

For over 2 years, the Meyers, a family in my district, have been waiting to bring home their son and daughter, Papy and Octavie. We can do better for Papy and Octavie and all the other children waiting to come home to their families.

As the Department of State continues to work to bring home these children, S. 1300 would provide much-needed relief to American families going through this harrowing experience. I urge my colleagues to vote for this legislation. It is the right thing to do and worthy of your support.

Ms. LOFGREN. I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of S. 1300, the Adoptive Family Relief Act. This bill seeks to remove obstacles for immigrant visas to be issued to adopted children from other countries. It eliminates fees for such visas.

Clearly, the challenge of caring for orphans due to crises worldwide is increasing. Rather than frustrate, however, or undermine the compassion and the love of American families who seek to adopt, this legislation modestly seeks to remove some of those barriers and some of those obstacles.

I would point out to my colleagues that I have held of number of hearings on adoption in my subcommittee, the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations. At one of those hearings several months ago, one of our witnesses made a very keen observation that there are more than 50 million children orphaned on the continent of Africa; and if you put that number in perspective, that would make that number of children, if they were in a single country, the fourth largest country in all of Africa after Nigeria, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

One remedy, of course, for this crisis is intercountry adoption, which sometimes brings children from Africa to our shores to provide them with loving homes. Of course, this is only a partial remedy. Many do find a place to live, a home with family members, but many others are left to fend for themselves.

This legislation recognizes that countries' policies do matter. Look at the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Currently, there are more than 400 American families who have successfully adopted children from the DRC. However, due to the DRC Government's suspension of exit permits, which was implemented beginning in September of 2013, many of these families have been unable to bring their adopted children home to the United States. About a dozen of those children have paid with their lives, dying in the country before they could receive medical attention. Others are in dire need of medical aid which, again, this legislation would help, at least, in terms of the

families to give them a bridge for the financial burdens they face.

I would point out that at one of my hearings, one of the witnesses really, in a very powerful way, said—and her name was Jovana Jones, an adoptive parent—“As adoptive parents, we spend years preparing, and it is imperative that our children come home immediately. We have done our part. Our families have done all we can, and we are at our limit.”

And then she said: “Our arms are open now, and our homes are ready to receive them today. We pray that our government mirrors our dedication and acts now so that our children come home soon.”

This is a very important piece of legislation that hopefully will facilitate the adoption and, at least, help those parents who are putting their money on the line; and it allows them to facilitate that adoption, to just hang in there until they can get their children.

Ms. LOFGREN. Mr. Speaker, before coming to the floor, I wanted to reassure myself that the State Department did not have the authority to waive these fees just administratively. It is pretty clear that they need this legislation in order to waive these fees. In fact, they want to waive the fees; they want to support the families. So there is no argument here between the House and Senate, between Republicans and Democrats, between the administration and the legislative branch. This is something that we can all agree on.

You know, to raise kids is one of the most wonderful experiences you can ever have, and we have wonderful American families that want to provide a home for orphans, not only in the DRC, but to orphans all around the world. So it is really important for those of us in the government, administration, and Congress to do what we can to support American families who want to raise these adoptive children.

It is worth noting that the DRC is the problem today, but we have had other problems in the past in other countries, in Latin America and Asia. So this change in the law is going to provide the necessary basis for relieving parents from excessive fees should this occur, God forbid, with other countries.

We would ask our State Department to redouble its efforts with the DRC to get these exit permits underway. It is really unfair to the children and their parents to keep these kids stranded.

□ 1745

Finally, I would just note that we have not done very much by way of anything touching on immigration where we could have bipartisan support. I still wish that we had before us comprehensive immigration reform. That is not this, but it doesn't mean that we shouldn't support this. I think that it is important that we pass this and show these American parents that we are on their side and we hope that they can use the funds that they save

to provide for their new sons and daughters.

Mr. Speaker, unless the gentleman has additional speakers, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, there are very few things that we do in this body more important than trying to make sure that parentless little children have hope in life. Through our State Department, all across the world we do very laudable things to try to make sure they have this chance in life. Sometimes it is orphanages; sometimes it is just other types of help through NGOs.

In this particular case, we are doing everything that we can to facilitate children being put into a loving family on a permanent basis. To bring sometimes childless parents together with often parentless children is, I think, a very beautiful and noble effort on our part. I hope that this bill allows that in a greater way with the DRC and, as Ms. LOFGREN mentioned, with other states across the world if it becomes necessary.

I am grateful for all the bipartisan support. I know this is something that we have come together on. Again, I express appreciation to Chairman ROYCE, Chairman GOODLATTE, and to the gentlewoman who has expressed her support for this.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FRANKS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, S. 1300.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 6:30 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 5 o'clock and 48 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1830

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. POE of Texas) at 6 o'clock and 30 minutes p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, proceedings will resume on motions to suspend the rules previously postponed.

Votes will be taken in the following order: