

Paul needs hope. I hope he sees all of us today. His family desperately needs hope. This House of Representatives needs to send a strong message to the Russians that Paul is not a pawn in international relations, and we all want him home. The House needs to tell Paul and his family today, we need to send a message that we aren't forgetting you, we are fighting hard, and we will never give up.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge all of my colleagues to support this important resolution. This is an opportunity for this body to once again demand, with one unified voice, the immediate release of Paul Whelan. It is far beyond time we bring him home.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time for the purpose of closing.

Mr. Speaker, for far too long, Paul Whelan has suffered at the hands of the regime in the Kremlin. For far too long, he has been forced to endure the horrific conditions in a Russian labor camp, wondering when he will finally be able to see his family again. For far too long, he has been left to wonder whether he has been forgotten by the government that the Kremlin is using him to extort.

By passing this legislation and taking other important steps to support Paul, to support Evan, and other Americans wrongfully detained overseas, we can speak with one voice, a single voice, that the United States Government will not rest until he and others like him are finally brought home to their families.

One voice, that is what we will do today. I know that my colleagues will join me in support of this very important resolution.

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

Mr. McCAUL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time for closing.

Mr. Speaker, I first thank Ranking Member MEEKS for his support. We do speak with one voice, as one Nation, against this hostage taking by foreign nation adversaries.

I thank Representative STEVENS for her passion on this issue and for introducing this resolution and being a co-chair of that important caucus. I also thank my dear friend, Mrs. DINGELL, who represents the family and, obviously, the passion of the family. I can only imagine what it must feel like to have your son, family member, detained in one of the worst prisons in the world.

This happens too often. We are seeing this trend way too often now. It is not just Russia; it is China and Iran and Venezuela. It is a disturbing trend, Mr. Speaker, to take Americans hostage and hold them as political pawns for either a change of policy or an exchange of a prisoner that has no relation to the offense of the American. You can't tell me that what happened to Brittney Griner, whose offense was so meager, the idea she had some sort of small

amount of—whatever it was, a vape pipe, and then in exchange, a major Russian arms dealer. But that is what they do and that is what they want.

We need to stop this, and we need to provide the deterrence to stop this. The world continues to watch in horror as Vladimir Putin's crimes and atrocities in Ukraine continue. That is a lot of what this is all about. Paul Whelan is a marine. Evan is a Wall Street Journal reporter.

Just reporting the truth gets you thrown in prison in Russia. What were they reporting about? The indiscriminate bombing and killing of civilians, to the mass graves I saw in Bucha, to torture chambers, to mobile crematoriums. Think about that, Mr. Speaker. We haven't heard about something like that in quite some time, probably since my father's generation and my father's war.

What we are witnessing today is a genocide. If you rise up in protest or report the truth, you will be put in prison. I condemn this aggression in the strongest possible terms. I, along with the other Members on both sides of the aisle, will continue to fight to hold these perpetrators accountable.

We must also condemn the Russian dictator's practice of exploiting them as political pawns. As I have said, it has happened way too often. It is time to get Paul out of this Russian gulag, which is what it is, and back to his family in Michigan.

Today, all of us stand in this body with one voice, united as Americans, in condemning Russia's illegal detention of Paul Whelan. Congress will not rest.

As Congresswoman STEVENS said to Mr. Putin, if he is watching this, and to Paul Whelan, if he has the opportunity to watch this, we want them to know that we here in Congress will not rest until all Americans wrongfully detained in Russia are returned to their families.

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 Texas (Mr. McCAUL) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 272.

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. McCAUL. 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, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

SPECIAL ENVOY FOR THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS ACT

Mr. McCAUL. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill

(H.R. 3099) to establish in the Department of State the position of Special Envoy for the Abraham Accords, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3099

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 "Special Envoy for the Abraham Accords Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds that the policy of the United States, as enacted in section 104 of the Israel Relations Normalization Act of 2022 (division Z of Public Law 117-103), with respect to the Abraham Accords remains unchanged.

