certainly, Texas physicians have no better friend in the State legislature, and you have been a true friend to the family of medicine across the country.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LEACH). 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 after 6:30 p.m. today.

SALT CEDAR AND RUSSIAN OLIVE CONTROL ASSESSMENT AND DEMONSTRATION ACT

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2707) to direct the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture, acting through the U.S. Forest Service, to carry out a demonstration program to assess potential water savings through control of Salt Cedar and Russian Olive on forests and public lands administered by the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 2707

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 ''Salt Cedar and Russian Olive Control Assessment and Demonstration Act''.

SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) SECRETARIES.—The term ''Secretaries'' means the Secretary of Agriculture, in cooperation with the Secretary of the Interior.

(2) WESTERN UNITED STATES.—The term ''Western United States'' refers to the States defined by the Act of June 17, 1902 (commonly known as the 1902 Reclamation Act; 43 U.S.C. 371 et seq.), which includes Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

SEC. 3. ASSESSMENT OF SALT CEDAR AND RUSSIAN OLIVE INFESTATION IN WESTERN UNITED STATES.

(a) ASSESSMENT.—Not later than one year after the date on which funds are first made available to carry out this section, the Secretaries shall complete an assessment of the extent of Salt Cedar and Russian Olive invasion in the Western United States.

(b) CONTENT.—The assessment shall include the following:

(1) To the extent practicable, documentation of the quantity of water lost due to the infestation.

(2) Documentation of the quantity of water saved due to various control methods, including the portion of saved water that returns to surface water or groundwater supplies and at what rates.

(3) Determination of the optimum control method for the various land types and land uses.

(4) Determination of what conditions indicate the need to remove such growth and the optimal methods for disposal or use of such growth.

(5) Determination of methods to prevent the regrowth and reintroduction of Salt Cedar and Russian Olive and to reestablish native species.

(c) REPORT ON ASSESSMENT.—

(1) PREPARATION AND CONTENT.—The Secretaries shall prepare a report containing the results of the assessment. The report shall identify long-term management and funding strategies that could be implemented by Federal, State, Tribal, and private land managers and owners on all land management types to address the invasion of Salt Cedar and Russian Olive. The report shall also identify deficiencies or areas for further study and where actual field demonstrations would be useful in the control effort.

(2) SUBMISSION.—The Secretaries shall submit the report to the Committee on Resources and the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate.

(d) SUPPORT FOR IDENTIFICATION OF LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT AND FUNDING STRATEGIES.—The Secretaries may make grants to institutions of higher education or nonprofit organizations (or both) with an established background and expertise in the public policy issues associated with the control of Salt Cedar and Russian Olive to obtain technical experience, support, and recommendations related to the identification of the long-term management and funding strategies required to be included in the report under subsection (c)(1). Each grant awarded under this subsection may not be less than $250,000.

SEC. 4. DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM FOR CONTROL OF SALT CEDAR AND RUSSIAN OLIVE IN WESTERN STATES.

(a) DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS.—

(1) PROJECTS REQUIRED.—Based on the results of the assessment and report in section 3, the Secretaries shall initiate a program of not fewer than three demonstration projects in the Western United States designed to address the deficiencies and areas for further study to address the invasion of Salt Cedar and Russian Olive, including the test of additional control methods, identified by the report.

(2) IMPLEMENTATION.—The Secretaries may enter into an agreement with a State in the Western United States to carry out a demonstration project. If the Secretaries select a demonstration project for implementation on National Forest System lands, the Secretary of Agriculture shall be responsible for implementation of the project.

(b) ELEMENTS OF PROJECTS.—

(1) DESIGN AND SCALE.—Each demonstration project shall be designed with integrated methods and adaptive management strategies and carried out over time frames and spatial scales large enough to accomplish the goals laid out in the report.

(2) SCIENTIFIC REVIEW.—Before being carried out, the methods and strategies proposed for each demonstration project shall be subject to review by scientific experts, including non-Federal experts, selected by the Secretaries. The Secretaries may use existing scientific review processes to the extent they comply with this requirement.

