

CONFERENCE REPORT ON S. 835,
ESTUARIES AND CLEAN WATERS
ACT OF 2000

Mr. GOSS. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 648 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 648

Resolved, That upon adoption of this resolution it shall be in order to consider the conference report to accompany the bill (S. 835) to encourage the restoration of estuary habitat through more efficient project financing and enhanced coordination of Federal and non-Federal restoration programs, and for other purposes. All points of order against the conference report and against its consideration are waived. The conference report shall be considered as read.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD). The gentleman from Florida (Mr. GOSS) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. GOSS. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MOAKLEY), my friend, the ranking member of the Committee on Rules; pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume.

□ 1700

During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 648 provides for consideration of the conference report to accompany S. 835, the Estuaries and Clean Waters Act of 2000. The rule waives all points of order against the conference report and against its consideration. The rule also provides that the conference report shall be considered as read. This is a standard rule for this type of conference report. And I believe it is totally without controversy. I strongly urge my colleagues to support it.

Before we get a chance to vote, Mr. Speaker, S. 835 is an excellent piece of environmental legislation and yet another addition to the fine environmental legacy of the 106th Congress. S. 835 encourages partnerships between Federal, State, and local interests for estuary habitat restoration. Of even greater importance is that the bill supports the development and implementation of comprehensive management plans for the National Estuary Program. This is of particular importance to me because of the Charlotte Harbor NEP, which is located in my district in southwest Florida. I worked hard with our local community to secure the NEP designation for Charlotte Harbor, and I am pleased this legislation will ensure a comprehensive management plan goes forward from the process.

Another key issue for my home State of Florida is title VI of the bill, which authorizes a pilot program to allow States to explore alternate water supply solutions to meet critical needs.

We have always had water wars in Florida, but given the increase in population and the attendant demand for water, we will surely reach a crisis point unless we take immediate action now. The alternate water source provisions in this bill will help in that effort, and I want to thank my colleague and good friend, the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. FOWLER), for her hard work in particular on this issue.

S. 835 also includes other critical restoration efforts for areas such as Lake Pontchartrain and the Tijuana River Valley. I am extremely disappointed to note the Senate refused to accept a provision passed by the House that would have established an EPA grant program to improve water quality in the Florida Keys. I am not aware of any substantive problem on this issue, and I remain hopeful we can adopt this program perhaps through another legislative vehicle.

Even so, this bill is a remarkable piece of legislation, and I commend the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER) and his Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure for their hard work in the area and the successful result. In short, Mr. Speaker, this is a good rule, it is a good bill, and I encourage my colleagues to support both.

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

Mr. MOAKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, my dear friend from Florida (Mr. Goss), for yielding me the customary time; and I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the rule for the bipartisan conference report. America's estuaries are in trouble. According to the national water quality inventory, 44 percent of our estuaries are not meeting their designated uses, whether they are fishing, swimming, or supporting aquatic life. This bill attempts to do something about that by authorizing \$275 million over the next 5 years to help the Corps of Engineers restore estuary habitats.

These funds will be available, Mr. Speaker, for projects to improve degraded estuaries and estuary habitats and get them to the point that they are self-sufficient ecosystems.

Mr. Speaker, estuaries are areas where the current of a river meets the tide of the sea; and because such a wide variety of life thrives there, they are the beginning of the food chain. Estuaries provide the nursing grounds for fisheries, support numerous endangered and threatened species, and host almost half of the migratory birds in the United States.

But, Mr. Speaker, estuaries are very fragile and are suffering from increasing human and environmental pressures. In response to those pressures, this bill includes a number of individual bills that passed the House overwhelmingly. The conference report passed the Senate by unanimous con-

sent and is supported by State and local governments and the business community and the entire environmental community. I urge my colleagues to support this rule and this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. KENNEDY).

Mr. KENNEDY of Rhode Island. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Massachusetts for yielding me this time, the honorable dean of the Massachusetts delegation; and I wish to thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for their support of this rule that makes in order this very important piece of legislation, the Estuary Habitat Restoration Improvement Act.

For those of my colleagues who are familiar with my State of Rhode Island, we are practically one big estuary. The Narragansett Bay runs right through my State. It is a very important part of our whole economy; and so, therefore, this bill represents an important step forward for our State and also for our Nation in preserving these fragile estuaries.

My State, as my colleagues know, has had a long history of trying to work to preserve its Narragansett Bay. It goes to the importance of fishing in our State, sailing, swimming, and our number one industry, the tourism economy. Of course this has a major impact on our tourism economy. So for all of these reasons, this Habitat and Estuary Restoration Act is very important for our State's economy.

It is not only the case in Rhode Island but it is also the case nationally that our waters have not always been treated with the respect and care that they deserve. Estuaries are very valuable ecosystems in our overall environment. They nourish a wide variety of animal and plant life, as the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MOAKLEY) pointed out. They also serve to help filter pollution that comes in in the form of so much runoff from farms, to oil spills, to wastewater overflow. Estuaries help in that very important part of preserving this environment by acting as a buffer.

Recently, I read an article in our own newspaper, the Providence Journal, where Curt Spalding, our executive director of Save the Bay in Rhode Island, said that we in Rhode Island have lost over half of our salt marshes in our State. Over 1,000 acres of eelgrass, for example, in our State, that we once possessed, only about 1/100th of that still remains, depriving countless marine life from its ability to find a source of primary food. And he writes that the damming of these rivers and streams has had a totally detrimental impact on countless fish habitat as well as other marine life.

So without immediate action on legislation such as this, we might pass the