SEC. 3. SPECIAL ENVOY FOR THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS.

Title I of the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956 (22 U.S.C. 2651a et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

"SEC. 64. SPECIAL ENVOY FOR THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS.

"(a) SPECIAL ENVOY FOR THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS.—There is established within the Department of State a Special Envoy for the Abraham Accords (in this section referred to as the 'Special Envoy'), who shall serve as the primary advisor to, and coordinate efforts across, the United States Government relating to expanding and strengthening the Abraham Accords. The Special Envoy shall report directly to the Secretary of State and shall hold the office at the pleasure of the President.

"(b) NOMINATION.—Pursuant to subsection (j)(1) of section 1, the Special Envoy shall be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, and may be appointed from among the officers and employees of the Department except that such officer or employee may not retain the position (or the responsibilities associated with the position) held by such officer or employee prior to such appointment simultaneously with the position or responsibilities of the Special Envoy.

"(c) RANK AND STATUS OF AMBASSADOR.—The Special Envoy shall have the rank and status of ambassador.

"(d) DUTIES.—The Special Envoy shall be responsible for—

"(1) encouraging countries without diplomatic relations with Israel to establish formal diplomatic, economic, security, and people-to-people ties;

"(2) seeking to expand and strengthen existing relationships between Israel and Muslim-majority countries, including those outside the geographic scope of the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau of the Department of State, to ensure that all parties reap tangible security and economic benefits for their citizens;

"(3) building on existing efforts, including the Negev Forum, to help foster enhanced cooperation between Israel and Muslim-majority countries on shared priorities including as relates to trade, agriculture, and water security;

"(4) providing diplomatic support for Israel's integration into cooperative efforts related to regional security; and

"(5) coordinating lines of effort across the United States Government, including the regional and functional bureaus within the Department of State, and conducting appropriate diplomatic engagement with foreign governments, nongovernmental organizations, and other stakeholders determined appropriate by the Special Envoy in order to

expand and strengthen the Abraham Accords.

“(e) REPORT.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year after the date of the confirmation of the first Special Envoy appointed pursuant to this section, and annually thereafter, the Special Envoy shall submit to the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate a report describing all United States efforts to expand the Abraham Accords, including specific diplomatic engagements and status of efforts with respect to specific countries.

“(2) FORM OF REPORT.—The report required by paragraph (1) shall be submitted in unclassified form but may contain a separate, classified annex.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. MCCAUL) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. MEEKS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MCCAUL. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on this measure.

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, for 75 years, the United States and Israel have been close friends and partners, working hand in hand on our shared priorities to keep our nations safe, secure, and prosperous.

Along with our partnership with Israel, we also have many shared interests with our Arab partners in the region.

The United States has consistently worked to help secure peace in the Middle East, and we remain committed to enduring peace throughout the region.

Not only do we want to ensure regional security but economic prosperity as well, which drives cutting-edge innovation.

We are all concerned about Iran's malign activities. A nuclear Iran is a threat to the entire region and the world and is not acceptable. Yet, for so many years, our friends would not speak directly to one another. Even after Egypt, in 1979, and Jordan, in 1994, established peace and diplomatic relations with Israel, other Arab countries refused.

Then, in August 2020, everything changed. The UAE and Israel announced that they were normalizing diplomatic relations in a deal brokered by the Trump administration, which we now know as the Abraham Accords. In short order, Bahrain and Morocco joined UAE in opening diplomatic relations with Israel.

I was proud to be at the White House for the signing of these famous docu-

ments, the accords, a game-changing development that benefits the United States, Israel, and our partners in the region.

The Abraham Accords have served as a foundation for increased cooperation between Israel and Middle Eastern nations. We have already seen incredible leaps forward as these countries engage in defense cooperation, economic cooperation, and frequent diplomatic engagement. What we have not seen, but we all wish to see, is more countries joining the Abraham Accords.

Secretary of State Blinken was in Saudi Arabia last week, and I remain hopeful that one day Saudi Arabia will engage with their neighbors and join these historic accords. Saudi Arabia and Israel would both benefit from working together on their shared interests.