(c) PROJECT COSTS AND COST SHARING.—The total cost of each demonstration project may not exceed $7,000,000, including the costs of planning, design, implementation, revegetation, maintenance, and monitoring. In the case of a demonstration project conducted on lands under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior or the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretaries may accept, but not require, funds or in-kind contributions, including State agency provided services. The Federal share of the costs of any activity on private lands funded under the project shall be no more than 75 percent of the total cost of the activity.

(d) REPORTING REQUIREMENT.—During the period in which the demonstration projects are carried out, the Secretaries shall submit to the congressional committees specified in section 3(c)(2) an annual report describing—

(1) the demonstration projects;

(2) the progress made in carrying out the projects during the period covered by the report; and

(3) the costs of the projects under subsection (c).

(e) MONITORING.—Demonstration projects shall include the following:

(1) Documentation of the quantity of water saved due to various control methods, including the portion of water saved that returns to surface water or groundwater supplies and at what rates.

(2) Optimal revegetative states to prevent the regrowth and reintroduction of Salt Cedar and Russian Olive and to reestablish native species.

(f) COOPERATION.—The Secretaries shall use the expertise of their various agencies, as well as other Federal agencies, institutions of higher education, State and local governments and political subdivisions thereof, including soil and water conservation districts, and Indian tribes, which are actively conducting assessments on or implementing Salt Cedar and Russian Olive control activities.

SEC. 5. RELATION TO OTHER AUTHORITY.

Nothing in this Act shall be construed to affect, or otherwise bias, the use by the Secretaries of other statutory or administrative authorities to plan or conduct Salt Cedar or Russian Olive control and eradication that is not planned or conducted under this Act.

SEC. 6. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

(a) ASSESSMENT.—There are authorized to be appropriated to the Secretaries $5,000,000 for fiscal year 2005 to conduct the assessment required by section 3.

(b) GRANTS.—There are authorized to be appropriated to the Secretaries $1,000,000 for fiscal year 2005 to award as grants under section 3(d).

(c) DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS.—There are authorized to be appropriated to the Secretaries $18,000,000 for each of the fiscal years 2005 through 2009 to carry out the program of demonstration projects under section 4.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. PEARCE. 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 the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2707, the Salt Cedar and Russian Olive Control Demonstration Act, provides for the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to carry out a demonstration program

assessing potential water savings through control of Salt Cedar and Russian Olive on forests and public lands administered by the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service.

Salt Cedar and Russian Olive are both invasive species that adversely impact the water supply, increases soil salinity, lowers the potential water that the soil can hold, and increases fire frequency. Last summer in Albuquerque, New Mexico, several hundred acres along the Rio Grande River burned, forcing about 600 people to be evacuated from their homes. This fire burned many native cottonwood and willow trees. However, one of the culprits being blamed for the escalation of the fire is the large amount of underbrush that had collected, which was mostly Salt Cedar. Without this buildup of Salt Cedar, the fire probably would not have burned as extensively or with the intensity that it did.

Regardless of what side of the aisle one is on, most can agree that controlling Salt Cedar and Russian Olive is important for water salvage, riparian restoration, salinity control, habitat restoration, and wildlife management.

Salt Cedar is widely distributed and is extensive along riparian areas in the Western United States, particularly along the Colorado, Rio Grande, the Pecos and Gila Rivers. Controlling and hopefully one day completely eradicating Salt Cedar and Russian Olive is important. As we eradicate Salt Cedar, we increase the flow of water in the streams, springs, and rivers, and restore native plants that are less water-consuming and improve habitat.

Because of the widespread nature of Salt Cedar and Russian Olive, there have been many projects to clear these trees and then to estimate how much water was saved. These increased stream flows and water restoration estimates vary widely. The high ranges from 6 to 9 acrefeet saved per year, down to a low of between zero to 1.5 acrefeet per year, per acre cleared, the last estimate based on a study done by USGS on the Pecos River in New Mexico.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2707 will begin to address these problems by providing sound science and, in turn, developing and expanding on innovative approaches to control these harmful weeds.

