

You do the math very quickly. Mr. Chairman can do the math very quickly. Actually, I take that back. The gentleman is from Arkansas. I will do it for him.

They can proliferate very, very quickly and have a profound impact. They will burrow into levees. They found that they have made these 150-foot burrows that actually compromise flood protection infrastructure like levees. It actually puts our communities in jeopardy. They will eat the vegetation. They will eat all the way down to the roots, and the roots are actually what hold everything together, what hold our coastal landscape together.

What this legislation does is that it helps to put a bounty program, to ensure that we can come in and we can actually harvest and we can retrieve these nutria to prevent the proliferation that goes today from Maryland all the way to California, down to the coast of Louisiana, to prevent this impact to habitat that exacerbates our coastal resiliency and ecological productivity all across the United States.

I thank Mr. HARDER, my friend from California, for working with us on this. This is a reauthorization bill. Members all across the political spectrum support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I will say it again. My good friend, Mr. HUFFMAN, from California and I rarely agree on legislation. We absolutely, absolutely agree on this one. I ask all Members to please support this. This is very helpful. It actually prevents disaster dollars. It improves ecological productivity and certainly will help with the resiliency of my home State of coastal Louisiana.

Mr. Speaker, as I close, the chairman commented on my attire. I want to remind him it is Christmastime. It is Christmastime, and these are colors that are festive and relevant to the time of year.

I think he might have noted that I resemble a nutria or something like that. Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what the gentleman from Arkansas is talking about. This is absolutely topflight attire for Christmas 2024.

While I respect my friend, the chairman of the committee, sometimes he is simply in error.

Mr. Speaker, I urge adoption of this legislation, and I thank my friend from California and my friend from Arkansas.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, when the last nutria in the United States is eradicated, it will not be missed, but the gentleman from Louisiana will be missed. It has been a pleasure serving with him. He is colorful, both in his rhetoric and in his fashion. We appreciate him and wish him well.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from northern California (Mr. HARDER).

Mr. HARDER of California. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. HUFFMAN for yielding. I thank my friend from Louisiana (Mr. GRAVES), for his leadership

and his sense of style. We are certainly going to miss him and all of the work that he has done to make this critical legislation a reality.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is dead simple. All it does is reauthorize funding to advance eradication efforts for this invasive rodent which is already causing millions of dollars in damage in 18 States including California, Louisiana, and Florida.

These swamp rats threaten our world-class farmland, our critical flood control infrastructure, and our water quality.

With their massive nacho cheese-colored orange teeth, nutria can eat 25 percent of their body weight in vegetation every single day, breaking down our levees and harming our waterways.

To make matters worse, these invasive rats weigh upwards of 40 pounds. One female nutria, to do the math for my friend from Louisiana, can reproduce 200 offspring every single year.

This means that if we don't get this bill done, these nutria will continue to expand and ravage our country, unless the strategic wildlife management plans actually reduce their growth.

This is our last chance to secure 5 additional years of nutria eradication efforts for affected districts across the Nation, and we know that it can work. Our efforts have already shrunk nutria populations across the country. In 2018, the Chesapeake Bay region successfully eradicated nutria from their communities after almost two decades.

□ 1845

We are learning from that in California and Louisiana. This shows that we have the wildlife management techniques that can ensure that we can continue to move forward.

We are reaching a critical point in nutria control efforts. This year alone, we have experienced a 55 percent increase in detected nutria cells, and we are on track to, unfortunately, have a record-breaking year for captive nutria right now.

We must reauthorize these eradication efforts so we can stop the destruction and damage in my district and others like it across the Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to pass this bill to keep our levees, waterways, and agricultural lands safe from these dangerous, invasive swamp rats.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on this very important bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 8308 would reauthorize a program that has proven to be very effective in protecting our country's vital wetlands and marshes from a destructive, invasive species.

While great work has already been accomplished in controlling these invasive pests, continuing to ensure our native species of plants and ani-

mals are able to recover and thrive is crucial for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, I again thank my colleagues for their diligent work on this bill. I urge all Members to support this commonsense, bipartisan legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 8308.

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.

