(i) IN GENERAL.—Subject to clause (ii), the Inspector General may exercise the authorities of subsections (b) through (i) of section 3161 of title 5, United States Code (without regard to subsection (a) of that section).

“(ii) PERIODS OF APPOINTMENTS.—In exercising the employment authorities under subsection (b) of section 3161 of title 5, United States Code, as provided under clause (i) of this subparagraph—

“(I) paragraph (2) of that subsection (relating to periods of appointments) shall not apply; and

“(II) no period of appointment may exceed the date on which the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction terminates under subsection (o).”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from American Samoa (Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from American Samoa.

GENERAL LEAVE

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

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

There was no objection.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of Senate bill 615, legislation that provides critical personnel authority for the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan, known as SIGAR.

Since 2001, the United States has devoted \$32 billion in humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan. In an effort to combat waste, fraud and abuse with regard to the expenditure of these funds, Congress created the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, commonly known as SIGAR, in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008.

That legislation empowers SIGAR to conduct audits, inspections, and investigations of all U.S. assistance programs in Afghanistan. Congress intended that SIGAR would exercise its authority swiftly. It came into existence in July of 2008 with an authorization to hire 18 auditors, 13 inspectors and 3 investigators; but from the beginning, SIGAR has been hindered by certain limitations contained in standard Federal Government personnel authorities and by the difficulty of attracting qualified candidates to work in the difficult security environment of Afghanistan. A year after its creation, SIGAR has conducted only one independent audit and has only hired nine auditors, five inspectors and three investigators.

This resolution would help resolve this problem by granting SIGAR a special hiring authority under 5 U.S.C., section 3161. Section 3161 would allow SIGAR a more flexible, excepted service authority and would empower the office to select, appoint, and employ the necessary staff to fulfill its duties. In particular, section 3161 would grant return rights to Federal employees, provide interagency detail authority and permit the setting of pay rates above the caps established by GS-15, step 10, under which SIGAR is currently required to operate.

This has proven to be a vital asset for SIGAR's counterpart in Iraq, SIGIR, which has long relied upon this enhanced hiring authority to attract its dedicated core of professional staff.

After conducting an in-depth review, the Department of Defense and the Office of Personnel Management have concluded that the proposed legislation is necessary to allow SIGAR to meet its responsibilities.

□ 1415

This bill represents a vital step in allowing SIGAR to fulfill its critical duties of the oversight of U.S. assistance programs in Afghanistan. I support the bill and urge my colleagues to support it as well.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this legislation. The United States has committed over \$30 billion in assistance to Afghanistan since 2001, and with the President's stated intention to increase the size and scope of our ef-

forts, it is necessary that we provide all of our inspectors general operating in Afghanistan the authorities and resources necessary to mitigate fraud, waste, and abuse in these programs. However, the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, or SIGAR, currently lacks such authorities and resources.

Despite its establishment nearly 1 year ago, SIGAR officials have reportedly had difficulty hiring individuals for this unique and challenging assignment, and the staffing shortfall has contributed to the lack of an independent audit or investigation by the office thus far.

This legislation would amend the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2008 to provide to SIGAR personnel authorities similar to those given to the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction. The legislation would expedite the standard hiring process for civil service provisions by permitting SIGAR to use employment authorities granted to heads of temporary organizations. Such authorities allow organizations to hire staff for limited terms, notwithstanding the requirements normally applicable to civil service positions.

This legislation is intended to help the SIGAR quickly hire experienced, well-qualified employees to conduct necessary oversight of reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Employees hired under this new authority could serve until the termination of the SIGAR office.

I strongly urge my colleagues to support this legislation which gives the SIGAR additional hiring authorities to facilitate his ability to quickly hire experienced, well-qualified employees to fill critical positions.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

I thank my good friend, the gentleman from Florida, for his comments in support of this legislation. And I do also want to thank the gentlelady, the good Senator from Maine, Senator COLLINS, for her authorship to this bill. Thirty-two billion dollars is no pennies certainly to be given some sense of responsibility in knowing where the American taxpayers' money has gone in terms of the appropriations and the funding that we've given to Afghanistan and as well as to any other country, for that matter.

So again, I really commend the gentlelady, the good Senator from Maine, Senator COLLINS, for her authorship of this bill, and I thank my good friend from Florida also in helping us manage this bill on the floor.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you for your leadership in bringing this legislation to the floor today. I want to also thank Senator COLLINS for introducing this legislation in the Senate.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today to support Amending the National Defense Authorization

Act for Fiscal Year 2008 to authorize the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) to exercise certain employment and employment-related authorities currently permitted for the heads of temporary organizations established by law or executive order.

As a member of the Homeland Security Committee, and Co-Chair of the US-Afghan Caucus, I am deeply concerned about this matter and want to ensure that the Inspector General's staffing needs are fulfilled in order for him to successfully carry out the responsibilities of his position. In order to be successful in Afghanistan and defeat the insurgents, we must make sure that we have a fully staffed SIGAR who is able to complete the duties of his position in a timely and accurate manner. The security of our troops and the success of our mission in Afghanistan depends upon it.