I urge adoption of the bill.

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

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

(Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this legislation, H.R. 2707. Salt Cedar and Russian Olive trees have caused severe ecological damage in the Southwest. These invasive species crowd out native species while crossing public and private lands, spreading indiscriminately. This bill will take the first step to enhance our capability to control these species. Under this proposed legislation, land managers will quantify the scope of the Salt Cedar and Russian Olive invasion and then develop demonstration projects to eradicate the invasives.

Invasive species control should become a national priority. I believe this bill is only a tip of the iceberg. We must find a solution not only to Salt Cedar and Russian Olive invasions, but also to the spread of other invasive plants and animals.

I want to commend my good friend, the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE), for his management of this legislation, and commend him also for sponsoring this legislation. I also thank the majority for incorporating amendments to the text at our request. I would also like to recognize the members of the Committee on Resources and members on this side of the aisle who also have been cosponsors of this bill: the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GRIJALVA), the gentleman from California (Mr. CARDOZA), the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. MARK UDALL), and the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. TOM UDALL) as sponsors of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

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

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. NEUGEBAUER).

Mr. NEUGEBAUER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2707, the Salt Cedar and Russian Olive Control Demonstration Act.

In Texas, New Mexico, and other Western States prone to drought, Salt Cedar trees are absorbing millions of gallons of water that our communities and farms can put to better use. Landowners and local State agencies have been working to slow the spread of Salt Cedars and eradicating them from the banks of rivers and streams, but this effort has been an uphill battle. Their vast root systems and abundant seeds carried by wind and water make getting rid of them very challenging. Unless we eliminate them, Salt Cedars will continue soaking up valuable and scarce water that west Texas communities need.

The demonstration projects and research authorized by this legislation will help find more effective means to speed the eradication of Salt Cedars. Better strategies for fighting the spread of Salt Cedars will benefit communities across State lines. Much water used in west Texas originates in other States, and Salt Cedars along those rivers are reducing the supply available to all of us.

Salt Cedar eradication projects are showing results. A project in the Pecos River in Texas has saved 12 billion gallons of water, nearly enough water to serve my hometown of Lubbock for 1 year, and additional eradication efforts are under way. In order to effectively eliminate Salt Cedar, these projects must cover many miles of rivers and stream banks. Taking out large areas of Salt Cedar at a time reduces the spread of new plants.

A mature Salt Cedar can use up to 200 gallons of water per day, much more water than native vegetation that could be replanted to stabilize those stream banks. Salt Cedars add to the salinity of water, which kills other plants and displaces wildlife.

While we still need rain in west Texas to alleviate the drought and replenish water supplies, we also need to take proactive steps to save the water resources we already have. Large-scale eradication of Salt Cedars is one of the means to conserve water. Enacting this legislation to further demonstration projects and additional research will help other States, our State and other communities implement the best strategies to deal with this Salt Cedar infestation sucking down our water supplies.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER).

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2707. I thank the gentleman from New Mexico for his sponsorship and leadership. We have heard about how important it is to the areas of Texas and New Mexico. It is also important to my district, one of the most important agricultural areas in the United States, the Imperial Valley of California.

We use water from the Colorado River, and we have heard how invasive this Salt Cedar can be. In fact, the Imperial County Agriculture Commissioners Office and the Brawley, California Research Station have been studying for a long time now how to control Salt Cedar. John Kershaw, the president of the Imperial Valley Conservation Research Center Committee, and Stephen Birdsall, Imperial County Agricultural Commissioner, have briefed me on the great strides that have been made to controlling Salt Cedar in our area. This bill will greatly help with those efforts.

We have heard how much water these species use. Salt Cedar is like a giant straw: One tree can suck up to 200 gallons of water a day.

□ 1430

It can cause an increase in fire and flooding, a decrease in water quantity and quality and an increase in soil salinity. It can replace native species, degrade wildlife habitat, and limit the human use of riverbanks.