FIRE DEPARTMENT REPAYMENT ACT OF 2023

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3396) to require the standardization of reciprocal fire suppression cost share agreements, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3396

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 "Fire Department Repayment Act of 2023".

SEC. 2. REQUIREMENTS RELATING TO CERTAIN FIRE SUPPRESSION COST SHARE AGREEMENTS.

(a) *ESTABLISHMENT OF STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES.—Not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment of this section, the Secretaries shall—*

(1) *establish standard operating procedures relating to payment timelines for fire suppression cost share agreements established under the Act of May 27, 1955 (42 U.S.C. 1856a) (commonly known as the "Reciprocal Fire Protection Act"); and*

(2) *with respect to each fire suppression cost share agreement in operation on such date—*

(A) *review each such agreement; and*

(B) *modify each agreement as necessary to comply with the standard operating procedures required under paragraph (1).*

(b) *ALIGNMENT OF FIRE SUPPRESSION COST SHARE AGREEMENTS WITH COOPERATIVE FIRE PROTECTION AGREEMENTS.—The standard operating procedures required under subsection (a)(1) shall include a requirement that each fire suppression cost share agreement be aligned with each of the cooperative fire protection agreements applicable to the entity subject to such fire suppression cost share agreement.*

(c) *PAYMENTS PURSUANT TO COST SHARE AGREEMENTS.—With respect to payments made pursuant to fire suppression cost share agreements, the standard operating procedures required under subsection (a)(1) shall require that the Federal paying entity reimburse a local fire department if such fire department submits an invoice in accordance with cost settlement procedures.*

(d) *SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that the Secretaries should carry out reciprocal fire suppression cost share agreement repayments to local fire suppression organizations as soon as practicable after fire suppression occurs but not later than 1 year after fire suppression occurs.*

(e) *SECRETARIES DEFINED.—In this section, the term "Secretaries" means—*

- (1) the Secretary of Agriculture;
- (2) the Secretary of the Interior;
- (3) the Secretary of Homeland Security; and
- (4) the Secretary of Defense.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) and the gentleman from California (Mr. HUFFMAN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 3396, the bill now under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 3396, the Fire Department Repayment Act. This is a bipartisan bill sponsored by Representative HARDER alongside Representatives CURTIS and LAMALFA.

H.R. 3396 would standardize cost-share agreements between the Federal Government and local fire departments to ensure safe and local firefighting partners are fairly and quickly compensated for fighting wildfires on Federal lands.

Because wildfires do not heed administrative boundaries, various State, Tribal, local, and private firefighting resources respond jointly to wildfires throughout the Nation. The costs expended by these resources are then reimbursed under preexisting arrangements known as reciprocal fire suppression cost-share agreements. These agreements enable firefighting entities to access resources and assistance from neighboring jurisdictions during large fires on Federal lands.

Unfortunately, the current reimbursement process is flawed. Payments are often delayed, imposing financial burdens on local fire departments and reducing their ability to respond to other emergencies.

The Fire Department Repayment Act addresses these challenges by establishing uniform reimbursement timelines for fire suppression cost-share agreements. This legislation would ensure local fire departments are paid promptly while still allowing the Federal Government to dispute any inaccurate invoices.

This is a good bill that would improve the reimbursement process for coordinated firefighting efforts. It thus takes a critical step toward strengthening shared resources and cross-boundary firefighting.

Mr. Speaker, I support the bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY,
Washington, DC, December 10, 2024.

Hon. BRUCE WESTERMAN,
Chair, Committee on Natural Resources,
Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIR WESTERMAN: H.R. 3396, the "Fire Department Repayment Act of 2023", was referred primarily to the Committee on Natural Resources, with an additional referral to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.

H.R. 3396 contains provisions within the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology's Rule X jurisdiction. As a result of your having consulted with the Committee and to expedite this bill for floor consideration, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology will forego action on the bill. This is being done based on our mutual understanding that doing so will in no way diminish or alter the jurisdiction of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology with respect to the appointment of conferees, or to any future jurisdictional claim over the subject matters contained in the bill or similar legislation.

I would appreciate your response to this letter confirming this understanding and request that you include a copy of this letter and your response in the committee report or in the *Congressional Record* during the floor consideration of this bill. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

FRANK D. LUCAS,
Chairman.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES,
Washington, DC, December 10, 2024.

