

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the yeas have it.

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

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

□ 1400

FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY ACT OF 2009

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 46) to provide for payment of an administrative fee to public housing agencies to cover the costs of administering family self-sufficiency programs in connection with the housing choice voucher program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 46

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Family Self-Sufficiency Act of 2009".

SEC. 2. ADMINISTRATIVE FEES FOR FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM COSTS.

Subsection (h) of section 23 of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437u(h)) is amended by striking paragraph (1) and inserting the following new paragraph:

"(1) SECTION 8 FEES.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall establish a fee under section 8(q) for the costs incurred in administering the self-sufficiency program under this section to assist families receiving voucher assistance through section 8(o).

"(B) ELIGIBILITY FOR FEE.—The fee shall provide funding for family self-sufficiency coordinators as follows:

"(i) BASE FEE.—A public housing agency serving 25 or more participants in the family self-sufficiency program under this section shall receive a fee equal to the costs of employing one full-time family self-sufficiency coordinator. An agency serving fewer than 25 such participants shall receive a prorated fee.

"(ii) ADDITIONAL FEE.—An agency that meets minimum performance standards shall receive an additional fee sufficient to cover the costs of employing a second family self-sufficiency coordinator if the agency has 75 or more participating families, and a third such coordinator if it has 125 or more participating families.

"(iii) PREVIOUSLY FUNDED AGENCIES.—An agency that received funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for more than three such coordinators in any of fiscal years 1999 through 2008 shall receive funding for the highest number of coordinators funded in a single fiscal year during that period, provided they meet applicable size and performance standards.

"(iv) INITIAL YEAR.—For the first year in which a public housing agency exercises its right to develop an family self-sufficiency

program for its residents, it shall be entitled to funding to cover the costs of up to one family self-sufficiency coordinator, based on the size specified in its action plan for such program.

"(v) STATE AND REGIONAL AGENCIES.—For purposes of calculating the family self-sufficiency portion of the administrative fee under this subparagraph, each administratively distinct part of a State or regional public housing agency shall be treated as a separate agency.

"(vi) DETERMINATION OF NUMBER OF COORDINATORS.—In determining whether a public housing agency meets a specific threshold for funding pursuant to this paragraph, the number of participants being served by the agency in its family self-sufficiency program shall be considered to be the average number of families enrolled in such agency's program during the course of the most recent fiscal year for which the Department of Housing and Urban Development has data.

"(C) PRORATION.—If insufficient funds are available in any fiscal year to fund all of the coordinators authorized under this section, the first priority shall be given to funding one coordinator at each agency with an existing family self-sufficiency program. The remaining funds shall be prorated based on the number of remaining coordinators to which each agency is entitled under this subparagraph.

"(D) RECAPTURE.—Any fees allocated under this subparagraph by the Secretary in a fiscal year that have not been spent by the end of the subsequent fiscal year shall be recaptured by the Secretary and shall be available for providing additional fees pursuant to subparagraph (B)(ii).

"(E) PERFORMANCE STANDARDS.—Within six months after the date of the enactment of this paragraph, the Secretary shall publish a proposed rule specifying the performance standards applicable to funding under clauses (ii) and (iii) of subparagraph (B). Such standards shall include requirements applicable to the leveraging of in-kind services and other resources to support the goals of the family self-sufficiency program.

"(F) DATA COLLECTION.—Public housing agencies receiving funding under this paragraph shall collect and report to the Secretary, in such manner as the Secretary shall require, information on the performance of their family self-sufficiency programs.

"(G) EVALUATION.—The Secretary shall conduct a formal and scientific evaluation of the effectiveness of well-run family self-sufficiency programs, using random assignment of participants to the extent practicable. Not later than the expiration of the 4-year period beginning upon the enactment of this paragraph, the Secretary shall submit an interim evaluation report to the Congress. Not later than the expiration of the 8-year period beginning upon such enactment, the Secretary shall submit a final evaluation report to the Congress. There is authorized to be appropriated \$10,000,000 to carry out the evaluation under this subparagraph.

"(H) INCENTIVES FOR INNOVATION AND HIGH PERFORMANCE.—The Secretary may reserve up to 10 percent of the amounts made available for administrative fees under this paragraph to provide support to or reward family self-sufficiency programs that are particularly innovative or highly successful in achieving the goals of the program."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. BACA) and the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. BIGGERT) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on this legislation and to insert additional materials thereon.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise today in support of H.R. 46, the Family Self-Sufficiency Act of 2009. I thank the gentlewoman from Illinois, Representative BIGGERT, for introducing this critical legislation which provides housing agencies with much-needed administrative funds.

H.R. 46 provides public housing agencies with a funding source to cover the costs of administering Family Self-Sufficiency, or FSS, programs in connection with HUD's section 8 voucher program.