Salt Cedar was originally introduced in order to stabilize stream banks, but it has turned into a nightmare for our farming communities. We have spent millions of dollars trying to eradicate this pest. Million of gallons of water

have been wasted. We have become increasingly concerned about water conservation and the best use of our natural resources in this Nation. Those of us who rely on the Colorado River see that Salt Cedar squanders this precious, precious water.

Removing it would allow native plants which have been squeezed out by the noxious tree to come back to our community. Removing the tree would also encourage wildlife populations to increase, including several species, such as the Willow Flycatcher, that are declining or are threatened or endangered. The Flycatcher is an endangered bird that eats insects that thrive on native plants in my district, which the Salt Cedar has displaced.

I commend the Departments of Interior and Agriculture for their dedication to controlling or eradicating invasive species such as Salt Cedar. We must continue this important work. We can protect our most precious natural resources, water, wildlife, and soil, by eradicating this invasive species.

Mr. Speaker, clearly these species are serious problems across all the United States, but particularly in the Southwest. The challenges they present to our communities are enormous, but we cannot let them ruin our natural native resources. We can and we must take back the land and water for our communities.

I thank the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE) for his leadership in this struggle.

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

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the distinguished gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), our most senior ranking member on the Committee on Agriculture, and certainly commend him for his expertise on agriculture-related issues.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from American Samoa for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 2707. I am an original cosponsor of this legislation, and I worked hard to push it through the House Committee on Agriculture; and I also want to commend highly my colleague from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE) for his diligent work on the Committee on Resources to make this issue a top priority and to shepherd this bill to the floor of the House of Representatives today. Again, I thank my friend from American Samoa (Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA) for his work on bringing it to the floor today.

My friend from New Mexico and I share similar constituencies, and we maintain the same concerns that we must act now to ensure the availability of fresh water in the future. This legislation is not about simply eliminating Salt Cedar and Russian Olive from watersheds. It is about controlling these plants to increase our supplies of fresh water in the Western United States. America's citizens should not have to compete with invasive pests for an already limited supply of drinking water.

I have represented west Texas now for 25 years, and there is virtually nothing of greater daily concern out there than the availability of fresh water. Like much of the West, the 17th Congressional District of Texas has certainly experienced the consequences of drought. Stream banks and lakebeds continued to recede during the dry periods, while Salt Cedar proliferates in those areas.

The devastating results can be seen all over west Texas as dense thickets of Salt Cedar have overtaken native plant species in the Colorado River basin. In fact, the Colorado River Municipal Water District estimated that Salt Cedar consumed more water in 2002 than the district's largest municipal customer, a city with more than 100,000 people. The combined capacity of the district's three reservoirs fell below 25 percent during 2002, and it became readily apparent that Salt Cedar was robbing municipalities of this precious resource.

The water district has worked closely with many Federal, State, and local entities to begin brush control projects within the Colorado River watershed. They have implemented Salt Cedar control projects with reasonable success on both public and private lands. Further, private landowners have successfully partnered with the National Resources Conservation Service to employ brush control on their properties. In several cases, dormant streams and creeks have again begun to flow where those control programs were implemented.

I am convinced that this bill moves towards real solutions to the Salt Cedar and Russian Olive invasion. It lays out the framework for private and public land managers to cooperate with the U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Department of Agriculture, local soil and water conservation districts and State agencies to work together on the demonstration programs authorized in this bill. After all, it will take integrated control and management practices to significantly deter the further spread of these non-native species.

I have worked tirelessly during my time in Congress to address the scarce water situation in west Texas, and I can attest that brush control efforts have produced the most lasting results in the 17th district. Most of our Nation faces an urgency to develop long-term plans to ensure that communities will have an adequate supply of drinking water. I truly believe this legislation will help public and private land managers across the Western United States take a giant step toward implementing more efficient and effective brush control projects that will result in better water conservation.

I close by saying, unlike a barrel of oil, it is tough to put a price on clean, fresh water.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I gladly yield 5 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. UDALL), one of the cosponsors of this legislation.

(Mr. UDALL of New Mexico asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, as a cosponsor of H.R. 2707, I am extremely pleased that this bill is on the floor of the House today.