Hon. FRANK D. LUCAS,
Chairman, Committee on Science, Space, and
Technology, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: I write regarding H.R. 3396, the "Fire Department Repayment Act of 2023," which was ordered reported by the Committee on Natural Resources on December 6, 2023.

I recognize that the bill contains provisions that fall within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology and appreciate your willingness to forgo further consideration of the bill. I acknowledge that the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology will not formally consider H.R. 3396 and agree that the inaction of your Committee with respect to the bill does not waive any jurisdiction over the subject matter contained therein.

I am pleased to support your request to name members of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology to any conference committee to consider such provisions. I will ensure that our exchange of letters is included in the *Congressional Record* during floor consideration of the bill. I appreciate your cooperation regarding this legislation.

Sincerely,

BRUCE WESTERMAN,
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Washington, DC, December 10, 2024.

Hon. BRUCE WESTERMAN,
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: This letter confirms our mutual understanding regarding H.R. 3396, the "Fire Department Repayment Act of 2023". Thank you for collaborating with the Committee on Agriculture on the matters within our jurisdiction.

The Committee on Agriculture will forego any further consideration of this bill. However, by foregoing consideration at this time,

we do not waive any jurisdiction over any subject matter contained in this or similar legislation. The Committee on Agriculture also reserves the right to seek appointment of an appropriate number of conferees should it become necessary and ask that you support such a request.

We would appreciate a response to this letter confirming this understanding with respect to H.R. 3396 and request a copy of our letters on this matter be published in the *Congressional Record* during Floor consideration.

Sincerely,

GLENN "GT" THOMPSON,
Chairman.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES,
Washington, DC, December 10, 2024.

Hon. GLENN "GT" THOMPSON,
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: I write regarding H.R. 3396, the "Fire Department Repayment Act of 2023," which was ordered reported by the Committee on Natural Resources on December 6, 2023.

I recognize that the bill contains provisions that fall within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Agriculture and appreciate your willingness to forgo further consideration of the bill. I acknowledge that the Committee on Agriculture will not formally consider H.R. 3396 and agree that the inaction of your Committee with respect to the bill does not waive any jurisdiction over the subject matter contained therein.

I am pleased to support your request to name members of the Committee on Agriculture to any conference committee to consider such provisions. I will ensure that our exchange of letters is included in the *Congressional Record* during floor consideration of the bill. I appreciate your cooperation regarding this legislation.

Sincerely,

BRUCE WESTERMAN,
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC, December 16, 2024.

Hon. BRUCE WESTERMAN,
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources,
Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN WESTERMAN: I write concerning H.R. 3396, the Fire Department Repayment Act of 2023 by Representative Harder. As a result of your having consulted with us on provisions within H.R. 3396 that fall within the Rule X jurisdiction of the Committee on Armed Services, I agree to forego any further consideration of this resolution so that it may proceed expeditiously to the House floor for consideration.

The Committee on Armed Services takes this action with our mutual understanding that by foregoing consideration of H.R. 3396 at this time, we do not waive any jurisdiction over subject matter contained in this or similar legislation and that our committee will be appropriately consulted and involved as this resolution or similar legislation moves forward so that we may address any remaining issues in our jurisdiction.

This legislation contains provisions that may require further modification prior to final consideration to ensure the support of the House Committee on Armed Services.

Finally, I ask that a copy of our exchange of letters on this matter be included by House Committee on Natural Resources in the *Congressional Record* during floor consideration, to memorialize our understanding. Thank you for the cooperative spirit in which you have worked regarding

this matter and others between our respective committees.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL D. ROGERS,
Chairman.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES,
Washington, DC, December 16, 2024.

Hon. MIKE ROGERS,
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: I write regarding H.R. 3396, the "Fire Department Repayment Act of 2023," which was ordered reported by the Committee on Natural Resources on December 6, 2023.

I recognize that the bill contains provisions that fall within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Armed Services and appreciate your willingness to forgo further consideration of the bill. I acknowledge that the Committee on Armed Services will not formally consider H.R. 3396 and agree that the inaction of your Committee with respect to the bill does not waive any jurisdiction over the subject matter contained therein.