This legislation enhances the FSS programs by providing housing authorities with additional coordinator funding so that they can help more families participate in the programs. It establishes a minimal ratio of coordinators to participants to ensure that there is adequate assistance to provide all of the families enrolled in the FSS program.

H.R. 46 requires HUD to establish and implement performance measures, collect data on FSS programs, and report to Congress on the effectiveness of these programs.

With this additional funding, HUD will have the flexibility needed to reward innovative and successful FSS programs. And that is important for a lot of us, to have the flexibility to reward those programs that are doing a good job. Mr. Speaker, as someone who comes from a district that has been one of the hardest hit by the foreclosure crisis—and that is in the Inland Empire—I can tell you that there is greater need now than ever before for public housing.

The FSS program works. It provides struggling families with the assistance they need, while also lessening their reliance on public housing so that they can eventually become self-sufficient homeowners and renters.

In my district, the waiting list for affordable housing for some families is as long as 10 years, and that is a shame that it has to be as long as 10 years. In this time of economic difficulty, we must support legislation that provides funds for public housing agencies that put more families on the path back to economic security.

Again, I want to thank Representative BIGGERT for her hard work on H.R. 46 and her commitment to this issue. Thank you for your commitment to this issue on behalf of all the families that will be impacted.

I urge my colleagues to support the Family Self-Sufficiency Act.

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

Mrs. BIGGERT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, as the author of H.R. 46, the Family Self-Sufficiency Act, I encourage all my colleagues to support this important legislation which will help more disadvantaged families gain independence from government assistance.

Thanks to the support of my colleague from California (Ms. WATERS) last Congress as a part of the larger section 8 voucher reform package and as a stand-alone measure, twice the House passed the Family Self-Sufficiency Act. Today, we will again consider the same measure.

The Senate didn't act on section 8 reform legislation last Congress, which is why we are moving this legislation again. The Family Self-Sufficiency Program, also called FSS, is offered in connection with the Department of Housing and Urban Development Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Local public housing authorities employ FSS coordinators and administer these programs. In addition to rental housing assistance, FSS programs connect families to housing counseling, job training, child care, education, and other services to help them reduce their dependence on public assistance. FSS also helps families save for homeownership.

The FSS program is well worth it. Let me give you a quick example of an FSS success story from my congressional district.

After 6 years of service, a Navy veteran and a single mom of two secured a part-time job, and thanks to the GI Bill, enrolled as a full-time student. Despite struggling to make ends meet, she received her degree and enrolled in the DuPage County Housing Authority Family Self-Sufficiency Program. This program connected her to a résumé writing class at the University of Illinois' Employment Training Center. Within a week of posting her newly polished résumé, she secured interviews and eventually a full-time job that doubled her salary. She also worked with a financial planner to improve her budgeting and management skills. Today, this single mother and veteran is an independent and self-sufficient homeowner, a long way from public housing.

So what is the problem? Well, in fiscal year 2004, HUD changed its FSS coordinator funding process, and the result, in a 20-month period: the number of FSS coordinators dropped by about two-thirds, and 4,000 fewer families participated in the program. HUD has attempted to fix the mistake, but without success. So that is why H.R. 46 is necessary, to ensure that public housing authorities have consistent coordinator funding necessary to administer the program and serve people who choose the FSS path to independence.

H.R. 46 establishes a minimum ratio of program coordinators to participants; ensures the Public Housing Au-

thority gets funding for one coordinator for 25-plus families enrolled in its FSS program; with 75 or more families enrolled, funding for two coordinators; and with 125 or more families enrolled, funding for three coordinators. It also requires HUD to establish and implement performance measures, collect data on FSS programs, evaluate their effectiveness, and report to Congress on its findings. Finally, the bill provides some funding flexibility to reward innovative and successful programs.

FSS works. It is a helping hand, not a handout, to American families who are working to become independent of government assistance. With the challenges American families face in this economy, the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, and those like my constituent who have benefited from it, are a glimmer of hope. With this program, families can successfully make ends meet, raise children, get an education, secure a job, and achieve the dream of homeownership. It is a simple, bipartisan step that we can take now to ensure that a brief period of economic hardship doesn't turn into a lifetime of poverty and dependence for many of our Nation's most vulnerable families. It does so by addressing the lack of consistent Federal funding for administering FSS services.

Mr. Speaker, these are good, flexible programs that help put disadvantaged families on the path to independence. Public housing can be an important safety net, but it is not a permanent solution. Let's give these individuals all the support we can to help them stand on their own two feet.

As I conclude, I would like to thank everyone who made this bill possible, including John Day, president of the DuPage Housing Authority; Jeffrey Lubell, executive director of the Center for Housing Policy; and the folks at the American Association of Service Coordinators, the National Housing Conference, the New America Foundation, and the Corporation for Enterprise Development. And of course I would like to thank my constituent for her courage and willingness to let me share her success story with all of you today, and the gentleman from California (Mr. BACA) for managing this bill.

