

Members of Congress, with the industry and with the administration, to ensure the availability of advanced telecommunications services in our rural communities. Many of the challenges confronting rural America can be met and overcome with the commitment that adequate resources are directed toward the development of rural communities, and access to telecommunications is one of those critical issues we face.

By bringing quality health care, education, information, and commerce to rural families and to business, an advanced telecommunication infrastructure can overcome any disadvantages of distance and low density.

By providing one voice for rural America, the congressional caucus will ensure communities remain viable and competitive. Our job in Congress is to raise the awareness of rural issues to preserve this way of life. As Congress debates important issues like access to telecommunications, we must address the opportunities and challenges that we face in rural America. Rural America across this country needs to demonstrate to ourselves and to the rest of the world our commitment for a better life. I urge my colleagues to join us in this effort to fight and to speak out for rural America.

EXPRESSING SUPPORT FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE REPUBLIC OF MOZAMBIQUE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD. Mr. Speaker, we just passed out of this House tonight H.R. 431, a very important piece of legislation, expressing support for humanitarian assistance to the Republic of Mozambique. I want to commend our government, nongovernmental organizations, and other nations for their response to the flood crisis in Mozambique. Cyclone Eline devastated that poor country, driving residents from their homes, children from their schools, shopkeepers from their businesses, and doctors and patients from their clinics. The only refuge was roofs, treetops and scraps of land protruding here and there from swirling waters. One young woman, Sophie Pedro, gave birth to a baby girl in a tree top where she had sought refuge for 4 days.

The heavy toll on the population and massive destruction of the infrastructure, however, have dwarfed these early emergency relief-and-rescue efforts.

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The flood waters have destroyed a decade-long economic recovery undertaken by Mozambique. Before these

disastrous floods, Mr. Speaker, the government had embarked upon sustained efforts to manage public resources better, improve the climate for investors, and promote private sector development. Mozambique had complied with the Structural Adjustment Program requirements, the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility, and more recently the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.

Last year, Mozambique completed the requirement to receive \$3.7 billion in debt reduction from external creditors, the largest reduction under the HIPC Initiative. Prudent fiscal and monetary policies and structural reforms increased international confidence in Mozambique's economy, reflected in higher long-term capital inflows and a stable exchange rate.

However, the disaster now will cost the country nearly all their hard-won economic gains. It will take hundreds of millions of dollars to rebuild the transportation and communication infrastructure, schools, clinics, homes, and businesses.

While Mozambique has been one of Africa's economic success stories, the floods threaten to return the country to conditions reminiscent of the command economy of the 1970s and the ravaging civil war of the 1980s.

To sustain its economic gains, Mozambique will need more than emergency aid and logistical relief. It will need long-term reconstruction and rehabilitation assistance. Already the multilateral institutions are considering new construction loans. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, these new loans will only compound Mozambique's existing debt burden, even with the substantial reductions under the HIPC program.

I applaud the President's decision to forgive Mozambique's remaining bilateral debt and encourage this Congress, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund to follow suit. Mozambique has played by the rules. They have restructured their economy, adhered to all conditionalities imposed by the multilateral financial institutions, and stayed the course with their fiscal and monetary policies.

The Mozambican people have made great short-term sacrifice for the long-term future prosperity of their country. If we do not address this current crisis with speedy and substantial current multilateral debt forgiveness, we will betray our social contract with the men, women, and children of Mozambique.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we should look at a permanent relief force so we will not have to come before this body every time a disaster occurs.

CONGRESSIONAL RURAL CAUCUS/ RURAL TRANSPORTATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DEAL of Georgia). Under a previous

order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. NEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. NEY. Mr. Speaker, tonight I rise, along with my colleagues before me, to promote the kick-off of the Congressional Rural Caucus. I am proud to be a member of this caucus, which will work to better represent the interests of rural America by raising awareness of the needs of communities in these areas.

Mr. Speaker, my district, the 18th Congressional District of Ohio, is mostly rural, made up of people who proudly support the coal and steel industries, agriculture, and various other manufacturing industries. A native of the Ohio Valley, I have represented this district for a number of years, both as a State Representative and a State Senator, and now in Congress. I am well aware of the needs of the people who live there.

Tonight previously Members heard from colleagues who talked about education in rural America. We also heard about telecommunications. Tonight I want to focus on transit, but there are a lot of other needs today. There is housing.

We were visited by Bruce Veldt from the Ohio Department of Development who was talking to us about rural housing initiatives. We have had many people who are concentrating on the things that are important, and they are coming from the State of Ohio. They are communicating more. But I think this kick-off of our Congressional Rural Caucus is something that is going to be able to work across all 50 States to help rural America.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, too often rural communities have been an afterthought in Federal policy discussions and program development. The establishment of the bipartisan Congressional Rural Caucus, which currently has 112 members, will help to ensure that the interests of rural America are properly represented in Federal policy and legislation.

One area that undoubtedly exhibits the need for better representation of rural America is the transportation arena. Rural areas are often left out of negotiations when State transportation planning is being planned, with most of the decision-making power being left to the State and metropolitan officials, who have a place at the table.

In June 1998, when Congress passed the landmark Transportation Equity Act for the 21st century, better known as TEA-21, it marked the beginning of a new era in rural transportation. In addition to providing more Federal funds to help improve the infrastructure and services in rural America, the new law reinforces the intermodal philosophy and takes an important first step in strengthening the role local officials wield in the decision-making process and planning process.

