

[Congressional Record (Bound Edition), Volume 152 (2006), Part 14]
[House]
[Pages 18781-18784]
[From the U.S. Government Publishing Office, www.gpo.gov]

PETS EVACUATION AND TRANSPORTATION STANDARDS ACT OF 2006

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendment to the bill (H.R. 3858) to amend the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to ensure that State and local emergency preparedness operational plans address the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals following a major disaster or emergency.

The Clerk read as follows:

Senate amendment:

Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ``Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act of 2006''.

SEC. 2. STANDARDS FOR STATE AND LOCAL EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS OPERATIONAL PLANS.

Section 613 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5196b) is amended--

- (1) by redesignating subsection (g) as subsection (h); and
- (2) by inserting after subsection (f) the following:

``(g) Standards for State and Local Emergency Preparedness Operational Plans.--In approving standards for State and local emergency preparedness operational plans pursuant to subsection (b)(3), the Director shall ensure that such plans take into account the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals prior to, during, and following a major disaster or emergency.''

SEC. 3. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS MEASURES OF THE DIRECTOR.

Section 611 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5196) is amended--

- (1) in subsection (e)--
 - (A) in paragraph (2), by striking ``and'' at the end;
 - (B) in paragraph (3), by striking the period and inserting ``; and''; and
 - (C) by adding at the end the following:
 - ``(4) plans that take into account the needs of individuals with pets and service animals prior to, during, and following a major disaster or emergency.''; and
- (2) in subsection (j)--
 - (A) by redesignating paragraphs (2) through (8) as paragraphs (3) through (9), respectively; and
 - (B) by inserting after paragraph (1) the following:
 - ``(2) The Director may make financial contributions, on the basis of programs or projects approved by the Director, to

the States and local authorities for animal emergency preparedness purposes, including the procurement, construction, leasing, or renovating of emergency shelter facilities and materials that will accommodate people with pets and service animals.''.

SEC. 4. PROVIDING ESSENTIAL ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS WITH HOUSEHOLD PETS AND SERVICE ANIMALS FOLLOWING A DISASTER.

Section 403(a)(3) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5170b(a)(3)) is amended--

- (1) in subparagraph (H), by striking ``and'' at the end;
- (2) in subparagraph (I), by striking the period and inserting ``; and''; and
- (3) by adding at the end the following:
``(J) provision of rescue, care, shelter, and essential needs--
``(i) to individuals with household pets and service animals; and
``(ii) to such pets and animals.''.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Shuster) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. Oberstar) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, at this time I would like to yield to the gentleman from Connecticut, who is the prime mover on H.R. 3858, Mr. Shays.

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania. I would like to just amend the gentleman's comment by saying there are two prime movers, Mr. Lantos and myself, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this legislation.

I rise in support of H.R. 3858, the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Act, referred to as the PETS Act, which Congressman Lantos and I both as cochairmen of the Friends of Animal Caucus introduced.

This commonsense bill requires State and local preparedness planners to include plans for evacuation of pet owners, pets, and service animals. Having passed this legislation once in the House, we now have an opportunity to include several important provisions that have been included by the Senate strengthening the bill, and then being able to send it directly to the President. These provisions include granting FEMA the authority to assist in developing evacuation plans, and authorizing financial help to States to create emergency shelters for people with their animals. Hurricane Katrina left so many victims in its wake, including up to 600,000 animals that lost their lives or were left without shelter.

To qualify for Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, funding, a jurisdiction is required to submit a plan detailing their disaster preparedness plan. The PETS Act would simply require State and local emergency preparedness authorities to plan for how they will accommodate households with pets or service animals when presenting these plans to FEMA.

This bipartisan legislation is necessary because it became evident during Hurricane Katrina, when asked to choose between abandoning their pets or their own personal safety, many pet owners chose to risk their lives and remain with their pets, and some of them perished. This is first a public safety issue, but also an animal welfare issue. Roughly

two-thirds of American households own pets. We need to ensure owners and their pets are protected.