Since 2001, the U.S. has provided approximately \$32 billion in humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan. In addition, the international community has provided a further \$25.3 billion for the rebuilding of Afghanistan. Since its inception in 2001, the SIGAR's mission has been to enhance oversight of programs for the reconstruction of Afghanistan by conducting independent and objective audits, inspections, and investigations on the use of taxpayer dollars and related funds by keeping the Congress, as well as the Secretaries of State and Defense, currently informed of reconstruction progress and weaknesses.

Amending this defense bill reflects our commitment to support the men and women who fight to secure not only our citizen's freedom but the freedom of others. This bill will provide the necessary resources to protect the American people and our national interests at home and abroad. With this extended personnel authority, the SIGAR has now become a formidable and compelling instrument to make oversight of reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan a reality.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. I yield back my time.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. I yield my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from American Samoa (Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 615.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES TO ITALIAN EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 430) expressing condolences to the citizens of Italy and support for the Government of Italy in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake that struck the Abruzzo region of central Italy, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 430

Whereas, in the early morning hours of April 6, 2009, a 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck the Abruzzo region of central Italy, killing over 250 people, damaging or destroying up to 15,000 buildings, and leaving tens of thousands homeless;

Whereas the epicenter of the quake was the town of L'Aquila, located 60 miles northeast of Rome, and massive destruction was reported in 26 surrounding cities, towns, and villages;

Whereas rescue workers, who heroically pulled over 100 survivors from the rubble, continued to find survivors amongst the wreckage days after the quake struck;

Whereas strong aftershocks continued to rock the region and created hazardous conditions for residents and rescue workers;

Whereas this was Italy's deadliest quake since 1980;

Whereas the earthquake damaged centuries old landmarks including churches and castles;

Whereas humanitarian aid agencies in the United States and around the world mobilized to provide much needed assistance to the relief and recovery efforts;

Whereas President Barack Obama expressed his condolences, and those of the people of the United States, to families that have lost loved ones and assured Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi that the United States stood ready to help Italy at this time of need; and

Whereas Prime Minister Berlusconi said that Italy would accept the support offered by President Obama and would devote it to preserving the region's cultural and artistic heritage and educational institutions: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

(1) mourns the loss of life and expresses its deepest condolences to the families of those killed and injured in the earthquake;

(2) recognizes the deep ties between the United States and Italy and expresses continued solidarity with the people of Italy during this time of crisis;

(3) applauds the courageous response of Italian rescue workers;

(4) supports President Obama's offer of United States assistance to Italy in response to this catastrophic event;

(5) urges the people of the United States to generously support those humanitarian aid agencies working to assist the people of Italy in this time of need;

(6) commends the many United States organizations, including the National Italian-American Foundation, working to demonstrate support and solidarity with the Italian people and raising funds to provide needed help; and

(7) expresses gratitude to the people of the United States who have generously supported those humanitarian aid agencies working to assist the people of Italy in this time of need.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from American Samoa (Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from American Samoa.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and in-

clude extraneous material in the resolution under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this resolution which expresses condolences to the citizens and the Government of Italy in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in the Abruzzo region.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my good friend and my colleague, Mr. PASCRELL from the great State of New Jersey, for introducing this important resolution that allows the House to add its voice to the international outpouring of sympathy for the Italian people in the wake of this natural disaster.

On April 6, the Abruzzo region of central Italy was struck by a 6.3 magnitude on the Richter scale earthquake. Nearly 300 people were killed while tens of thousands were left homeless. In addition to the terrible loss of life and livelihood, the earthquake damaged nearly 15,000 buildings, including hundreds of churches, castles, and heritage sites.

The U.S. Embassy in Rome immediately provided \$50,000 in emergency relief funding while President Obama expressed his condolences and offered additional American assistance. Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi, the host of the next G-8 meeting, has relocated the July summit to the town of L'Aquila that was at the center of the devastation. As he explained, "The G-8 in L'Aquila represents the message of hope for the entire region struck by the earthquake."

It is appropriate that the House pauses today, Mr. Speaker, as Prime Minister Berlusconi is in Washington, DC, to express its deepest condolences to the families killed and injured in the earthquake. We also reaffirm the deep ties shared between our people and two countries. I strongly support this resolution, and I urge all of my colleagues to do likewise.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

I rise today in support of this resolution which expresses our condolences and sympathy for the people of Italy following the terrible loss of life which occurred in the central Abruzzo region last April which was struck by a powerful earthquake. Tragically, the 6.3 magnitude earthquake, which struck in the early morning of April 6, killed over 250 people. Tens of thousands more were left homeless as their family properties were destroyed. Over 15,000 buildings rich in culture and history were obliterated in just moments by the powerful shocks.

I note that despite the danger from the strong aftershocks after the earthquake, heroic Italian rescue workers