I will ensure that your committee will be appropriately consulted and involved as this resolution or similar legislation moves forward so that you may address any remaining issues in your jurisdiction. I will ensure that our exchange of letters is included in the Congressional Record during floor consideration of the bill. I appreciate your cooperation regarding this legislation.

Sincerely,

BRUCE WESTERMAN,
Chairman.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this Fire Department Repayment Act introduced by my colleague from California, Representative JOSH HARDER.

The bill would require the Secretaries of Agriculture, Interior, Homeland Security, and Defense to establish standard operating procedures for fire suppression cost-share agreements under the Reciprocal Fire Protection Act.

With the increasing threat of climate change and with wildfires becoming more rampant, it is critical that our local and State fire organizations are supported and continue to receive the resources that they need to fight wildfires.

That is why this bill would enable local and State fire departments to maintain their readiness and effectiveness by establishing standard operating procedures to expedite the process for reviewing and modifying existing fire suppression cost agreements to align with cooperative fire protection agreements.

Furthermore, the bill would require the Secretaries to complete second-level reviews of a fire suppression cost-share agreement following containment of a wildfire in consultation with State and local fire suppression organizations.

The establishment of standard operating procedures is a necessary step toward ensuring quicker and more efficient reviews so that local and State fire departments receive Federal reimbursements in a more timely manner.

As fire seasons continue to increase in frequency and severity, Congress

needs to do everything we can to support our local and State fire departments and their firefighters.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I am prepared to close. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from California (Mr. HARDER), who is the author of this important bill.

Mr. HARDER of California. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. HUFFMAN for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of my bill, the Fire Department Repayment Act. This legislation cuts red tape and fixes the burdensome fire department repayment system to ensure our local departments are repaid quickly for their work to keep our communities safe.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the wildfire crisis is getting longer and more intense every year. Sixty thousand communities in the United States are at risk for wildland fires in newly populated, recently developed areas that border fire-prone fields and forests.

My home State of California is on the front lines of this crisis with the most neighborhoods threatened by wildfires.

When a wildfire breaks out on Federal lands, our local firefighters are often the first on the scene, braving hazardous conditions to put out these blazes and protect nearby homes, families, and communities. Local fire departments deploy personnel, use fire engines, and spend thousands of dollars' worth of time and resources to fight fires on Federal lands.

Yet, the bureaucratic Federal reimbursement process is slow and covered in red tape. It often takes years for small fire departments to be repaid for their assistance on these fires.

In my own district, fire departments have waited years and years for repayment from Federal agencies. That has drained their budgets and restrained their resources to combat the fires that we are fighting just this year.

That is unacceptable. Our government must work better for the heroes who put their lives on the line to keep our families safe.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to pass this bill to ensure our local fire departments are paid back quickly so they have the tools they need to protect our communities from the next fire. I also thank my colleagues, Mr. CURTIS and Mr. LAMALFA, for their tireless leadership and support of this important bill.

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

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, in closing, this is a commonsense, bipartisan bill that would benefit our local fire departments and improve our response to wildfires nationwide.

Mr. Speaker, I urge adoption of this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3396, as amended.

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

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

MILITARY FAMILIES NATIONAL PARKS ACCESS ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 9516) to amend the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act to provide for lifetime National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Passes for family members of members of the Armed Forces who lost their lives while serving their country, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 9516

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 "Military Families National Parks Access Enhancement Act".

SEC. 2. LIFETIME PASSES.

Section 805(b)(2) of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (16 U.S.C. 6804(b)(2)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

"(D) Any individual who is a survivor entitled to—

"(i) a death gratuity under section 1475 of title 10, United States Code; or

"(ii) dependency and indemnity compensation under chapter 13 of title 38, United States Code."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) and the gentleman from California (Mr. HUFFMAN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 9516, the bill now under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 9516, the Military Families National Parks Access Enhancement Act. This bill, which is led by Representative CHAVEZ-DEREMER, expands access to free, lifetime passes to our national parks and public lands to Gold Star next of kin and families of veterans who pass away due to a service-related illness or injury.