The human horror and devastation in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama was a failure we needed to immediately address, but it was also heartbreaking to hear stories of forced evacuees to choose between being rescued or remaining with their pets. The plight of

[[Page 18782]]

the animals left behind was truly tragic.

In the middle of hurricane season, it is imperative that regulations to include pets in evacuation plans be placed in anticipation of future tragedies.

This is an important bill. I urge its passage so that we can send it directly to the President.

Again, I want to thank the chairman for bringing this bill out and marshaling this bill both times we have been before the Chamber. And I also want to thank my colleague, my cochairman, Mr. Lantos for all that he has done. He is a pleasure to work with.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the leader on our side, an advocate for this legislation, the gentleman from California (Mr. Lantos).

Mr. LANTOS. I want to thank my friend Congressman Oberstar for yielding. I want to thank Chairman Young of Alaska and Congressman Oberstar for their stewardship of this important piece of legislation that my friend Congressman Chris Shays and I introduced, and we are thrilled and delighted that we have reached this day, and hopefully it will pass.

I also would like to congratulate our colleagues in the Senate, Senators Stevens of Alaska and Lautenberg of New Jersey, for leading the fight to pass the PETS Act by a unanimous vote. In my own office, three young and committed men worked hard on this legislation, Ron Grimes, Jason Rosenstock, and Guido Zucconi, and I want to express my appreciation to them. But primarily I want to thank my wife, Annette, who, over a long lifetime together, taught me the love of animals.

Mr. Speaker, if I may, I would like to call special attention to three doggies in our office, Masko, Chippy, and Cassie, who bring a civilized tone, joy, fun, pleasure, and wit to our congressional office. Their work, along with the tireless efforts of animal welfare organizations, will ensure the safety of household pets and service animals and their owners as well.

Mr. Speaker, before the images of the gulf coast hurricanes of last year begin to fade from our national memory, it is imperative that we help our citizens prepare for the next disaster. Our legislation, the PETS Act, will ensure that families and people with disabilities will never be forced to choose between being rescued or remaining with their pets or service animals.

The scene from New Orleans of a 9-year-old little boy crying because he was not allowed to take his little white dog Snowball was too much to bear. Personally, I know I wouldn't have been able to leave my little white dog Masko to a fate of almost certain death.

As I watched the images of the heartbreaking choices the gulf residents had to make, I was moved to find a way to prevent this from ever happening again. Requiring local and State emergency planners to take into consideration the needs of evacuees with household pets and people with disabilities who have service animals is a simple and effective way to ensure saving as many human lives as possible. If people can leave their homes knowing that all members of their family, including their pets, will be safe, it will make for a more civilized and more efficient evacuation.

That is the reason why, along with my colleagues, Mr. Shays, Mr. Young, Mr. Oberstar, and Mr. Frank of Massachusetts, I introduced the Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act, which we call the PETS Act. Never before in my long congressional career have I received so much support and encouragement for a piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, not only from citizens in my own district, but from a national audience that shares my concerns for the safety of these animals and their owners.

Since the hurricanes of last year, the PETS Act has influenced State officials to make plans for people with pets and service animals. Miami-Dade and Broward Counties in Florida have shelters that accept animals, as well as careful instructions for people forced to leave their homes who may have animals. This demonstrates that emergency planners are more than capable of making effective plans for people with pets or service animals.

Now, more than ever, with hurricane season upon us, this bill is of the utmost importance. The PETS Act will ensure that States will continue to plan for their pet and service animal populations, which will in turn ensure a smoother and safer evacuation for all members of the family.

On behalf of the tens of millions of families across our Nation who have pets, I urge all of my colleagues to vote for this important legislation.

{time} 1800

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

I am pleased to be here today to pass an important reform to our emergency management system. Like many Americans, I watched in disbelief last year as our government struggled to respond to the death and destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina. I believe we were all shocked by FEMA's performance, given FEMA's outstanding reputation just a few years earlier.

Breaking FEMA up and burying its pieces within the massive Homeland Security bureaucracy was a mistake, I believe. Since Hurricane Katrina, the Transportation Committee, the Select Committee on Hurricane Katrina, held dozens of hearings on Katrina and drafted the most comprehensive report on reforming our emergency management system.