As a member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, I was privileged to have served on the TEA-21 conference committee. I am proud to have fought for the language which increased the presence of local rural officials in the transportation and planning process. This is good for rural America and it is good for transportation.

However, challenges abound in rural areas. The needs still greatly outpace Federal, State, and local resources. I would like to just give a few examples.

One in every 14 households in rural America is without a vehicle, despite being the most prevalent mode of transportation. Nearly 38 percent of county roads are inadequate for current travel, and nearly half of major rural bridges are structurally deficient.

This is significant, as 81 percent or 3.1 million miles of the Nation's public highway system exist in rural America.

While still an important mode of transportation, inner city bus service has almost completely disappeared off the face of rural America. In 1965, 23,000 communities were linked together with daily bus service. As we start the new century, that number has dwindled to a mere 4,500, from 23,000 down to 4,500. Those are communities with rural routes. Too often the rural routes are the ones that are eliminated.

This decline has implications, not only for passenger service, but also for essential freight services, as intercity buses often provide the only daily package express service in remote rural communities.

Public transit is becoming a vital source of transportation in rural areas, especially as disabled and elderly populations rise. Yet, 38 percent of rural residents live in an area without any form of public transportation. This can be directly linked to the fact that less than 10 percent of Federal spending for public transportation goes to rural communities.

Air service is often seen as an essential factor in attracting and retaining businesses in rural communities, but the high cost of subsidizing service limits its availability. On this, the eve of the day when Congress is scheduled to take up the Aviation Investment and Reform Act, or known as AIR-21, the conference report, a bill which will reauthorize and increase funding for Federal aviation programs, as well as provide improved passenger service to rural areas, on this eve, I wish to thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER) and the rest of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure who, on a bipartisan basis, have recognized the needs of rural America when it comes to aviation.

TEA-21 does help ensure rural elected officials and communities are represented in the planning process, which is best described as the gateway for accessing Federal transportation funds.

This will help States develop comprehensive plans that use our limited resources most wisely, as well as contribute to the economic and social growth of rural areas.

Even with the new TEA-21 provisions, however, rural elected officials are still on an uneven playing field with urban and state officials. That is why members of groups like the National Association of Counties, National League of Cities, National Association of Development Organizations and the American Public Works Association continue to advocate federal legislation that closes the equity gap in planning and programming.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, transportation is an essential component of addressing the needs of rural America. It not only connects people to jobs, health care and family in a way that enhances one's quality of life, but it also serves as the lifeline of the rural and national economies. I look forward to serving with the other members of the Congressional Rural Caucus and to bettering the lives of those we serve.

I just want to pay tribute to the rural caucus, who is going to absolutely make life better across rural America by their bipartisan effort.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION WAIVING POINTS OF ORDER AGAINST CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 1000, WENDELL H. FORD AVIATION INVESTMENT AND REFORM ACT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Mr. REYNOLDS, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 106-523) on the resolution (H. Res. 438) waiving points of order against the conference report to accompany the bill (H.R. 1000) to amend title 49, United States Code, to reauthorize programs of the Federal Aviation Administration, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 3843, SMALL BUSINESS RE-AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2000

Mr. REYNOLDS, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 106-524) on the resolution (H. Res. 439) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 3843) to reauthorize programs to assist small business concerns, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

ISSUES CONCERNING RURAL AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. SCHAFFER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, I, too, wish to commend those who provided

the leadership in the House of establishing the Congressional Rural Caucus. As a member of that caucus, I am enthusiastic about the work before us and the goals that we propose to undertake.

The kick-off of that caucus is an exciting time and I think an important realization that rural issues need some help here in the United States Congress. There seem to be fewer and fewer of us who represent rural communities, and our goal and our charge over the rest of this Congress and on into the future years involves elevating the priority of rural issues in the Congress. I am excited to be part of that.

Sixty-two million Americans live in rural America. That is one out of every four people. We should not be leaving 25 percent of our citizens out of the economic prosperity we are enjoying generally as a Nation today.

In the Fourth Congressional District of Colorado, it is a largely rural area and depends heavily on agriculture. The fragile support system of small towns scattered throughout the region depends on the bounty of our natural resources. The tax base in small cities and counties in Colorado and all over rural America is usually small and less flexible than in larger cities in suburban areas. With such small populations, tax bases rarely grow, and increased taxes have a much greater impact on the individual property owner.

Residents of these areas cannot afford tax increases to support the needs of their small communities, so local governments have to make do with what they have. They cannot afford to compensate for an ever-changing Federal role with respect to an overregulatory propensity here in Washington. The Federal government and Congress must allow these people to raise the resources they need, and we should spend less of our time regulating every last penny out of them.

All too often Federal agencies propose regulations without keeping in mind these rural communities. These communities, I submit, cannot afford to comply with too many more new rules and regulations.

One of the biggest offenders in the overregulating of rural America is the Fish and Wildlife Service, through the Endangered Species Act. Regulations involving sensitive animals and plants can clean out just about any small town's economy if the species in question happens to be in a community.

Rural communities, like those in my district, are often supported by agriculture. Agriculture is not benefiting from the economic prosperity that the rest of the country is currently experiencing. They are suffering even more thanks to the Endangered Species Act.

My district contains the short grass prairie ecosystem that attracts many small critters, such as the Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse, the black-