

Mines has made debt repayments totaling more than \$40 million.

A General Accounting Office study in 1992 recommended that the helium debt be canceled since it was characterized as a bookkeeping transaction between two Federal agencies, with no impact on the deficit or national debt.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that my comments will give my colleagues a better understanding of Federal involvement in helium. The national media and others have both maligned and misunderstood this program. I have urged my colleagues to vote "no" on H.R. 3008 so that true reform of the helium program may become a reality. Sadly, H.R. 3008 will actually prevent speedy privatization of the helium operations and prohibit the sale of excess helium.

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, this Member rises in strong support of H.R. 3008, the Helium Privatization Act of 1996. This legislation represents a small but important step toward a more commonsense approach toward developing the proper role of the Federal Government.

The Federal Helium Program is clearly an anachronism which deserves elimination. While it may have served a purpose during the first part of this century, the justification for the Federal Helium Program has certainly run out of gas.

This Member has long recognized the need to eliminate this wasteful and nonessential governmental program. In 1993, this Member wrote to the President suggesting spending cuts which would help reduce the Federal deficit. This list included a proposal to sell the national helium reserves as a way to save taxpayer dollars. This Member also cosponsored helium privatization legislation introduced by the distinguished gentleman from California [Mr. COX] in this Congress as well as the previous Congress.

The healthy private helium industry offers strong evidence that the Federal Government should get out of the business. The private sector currently provides more than 90 percent of the Nation's helium needs. In fact, as a result of the efficiency of the private helium industry, the United States now produces eight times more helium than the rest of the countries combined. It is unnecessary and improper for the Federal Government to retain its current monopoly on the sale of helium to Federal agencies.

H.R. 3008 offers an effective approach toward the privatization of the Federal Helium Program. This legislation will save taxpayers money by ending the production, refining, and marketing at the Federal helium facility in Texas. It will also require the sale of the Federal Helium Program's production facilities and other equipment and privatize the current helium stockpile. The proceeds from these asset sales will then be applied toward the program's massive debt to the taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, this Member urges his colleagues to vote for H.R. 3008, the Helium Privatization Act of 1996. It's commonsense legislation which will benefit private business and the American taxpayers.

Mr. HORN. Mr. Speaker, the recently passed omnibus appropriations bill was a historic achievement. With it, Congress significantly reduced the Washington bureaucracy. Nearly 200 outdated Federal programs were eliminated.

This was a good first step toward a balanced budget. Now, we must maintain this momentum by taking more steps. For instance, we must get the Government out of the money-draining helium production business. This will save taxpayers nearly \$9 million annually—money badly needed in far more vital areas of our economy. I urge a "yes" vote on H.R. 3008.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I know of no other Federal program more maligned and misunderstood than the Department of Interior, Bureau of Mines, helium operations. Many of my colleagues have piled on board to eliminate the program. They've heard the clever talking points about German zeppelins and toy balloons. Although I know I am in the minority on this issue, I hope to set the record straight on a few essential points.

The Federal helium operation is actually one of the few Federal programs that has done what it was intended to do. Going from a time when there was no helium produced by the private sector, the Helium Act has been tremendously successful in helping to develop private sector production and a strategic reserve for helium.

I hope my colleagues and the folks out there listening to this debate will reflect on 67 years of dedicated, quality service given this country by those who took on a mission in 1929. My colleagues who mention the cost to taxpayers for this program are speaking of the accumulated interest costs—not the annual cost, which is a net positive gain to the U.S. Treasury of \$10 million last year alone.

A legitimate debate has taken place regarding whether or not the Federal Government should be in the helium business. Regardless of your view, this bill, H.R. 3008, is not the best answer. Here's why: This measure effectively prevents private purchase of the helium reserves and refinery. It attempts to recoup the Government's investment with a formula selling off 100 years worth of helium. But it will do so at a price still higher than what its private competitors sell at market.

The bill is designed—plain and simple—to repay the debt and interest on a loan that was made between two Federal agencies. But also just as plain and simple, this bill will not privatize the helium operations. All of that excess helium will remain unsold.

However, there is a better, more balanced approach: It was offered by another one of our colleagues, MAC THORNBERRY, during the budget debate over this legislation in the Resources Committee. His amendment would have allowed some helium to be sold at market price, as long as it did not disrupt the market. Adequate helium stockpile would remain for national security needs, while ensuring the taxpayer a sufficient return on their investment. It would have canceled the bookkeeping debt between two Federal agencies. This commonsense substitute is nowhere in today's bill. The inclusion of this language into H.R. 3008 would have made this measure a better investment for taxpayers. Without a balanced, commonsense approach, I cannot support H.R. 3008. I urge my colleagues to vote "no" so that true reform of the helium program may become a reality.

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman, and with that, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CLINGER). The question is on the mo-

tion offered by the gentleman from California [Mr. CALVERT] that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3008.

The question was taken.

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

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 5 of rule I and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CALVERT. 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 various bills considered today.

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

There was no objection.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the House will stand in recess until 5 p.m.

Accordingly (at 3 o'clock and 36 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until 5 p.m.

□ 1704

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. GOODLATTE) at 5 o'clock and 4 minutes p.m.

FOREIGN RELATIONS AUTHORIZATION ACT, FISCAL YEARS 1996 AND 1997—VETO MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The unfinished business is the further consideration of the veto message of the President of the United States on the bill (H.R. 1561) to consolidate the foreign affairs agencies of the United States; to authorize appropriations for the Departments of State and related agencies for fiscal years 1996 and 1997; to responsibly reduce the authorizations of appropriations for United States foreign assistance programs for fiscal years 1996 and 1997, and for other purposes.

The question is, will the House, on reconsideration, pass the bill, the objections of the President to the contrary notwithstanding.

The gentleman from New York [Mr. GILMAN] is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, for purposes of debate only, I yield 30 minutes to the gentleman from Indiana [Mr. HAMILTON], pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. Mr. Speaker, during this debate, all time yielded is for purposes of debate only.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members