Just a few days ago the chairman of the authorizing committees, Chairman Young, Chairman Davis, Chairman King, Chairman Reichert and I reached an agreement with the Senate authorizers to rebuild FEMA and reform the Nation's emergency management system. With the leadership, authority and resources necessary to respond effectively to the next disaster, FEMA can once again be a premier agency within the Federal Government.

I am pleased to have one of these specific reforms on the floor today, H.R. 3858, the PETS Act, that ensures the needs of people with household pets and service animals are considered by State and local emergency preparedness plans.

The Senate amended the PETS Act to permit FEMA to fund structures that will accommodate pets and service animals and provide essential assistance to people with pets and service animals following a disaster.

People become very attached to their pets. I have a Wheaton terrier that has become part of the family, and it would be very difficult to leave Chloe behind in a disaster. I certainly can understand and empathize with those folks who have household pets.

I would like to thank Chairman Young, who is an original sponsor of this legislation for his leadership and guidance on the bill, and on the broader emergency management reform bill that will be on the floor,

we hope, next week.

I would also like to commend Mr. Shays for his dedication and hard work in moving this legislation. Mr. Shays has been a champion of this issue and has worked to ensure that owners don't have to make a choice between their personal safety and their pet's safety.

I would also like to commend Mr. Shays for his leadership on the committee's investigating response to Hurricane Katrina. He worked tirelessly to resolve the flaws in our Nation's emergency management system that became apparent during Hurricane Katrina.

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

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 30 seconds.

Do I understand, Chairman Shuster, that if we pass this bill tonight, it goes directly to the President for his signature?

I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. SHUSTER. That is my understanding, yes, sir.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. Kucinich).

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. Oberstar) and Chairman Shuster, Mr. Shays, and Mr. Lantos for your support of this bill.

[[Page 18783]]

What is noteworthy is that in the last few days, this Congress has had three pieces of legislation in front of it that have a similar theme: The tribute that we paid to the Dalai Lama, and yesterday our support for the one day of peace, and today our support for the PETS Act, all are about compassion and the recognition of the importance of compassion in the life of this Nation.

I think it is important for us to reflect that this is a strong capacity that we have that when we touch it, it touches people's hearts everywhere.

I encourage my colleagues to join in support of H.R. 3858, the Pets Evacuation Transportation Standards Act. Passage of this bill is essential to the safety of all citizens and their pets in emergency and disaster circumstances. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita will long be held in our collective conscious. It has been just over 1 year since we saw the terrified and helpless faces of the victims these natural disasters claimed, displaced, and horrified. The unbearably inadequate response to these disasters exacerbates the shame, the heartache and insecurity that has resulted. The images haunt us; and it is not just the images of our fellow human beings, but that of our gracious household pets and service animals.

Among the injustices incurred in the gulf coast were citizens forced to choose between their own safety and that of their pet or service animals. And the example that Mr. Lantos gave of the 9-year-old boy who had to part with his beloved dog is an example of the heartbreak that all of us can relate to.

Some chose to compromise their own safety, unwilling to evacuate without their pet, despite the great risk to themselves and their families. Others were forced to leave these important friends behind, abandoned and alone. Animals were left to survive on their own with little hope of survival, causing the very understandable human emotions of pain and agony that accompanied this choice.

Some, dependent upon a service animal for their own safety and survival, were made to leave their companions behind, a direct threat to their own security.

It is estimated that well over half of U.S. households include a pet or vital service animal as a member of the family. In the Kucinich household, we have three dogs, two beagles and one cocker spaniel, and

anyone who has a pet understands how it would tug at your heart to have to be separated from that pet in a time of emergency.

We know that the gulf coast region affected by the hurricanes had as many as 600,000 pets and service animals. Most of these animals could not be saved, and few have been reunited with their original owners.

H.R. 3858, the PETS Act, will ensure that emergency preparedness for the safety of our own citizens includes the proper protocol to identify, evacuate, and shelter people, pets and service animals in times of emergency evacuations.