I would like to thank my colleague from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE) for introducing this important legislation and for his leadership on this issue. I would also like to thank the gentleman from American Samoa for his hard work and his leadership in bringing this to the floor today.

Mr. Speaker, those of us from the West are all too familiar with the water troubles that our communities are facing. Many of us are trying to find commonsense approaches to sustainable water management. This legislation is an important step in that direction.

H.R. 2707 authorizes funds for demonstration projects on the Pecos and Rio Grande rivers to find the most efficient way to eliminate the invasive Salt Cedar species. The legislation authorizes up to $7 million per trial for the Army Corps of Engineers to begin examining the most effective methods to remove the Salt Cedar. The invasive Salt Cedar species is very damaging to water efficiency, has no natural enemies such as insects and diseases, and has a ravenous thirst. A large tree can soak up as much as 200 gallons of water per day.

Removing the Salt Cedar alone will not be a panacea for our water troubles, but will certainly go a long way towards improving our water efficiency.

Because of the importance of this task, support of efforts to eradicate non-native plants in New Mexico are widely supported by a diverse number of groups. The Alliance for the Rio Grande Heritage and the Northern New Mexico Sierra Club have supported efforts by the New Mexico legislature to eliminate Salt Cedar and other phreatophytes along the State's riverbanks.

Farmers and conservationists agree that everything possible must be done to remove Salt Cedars and other invasive species. Addressing a problem of this magnitude will require significant resources; and it is, therefore, imperative that we develop the most effective approaches. Passing this legislation will allow the Federal Government to make a significant contribution to helping communities throughout the Nation eradicate the Salt Cedar.

Mr. Speaker, the water problems facing the West are complex and politically charged. However, we all stand here today committed to taking an important step in the fight against water shortages by passing this legislation. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

I thank, once again, the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE).

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 2 minutes.

As the assembled body can hear, this bipartisan bill has great importance, and especially throughout the West. I thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), the gentleman from American Samoa (Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA), and the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. UDALL) for their hard work on behalf of this bill.

I have areas, Mr. Speaker, in my district which typically get around 16 inches of rainfall a year. In the last several years, we have gotten less than 6 inches in many of those areas; in some areas, as little as 2 inches in the last 12 months.

Mr. Speaker, our entire agricultural production system is at risk. We need to support our farming and ranching. We need to understand that one of the most critical things we can provide for ourselves and our Nation is a secure supply of food.

Mr. Speaker, this bill should begin to deliver more water to the agriculture community of America.

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

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 1 minute.

Mr. Speaker, my district has 200 inches of rainwater a year, and I would be more than glad to share some of my water with my colleagues. Unfortunately, they would have to go many miles to get these 200 inches of water that we would be more than glad to share with our friends here in the continental United States.

Mr. Speaker, I think the spirit of bipartisanship has been demonstrated this afternoon as we debate and discuss this issue; and, again, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

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

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Speaker, I accept the gentleman's offer of the rain that he has and shares so willingly, and we will address that in the next bill.

Mr. MATHESON. Mr. Speaker, as Utah copes with its most severe drought in recent times, protecting our native species from invasive plants is vital to both agriculture and the environment. It is important to those of us in the West to take those steps necessary to stop non-native species from consuming our precious water resources.

Throughout the development of the West, we have maintained a healthy and vibrant balance between our economic and residential needs and the needs of our native plants and animals. The tamarisk threatens that balance.

For this reason, I support H.R. 2707—The Salt Cedar and Russian Olive Control Demonstration Act. This bill has particular meaning to me and to my constituents, because of the efforts it promotes to eradicate tamarisk.

Overall, experts estimate the economic impact of invasive species in the U.S. to be over $100 billion annually. Scientists have calculated that tamarisk plants soak up an estimated 2–4 million acre-feet of water per year in the West. A single plant can absorb up to 300 gallons of water a day through a taproot that can reach down 50 feet into the water table. Tamarisk, originally introduced by settlers trying to control stream bank erosion, is inedible to most animals and is notoriously difficult to kill. Even when it's burned, it generates new shoots.