At this time, I would like to insert into the RECORD a 2008 letter from the American Association of Service Coordinators.

SEPTEMBER 24, 2008.

Hon. JUDY BIGGERT,
Ranking Member, Financial Institutions and
Consumer Credit Subcommittee of the House
Financial Services Committee, House of
Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR RANKING MEMBER BIGGERT: On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to thank you for the introduction of the Family Self-Sufficiency Act of 2007 and for your support of stabilized funding for the HUD Family Self-Sufficiency program (FSS).

We appreciate your recognition of the importance of stable, predictable funding for the FSS program. The improvements prescribed in the FSS Act will enable agencies to run effective FSS programs and ulti-

mately provide more families with the opportunity to build assets and work toward self-sufficiency.

As you know, changes in the way Section 8 FSS funding has been allocated for FSS coordinators in recent years has caused many housing agencies to experience sudden funding cut-offs and declining enrollment. Moreover, many participants have been left without the necessary program coordinators who are critical to their access to services and support and mentorship for their progress toward self-sufficiency.

The FSS Act of 2007 addresses this problem and places the FSS program back on its original path as a proven approach for helping families in the Housing Choice Voucher program lift themselves out of poverty and achieve their dream of education, entrepreneurship or homeownership in a safe, viable way.

We also support the Section 8 Voucher Reform Act of 2007 (SEVRA), H.R. 1851, voucher reform legislation, that proposed similar changes to the FSS administrative funding process and also makes critical improvements to the overall Section 8 voucher program. By stabilizing funding for the Section 8 voucher program, SEVRA not only allows the voucher program to run more efficiently and effectively but ensures that funding is available for the asset-building escrow accounts provided through FSS.

Together, the FSS Act and SEVRA can help restore the strength to the Section 8 voucher program, the nation's leading source of housing assistance for low-income people and a critical base for the FSS program.

Again, we thank you for the introduction of the Family Self-Sufficiency Act of 2007 and for your continued support of the FSS program. We look forward to your continued leadership in support of FSS and the Section 8 voucher program.

Sincerely,

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
SERVICE COORDINATORS.
CORPORATION FOR
ENTERPRISE
DEVELOPMENT.
NATIONAL HOUSING
CONFERENCE.
NEW AMERICA FOUNDATION.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 46, "The Family Self-Sufficiency Act of 2009." This bill expresses the importance of providing payment for an administrative fee to public housing agencies to cover the cost of administering family self-sufficiency programs in connection with the housing choice voucher program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Housing choice vouchers allow low-income families to choose and lease or purchase safe, decent, and affordable privately-owned rental housing. Since housing assistance is provided on behalf of the family or individual, participants are able to find their own housing, including single-family homes, townhouses and apartments. The participant is free to choose any housing that meets the requirements of the program and is not limited to units located in subsidized housing projects. Housing choice vouchers are administered locally by public housing agencies (PHAs). The PHAs receive federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to administer the voucher program.

A family that is issued a housing voucher is responsible for finding a suitable housing unit of the family's choice where the owner agrees to rent under the program. This unit may include the family's present residence. Rental

units must meet minimum standards of health and safety, as determined by the PHA. A housing subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by the PHA on behalf of the participating family. The family then pays the difference between the actual rent charged by the landlord and the amount subsidized by the program. Under certain circumstances, if authorized by the PHA, a family may use its voucher to purchase a modest home.

Eligibility for a housing voucher is determined by the PHA based on the total annual gross income and family size and is limited to U.S. citizens and specified categories of non-citizens who have eligible immigration status. In general, the family's income may not exceed 50 percent of the median income for the county or metropolitan area in which the family chooses to live. By law, a PHA must provide 75 percent of its voucher to applicants whose incomes do not exceed 30 percent of the area median income.

Since the demand for housing assistance often exceeds the limited resources available to HUD and the local housing agencies, long waiting periods are common. In fact, a PHA may close its waiting list when it has more families on the list than can be assisted in the near future.

PHAs may establish local preferences for selecting applicants from its waiting list. For example, PHAs may give a preference to a family who is (1) homeless or living in substandard housing, (2) paying more than 50 percent of its income for rent, or (3) involuntarily displaced. Families who qualify for any such local preferences move ahead of other families on the list who does not qualify for any preference. Each PHA has the discretion to establish local preferences to reflect the housing needs and priorities of its particular community.