Natural disasters are unavoidable; compromising the safety of our citizens is not. That is why I ask my colleagues to join me in support of H.R. 3858, the PETS Act, to ensure that in times of disaster no citizen is forced to compromise their own safety or well-being for that of their service animal.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, it is refreshing in a time of perception of contentiousness in the legislative bodies that we can consider a matter of this nature and have such thoughtful, constructive, civilized dialogue on a matter that touches the heart of so many of our fellow citizens. And how fitting to have a survivor of the Holocaust whose whole life and career has been concerned with saving people from tragedy, to lend his voice and his stature, his character and dignity to saving the lives of pets.

And to the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. Shays), who has been associated so much with the process of campaign finance reform and other similar matters, to lend his support and his concern, his character, to a matter of this kind and to partner with the gentleman from California, both coasts joining to support something greater than all of us.

As others have said, my wife and I watched the horror of Hurricane Katrina. Jean's home is New Orleans. Her family were there. Two brothers both had property losses, severe property loss. She knew as the cameras moved around the city from one street to the next, I walked that street, I know the people in that house. They have a pet. That dog is up in the attic and they are not going to leave because they cannot rescue the pet.

We will now make it possible to avoid such dire choices in the future by putting in place a structure by which we can accommodate the needs of people and the lives they lead and the pets they have that are important to their living.

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

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. Shays).

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman very much. I wanted to rise and thank Chairman Shuster for marshaling this bill through and making sure that Members treated it with seriousness.

I thank the ranking member of the full Transportation Committee, Mr. Oberstar, for his partnership in this effort.

I also thank Congressman Lantos. We have been through many battles together, and this has been one of the most enjoyable ones.

I also wanted to stand up and acknowledge the fine work of Senator Collins and the ranking member, Mr. Lieberman, in the Senate for their help in getting this bill through. Had they not taken action and treated this bill seriously, we would not be here today. And, frankly, they made it a better bill. I just wanted to thank Senators Collins and my friend Joe Lieberman, who I love very dearly.

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

I will close very quickly because I am in danger of being labeled as a big softy if I give too much in the way of closing comments. I will close by just asking all of my colleagues to support this piece of

legislation which is important to millions and millions of Americans.

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be a supporter of H.R. 3858, the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act. I was disappointed to miss the original rollcall vote on this important bill. Had I been present I would have voted ``yes'' in support of allowing people to save their vulnerable pets in the event of an emergency.

I am proud to be a cosponsor of this legislation. It will require local governments to include in their emergency plan options to accommodate people with pets or service animals. One of the most heartbreaking elements of the Hurricane Katrina aftermath was seeing the number of pets that were abandoned throughout the gulf coast and the number of people who stayed to care for their pets rather than leave them behind. People should not be forced to choose between their own safety and leaving their beloved pets. There is also a health and safety concern created in a disaster area when a large number of animals are stranded.

People have a connection with their pets. They know that animals trust their caretakers to take care of them and not leave them abandoned. It is important that we give people the choice to bring their animals with them in an emergency, especially since they can serve as a source of comfort during a troubling time.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my appreciation to Representative Tom Lantos for introducing H.R. 3858, the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act of 2006.

Hurricane Katrina brought to light the difficult circumstances and decisions citizens may face when forced to evacuate their homes. Heartbreaking scenes and stories of evacuees being forced to leave behind their beloved pets were all too common. Thankfully, many evacuees were reunited with their animals after the storm. However, thousands of pets either did not survive or may still be separated from their owners.

H.R. 3858 would ensure that all States and communities include the evacuation of pets and service animals within their emergency and disaster preparedness plans. With pets present in 63 percent of American households, this legislation would provide the needed tools for citizens and communities to better navigate the already stressful experience of evacuation.

I was not present when the House considered H.R. 3858 because I was in Texas to

[[Page 18784]]

participate in a critically important conference on Latino health issues. However, I would have voted in favor of this legislation. I now look forward to the President signing the bill into law.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. Schwarz of Michigan). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Shuster) that the House suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendment to the bill, H.R. 3858.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate amendment was concurred in.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.