This plant's effects are particularly devastating in our state and in our neighboring states, and so I have worked on the Science Committee to create new opportunities to combat tamarisk. This bill is an important step towards eradicating the threat that tamarisk poses in Utah and other Western states, and I will continue to support it and other legislation which furthers our battle to remove this threat.

Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support H.R. 2707, the Salt Cedar and Russian Olive Control Demonstration Act, introduced by my colleague from New Mexico STEVE PEARCE.

The Russian Olive and Salt Cedar are invasive species that are soaking up our water. Water is the lifeblood of the American West and foundation of our economy. The Salt Cedar can consume up to 200 gallons of water per day during growing season. This is more than the average Albuquerque household consumes in a day.

Additionally, these invasive species are highly flammable and put our communities at risk. In 2003 two major fires, fueled by these invasive species, broke out in the heart of Albuquerque. These fires left 16,000 people temporarily without electrical power, threatened 600 homes and led to the evacuation of about 1,000 people.

This legislation begins an important Federal initiative to reduce the negative effect of these invasive species.

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Speaker, I have no additional speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LEACH). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2707, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. PEARCE. 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.

SOUTHWEST FOREST HEALTH AND WILDFIRE PREVENTION ACT OF 2004

Mr. RENZI. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2696) to establish Institutes to demonstrate and promote the use of adaptive ecosystem management to reduce the risk of wildfires, and restore the health of fire-adapted forest and woodland ecosystems of the interior West, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 2696

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 ''Southwest Forest Health and Wildfire Prevention Act of 2004''.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds that—

(1) there is an increasing threat of wildfire to millions of acres of forest land and rangeland throughout the United States;

(2) forest land and rangeland are degraded as a direct consequence of land management practices, including practices to control and prevent wildfires and the failure to harvest subdominant trees from overstocked stands that disrupt the occurrence of frequent low-intensity fires that have periodically removed flammable undergrowth;

(3) at least 39,000,000 acres of land of the National Forest System in the interior West are at high risk of wildfire;

(4) an average of 95 percent of the expenditures by the Forest Service for wildfire suppression during fiscal years 1990 through 1994 were made to suppress wildfires in the interior West;

(5) the number, size, and severity of wildfires in the interior West are increasing;

(6) of the timberland in National Forests in the States of Arizona and New Mexico, 59 percent of such land in Arizona, and 56 percent of such land in New Mexico, has an average diameter of 9 to 12 inches diameter at breast height;

(7) the population of the interior West grew twice as fast as the national average during the 1990s;

(8) catastrophic wildfires—

(A) endanger homes and communities;

(B) damage and destroy watersheds and soils; and

(C) pose a serious threat to the habitat of threatened and endangered species;

(9) a 1994 assessment of forest health in the interior West estimated that only a 15- to 30-year window of opportunity exists for effective management intervention before damage from uncontrollable wildfire becomes widespread, with 8 years having already elapsed since the assessment;

(10) healthy forest and woodland ecosystems—

(A) reduce the risk of wildfire to forests and communities;

(B) improve wildlife habitat and biodiversity;

(C) increase tree, grass, forb, and shrub productivity;

(D) enhance watershed values;

(E) improve the environment; and

(F) provide a basis in some areas for economically and environmentally sustainable uses;

(11) sustaining the long-term ecological and economic health of interior West forests and woodland, and their associated human communities requires preventing severe wildfires before the wildfires occur and permitting natural, low-intensity ground fires;

(12) more natural fire regimes cannot be accomplished without the reduction of excess fuels and thinning of subdominant trees (which fuels and trees may be of commercial value);

(13) ecologically based forest and woodland ecosystem restoration on a landscape scale will—

(A) improve long-term community protection;

(B) minimize the need for wildfire suppression;

(C) improve resource values;

(D) improve the ecological integrity and resilience of these systems;

(E) reduce rehabilitation costs;

(F) reduce loss of critical habitat; and

(G) protect forests for future generations;

(14) although landscape scale restoration is needed to effectively reverse degradation,