When the voucher holder finds a unit that it wishes to occupy and reaches an agreement with the landlord over the lease terms, the PHA determines a payment standard that is the amount generally needed to rent a moderately-priced dwelling unit in the local housing market and that is used to calculate the amount of housing assistance a family will receive. However, the payment standard does not limit and does not affect the amount of rent a landlord may charge or the family may pay. A family which receives a housing voucher can select a unit with a rent that is below or above the payment standard. The housing voucher family must pay 30 percent of its monthly adjusted gross income for rent and utilities, and if the unit rent is greater than the payment standard, the family is required to pay the additional amount. By law, whenever a family moves to a new unit where the rent exceeds the payment standard, the family may not pay more than 40 percent of its adjusted monthly income for rent. The PHA calculates the maximum amount of housing assistance allowable. The maximum housing assistance is generally the lesser of the payment standard minus 30 percent of the family's monthly adjusted income or the gross rent for the unit minus 30 percent of monthly adjusted income.

The family self-sufficiency (FSS) is a HUD program that encourages communities to develop local strategies to help voucher families obtain employment that will lead to economic independence and self-sufficiency. Public housing agencies work with welfare agencies, schools, businesses, and other local partners

to develop a comprehensive program that gives participating FSS family members the skills and experience to enable them to obtain employment that pays a living wage. FSS was established in 1990 by section 554 of the National Affordable Housing Act. It is a successor program to project self-sufficiency and operation bootstrap. FSS program services may include, but are not limited to: child care, transportation, education, job training and employment counseling, substance/alcohol abuse treatment or counseling, household skill training, and homeownership counseling.

For the most part, PHAs must rely on their own or other local resources to operate FSS programs. However, under the authority of annual appropriations acts, HUD has been able to provide some funding for FSS program coordinators to assist PHAs in operating housing choice voucher FSS programs. With this act, the secretary shall establish a fee for the costs incurred in administering the self-sufficiency program under this section to assist families receiving voucher assistance through section 8. A public housing agency serving 25 or more participants in the family self-sufficiency program under this section shall receive a fee equal to the costs of employing one full-time family self-sufficiency coordinator. An agency serving fewer than 25 such participants shall receive a prorated fee. An agency that meets minimum performance standards shall receive an additional fee sufficient to cover the costs of employing a second family self-sufficiency coordinator if the agency has 75 or more participating families, and a third such coordinator if it has 125 or more participating families. An agency that received funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for more than three such coordinators in any of fiscal years 1999 through 2008 shall receive funding for the highest number of coordinators funded in a single fiscal year during that period, provided they meet applicable size and performance standards. For the first year in which a public housing agency exercises its right to develop a family self-sufficiency program for its residents, it shall be entitled to funding to cover the costs of up to one family self-sufficiency coordinator, based on the size specified in its action plan for such program.

The family self-sufficiency program will truly benefit those who really need a helping hand out of poverty. However, there needs to be monetary assistance given to the Department of Housing and Urban Development so that they might hire the needed staff to maximize the use of federal funds and improve the lives of others. The family self-sufficiency act will ensure that these objectives are met. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting "The Family Self-Sufficiency Act of 2009."

Mrs. BIGGERT. With that, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank again JUDY BIGGERT for her leadership in preventing homelessness. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 46, the Families Self-Sufficiency Act of 2009.

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 California (Mr. BACA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 46.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

RAISING THE CASE OF ROBERT LEVINSON WITH IRAN

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 36) calling on the President and the allies of the United States to engage with officials of the Government of Iran to raise the case of Robert Levinson at every opportunity, urging officials of the Government of Iran to fulfill their promises of assistance to the family of Robert Levinson, and calling on the Government of Iran to share the results of its investigation into the disappearance of Robert Levinson with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the concurrent resolution.

The text of the concurrent resolution is as follows:

H. CON. RES. 36

Whereas United States citizen Robert Levinson is a retired agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, a resident of Florida, the husband of Christine Levinson, and father of their 7 children;

Whereas Robert Levinson traveled from Dubai to Kish Island, Iran, on March 8, 2007;

Whereas, after traveling to Kish Island and checking into the Hotel Maryam, he disappeared on March 9, 2007;

Whereas neither his family nor the United States Government has received further information on his fate or whereabouts;

Whereas March 9, 2009, marks the second anniversary of the disappearance of Robert Levinson;

Whereas the Government of Switzerland, which has served as the Protecting Power for the United States in the Islamic Republic of Iran in the absence of diplomatic relations between the Government of the United States and the Government of Iran since 1980, has continuously pressed the Government of Iran on the case of Robert Levinson and lent vital assistance and support to the Levinson family during their December 2007 visit to Iran;

Whereas officials of the Government of Iran promised their continued assistance to the relatives of Robert Levinson during the visit of the family to the Islamic Republic of Iran in December 2007; and

Whereas the Government of Iran, including through a statement made during an interview with NBC News broadcast on July 28, 2008, has declared that its officials are willing to cooperate with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the search for Robert Levinson: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That Congress—

(1) commends the Embassy of Switzerland in Tehran, Iran, and the Government of