

Frankly, I am concerned about this Administration's lack of funding for existing regional commissions and lack of interest in promoting economic development programs that create jobs and improve communities. In its fiscal year 2006 budget proposal, the Administration proposes \$6 million for the Delta Regional Authority and only \$1 million for the Northern Great Plains Regional Authority. Further, the Administration's budget proposes to dismantle 18 different economic development programs and instead "consolidate" these programs into a formula-based program housed in the Department of Commerce. Presently these 18 programs include funding for grants and other economic development activities that total \$5.5 billion. The new program will be funded at \$3.7 billion—a reduction of nearly \$2 billion in economic development program funds!

It is time that we affirm our commitment to regional economic development by authorizing these commissions and providing the funding necessary from them to break the cycle of chronic distress in these regions. I believe this bill will help us do that.

SUMMARY OF THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT ACT

The Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act organizes four regional commissions under a common framework, thereby providing a more uniform method for distributing economic assistance throughout the regions most in need of such assistance. It reauthorizes the Delta Regional Authority and the Northern Great Plains Regional Authority and creates two new regional commissions: the Southeast Crescent and the Southwest Border Regional Commission. Both of these latter commissions have been proposed in legislation introduced in the previous Congress and are designed to address problems of systemic poverty and chronic underdevelopment in those regions. Every county or parish that is currently included in a commission through enacted or proposed legislation is similarly included in that same commission under this bill. While the bill follows the successful organizational model of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), it does not include the ARC or the Denali Commission (a wholly intrastate commission) in its framework.

PURPOSE

To organize the regional commissions in the lower 48 states (with the exception of the Appalachian Regional Commission) under a common framework, providing a more uniform organization structure among the commissions and a more uniform method for distributing economic assistance throughout the country.

COMMISSIONS

The bill reauthorizes the Delta Regional Commission and the Northern Great Plains Regional Commission, and creates the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission and the Southwest Border Regional Commission. The Delta Regional Commission and the Northern Great Plains Regional Commission are composed of the same states, counties, and parishes included in the existing Delta Regional Authority and Northern Great Plains Regional Authority. The Southeast Crescent Regional Commission and the Southwest Border Regional Commission are composed of the same states and counties proposed in legislation introduced in the 108th Congress to create a Southeast Crescent Regional Authority and a Southwest Border Regional Commission.

Each commission is authorized to receive appropriations of \$30 million for fiscal year

2006; \$35 million for fiscal year 2007; \$40 million for fiscal year 2008; \$45 million for fiscal year 2009; and \$50 million for fiscal year 2010.

Currently, some counties qualify for membership in more than one regional commission. The bill does not change that. However, the bill provides that an individual county may only receive economic assistance from one regional commission. Therefore, if a county is eligible for membership in more than one commission, it must select one commission in which it would like to participate and be eligible to receive funds. A county or parish can change its selection 90 days before the start of the fiscal year.

The Denali Commission and the Appalachian Regional Commission are not included in this statute.

COMPOSITION

Each commission includes a Federal co-chairperson and a state cochairperson, who is selected from among the state members. Like current law, the Northern Great Plains Commission also includes a tribal cochairperson.

An affirmative vote of a commission requires an affirmative vote of the federal co-chairperson plus a majority of state members.

Like the current laws authorizing regional commissions, the bill sets forth provisions for the salaries of commission members, the appointment of alternatives, and the hiring of additional staff, including an Executive Director.

The bill establishes a coordinating council for the regional commissions consisting of representatives from all the commissions, including the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Denali Commission. The coordinating council is directed to meet biannually to discuss issues facing regions that suffer chronic distress and successful strategies for promoting regional development. The council has no decision-making authority.

Also like current law, each state must develop a comprehensive economic development plan and each commission must develop an economic and infrastructure development plan.

Commissions are required to designate distressed, transitional and attainment counties, and isolated areas of distress within attainment counties, within their region and must allocate at least 50 percent of the appropriations made available to the commission to projects in distressed counties and isolated areas of distress.

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

Commissions have the authority to make grants to State and local governments, and public and nonprofit organizations, for economic development projects, with an emphasis on infrastructure projects, including transportation, basic public, and telecommunications infrastructure projects.

The bill provides for a commission share of 50 percent of the costs of projects; that percentage increases to up to 80 percent for distressed counties. These shares are increased by 10 percent (to 60 percent and 90 percent, respectively) for those projects that have a significant regional impact, including projects that involve 3 or more counties or more than one State.

Commissions have the authority to make grants to local development districts to assist in the payment of the administration of the district. The commission of these grants is limited to 80 percent of the administrative expenses of the local development district receiving the grant.

Commissions have the authority to supplement part of the basic Federal contribution to projects authorized under other Federal grant programs and to increase the Federal

contribution above the fixed maximum part of the cost. The federal share is the same for projects (50 percent and 80 percent for distressed counties, with a 10 percent bonus for regional projects), with the stipulation that the total federal contribution cannot exceed 80 percent.

IN MEMORY OF THE KURDISH VICTIMS OF MARCH 16, 1988

HON. TOM LANTOS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 16, 2005

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleagues to join me in remembering the horrible events that took place in Halabja, Iraq, on March 16, 1988. Today is the 17th anniversary of Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons attack on his own people during a battle waged between a Kurdish force resisting Saddam's oppression and Saddam's Iraqi army. This attack was part of Saddam's systematic genocidal attack on the Kurds known as the Anfal campaign.

In seeking to subdue Kurdish resistance, Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons indiscriminately against Kurdish fighters and civilians alike. The attack on Halabja was one of some forty chemical assaults staged by Hussein against the Kurdish people. In fact, the Kurds of Halabja and neighboring towns constitute the largest civilian population ever exposed to chemical weapons, including sarin, VX, tabun, and mustard gas. As a result of the extensive and devastatingly cruel Anfal campaign, hundreds of Kurdish villages were totally destroyed and as many as 200,000 Kurds were killed.

The tragedy of Halabja should yield lessons for those concerned about responding to future chemical and biological emergencies. The world stood by as innocent men, women, and children suffered and died at the hands of a barbarous regime, and, for 14 long years, the Saddam Hussein dictatorship went unpunished for the murder of hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis, the use of banned chemical weapons against Iraqi Kurds, and innumerable other human rights violations. During those 14 years, the number of his victims, Kurdish and non-Kurdish, increased dramatically, as the discovery of mass graves testifies.

Mr. Speaker, now history has avenged Saddam's victims, however belatedly and inadequately, and soon Saddam Hussein will face the consequences of his war crimes. I ask that my colleagues join me in speaking out against oppression and against the use of chemical and biological weapons. That is now the best way to commemorate the suffering of the people of Halabja and all the victims of Saddam's inhuman Anfal campaign and of his subsequent depredations.

TRIBUTE TO SOUTH PARK HIGH SCHOOL

HON. BRIAN HIGGINS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 16, 2005

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call your attention to the great South Park