

States, with nearly 108,000 acres of parklands spread across 65 regional parks and over 1,100 miles of trails in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. Approximately 14 million visitors a year from throughout the San Francisco Bay area and beyond take advantage of the vast and diverse District parklands and trails.

During his tenure, the district has acquired over 40,000 acres of new parklands, adding 17 new parks, doubling the size of 12 existing regional parks, and adding more than 200 miles of new regional trails. He has attracted more than \$105 million in matching funds—including this year's historic \$10.2 million Tiger II award. He has successfully secured stable funding through ballot measures and by creating assessment districts, and refinanced existing district bonds at lower rates, saving taxpayers over \$14 million. Every community in the East Bay has received at least one park, recreation or community center project funded through his efforts.

His dedication to serving the public through the parks and recreation procession is the legacy he will leave behind. His career has been guided by the desire to make substantive contributions to society and to people's lives. His firm leadership has helped to preserve the priceless heritage of our region's natural and cultural resources—open space, parks and trails—and to set aside park areas for enjoyment and healthful recreation for current and future generations.

Mr. Speaker, we invite our colleagues to join us in honoring General Manager Pat O'Brien for his dedicated service to the people of California and the Bay Area. We are pleased to join with his family, colleagues, and friends in congratulating Pat on a long and highly successful career and wish him a happy and healthy retirement.

INTRODUCTION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA BUDGET AUTONOMY ACT OF 2011

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 19, 2011

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, next to voting rights, the highest priority for District of Columbia residents is to achieve the right to control the funds they themselves raise to support their city, as resident in other jurisdictions do. Therefore, today I introduce a bill, the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act of 2011, to allow the District's local taxpayer-raised budget to take effect immediately when passed by the city, without being subject to affirmative congressional approval.

Control over the dollars raised by local taxpayers is central to local control, the oldest American principle. Moreover, permitting the city's local budget to become law without first coming to Congress would have multiple practical benefits for both the city and Congress. For the city, a timely budget means: eliminating the uncertainty of the congressional approval process, which has a negative effect on the city's bond rating, adding unnecessary interest costs for local taxpayers; significantly increasing the District's ability to make accurate revenue forecasts; and reducing the countless operational problems that result because the city's budget cannot be implemented until

Congress approves it. Of major importance, eliminating congressional approval of D.C.'s local budget would also align the District's fiscal year with the typical state and local government July 1st fiscal year instead of the congressional fiscal year, which starts in October, allowing ample time to prepare for the usual opening of schools in September. The D.C. local budget consumes valuable subcommittee, committee, and congressional floor time in both houses of Congress even though it is of interest only to those members who use it to promote their own issues, violating the principle of local self-government.

Increasing recognition of the hardships and delays caused by the annual appropriations process has led Congress to begin freeing the city. When I was last in the minority, I negotiated an agreement with the appropriators that has ensured that the city's local budget is always included in the first continuing resolution, if it is not approved by the start of the fiscal year. This approach has ended the lengthy delay of the budget of a big city until an appropriations bill is passed, often months after October 1st. As a result, the city has been able to spend its local funds at the next year's level, even though the budgets for federal agencies are often delayed for months. We hope that this process, which ended some serious problems in the functioning of the local government, will continue.

We nearly secured budget autonomy for the District in the last days of the lame duck session last Congress. I used an unusual procedure, getting subcommittee and committee authorizers to agree to place budget autonomy in the D.C. appropriations bill that was passed by the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government. Unfortunately, Congress passed a Continuing Resolution instead of regular appropriations bills.

If the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act is enacted, Congress would retain jurisdiction over the District of Columbia under article I, section 8, clause 17 of the U.S. Constitution. Because this authority allows Congress to make changes in the District's budget and laws at anytime, it is unnecessary to require a lengthy repetition of the District's budget process here. The time is overdue to permit the city to enact its local budget, the single most important step Congress could take to help the District better manage itself.

Members of Congress were sent here to do the business of the nation. Members have no reason to be interested in or to become knowledgeable about the local budget of a single city. In the past, the House and Senate have more often than not passed the District's budget as is. Our bill takes the Congress in the direction it is already moving. Congressional interference into one of the most vital rights to self-government should end this year with enactment of the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act of 2011.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. LAURA RICHARDSON

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 19, 2011

Ms. RICHARDSON. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 12, I was unavoidably detained. Had I been present, I would have voted "yes."

VAN WEZEL PERFORMING ARTS HALL

HON. VERN BUCHANAN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 19, 2011

Mr. BUCHANAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the accomplishments of the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall's education programs and the work of the Van Wezel Foundation in support of arts education.

I also recognize Mary Bense, Executive Director of the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota, Florida for her service in support of the educational programs and community engagement activities of the Van Wezel.

The mission of the Van Wezel Foundation is to enrich the Gulf Coast community, with an emphasis on children, through the performing arts while supporting the needs of the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall.

The arts education and community engagement programs of the Van Wezel are celebrating their fourteenth year, are nationally known, and are a major factor in the integration of arts education within our region's schools.

Each year tens of thousands of students, educators and lifelong learners from four counties are introduced to national performing arts programming through the support of the Van Wezel Foundation.

Annually, over 23,000 students from DeSoto, Charlotte, Manatee and Sarasota County Schools attend the School-time performances conducted by the Van Wezel and supported by the Foundation.

Each year the Van Wezel, in collaboration with the Kennedy Center and local school districts provide specialized workshops to train teachers of science, math, history, social studies and literacy on ways to use the arts to enhance the presentation of their subject materials.

The Van Wezel is affiliated with the Partners in Education Program of the Kennedy Center and is one of the only projects nationally that has conducted a longitudinal study on the impact of integrative arts education on student learning and achievement. It is the only Kennedy partner in the country to have received seven national research grants on the impact of the arts and education programs within county schools.

Furthermore, the Van Wezel Education Department and the Manatee County schools are in the second year of Project Stage, a project funded through a U.S. Department of Education three year grant to increase literacy in elementary schools.

Under the leadership of Mary Bense, the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall and the Van Wezel Foundation have made a remarkable contribution to the cultural life of our community and education of our children.

DR. WILLIAM HALE

HON. GUS M. BILIRAKIS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 19, 2011

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of Dr. William Hale. Dr. Hale