□ 1645

It has never been more important that we continue to prioritize the expansion of these agreements. Part of doing this entails making it clear who in the United States Government is responsible for expanding these Abraham Accords.

This bipartisan bill, introduced by my colleague and friend MIKE LAWLER from New York, who is also a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, would create that position, a special envoy for the Abraham Accords at the State Department. The special envoy will coordinate all efforts to expand the accords and strengthen relationships between Israel and participating countries.

We need to put our diplomatic might into trying to achieve the kinds of big breakthroughs that created the accords almost 3 years ago. This legislation, Mr. LAWLER's bill, does exactly that.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important measure, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this resolution, and I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend and colleague, Representative TORRES, for working with Representative LAWLER to introduce this very important piece of legislation that would create a senior-level special envoy dedicated to enhancing and expanding the important Abraham Accords.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken in the past about my support for the accords, which I believe have the potential to transform the security, diplomatic, and economic environment in the Middle East for peace and to advance United States' interests.

These agreements are already showing promise and deserve the attention of this Congress. I believe it is advantageous to the State Department to have an official in place focused on managing and implementing regional strategy for peace and encouraging cooperation between and among Israel,

Arab states, and the Palestinians to enhance such prospects for a true peace and create tangible benefits for all.

As Mr. MCCAUL said, starting with the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco with the Abraham Accords, we need to grow and have more nations involved, saying this time that we know that Israel has the right to exist and will exist, and we are going to look and work together for peace in the Middle East.

That is why adding a special envoy dedicated to working on and having and stimulating conversation among the other nations in the Gulf region with Israel is tremendously important. This is something that I am proud to support, and I hope my colleagues in the House join me.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the Biden administration has taken implementation and expansion of the Abraham Accords seriously. I know that the President has dedicated several government agencies to their success. I believe that this high-level special envoy will be another asset to the State Department and help them coordinate and streamline implementation of the accords. It is something that we should focus on because success means peace in the Middle East, and peace is good for all of us on this planet.

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

Mr. MCCAUL. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from New York (Mr. LAWLER), a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the author of this important bill.

Mr. LAWLER. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise to speak in strong support of the passage of my bill, H.R. 3099, the Special Envoy for the Abraham Accords Act.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman MCCAUL, Ranking Member MEEKS, and the gentleman from New York (Mr. TORRES) for working together in a bipartisan way to advance this legislation.

I have been overwhelmed by the amount of support and positive feedback that this crucial piece of legislation has received, and for good reason.

H.R. 3099 creates the position of the special envoy for the Abraham Accords in the U.S. Department of State. This new position would hold ambassador rank and be Senate confirmed. The special envoy would be responsible for coordinating efforts across the United States Government to expand and strengthen the Abraham Accords with key allies and strategic partners across the Middle East and across the globe. Having a point person at the State Department is key to ensuring the accords maintain a priority in this administration and all future administrations.

While this bill seeks to hold the Biden administration accountable to ensure they are advancing the Abraham Accords, it does so with strong support from both sides of the aisle, making clear that the United States

Government prioritizes our relationship with Israel and the advancement of peace and prosperity, regardless of any other policy differences we may have.

For 75 years, Israel has been and remains our staunchest ally and a pivotal partner in the Middle East. A beacon of freedom, democracy, and prosperity, they are an example that the rest of the region can look to for building a successful and vibrant society.

The Abraham Accords, a series of normalization agreements between Israel and other Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, were a monumental step that has provided a roadmap for the future of diplomacy in the Middle East and beyond.

They also showcased that the real center of instability in the region is Iran. Many countries were finally ready to work together with the United States and Israel to counter Iran's state-sponsored terrorism, pursuit of nuclear weapons, and consistent violation of the human rights of the Iranian people.

Mutual opposition to the Islamic republic has fueled the Abraham Accords and signified a seismic shift in the geopolitical landscape. They are a testament to the transformative power of diplomacy and strong economic ties to bring about peace.

At its origins in September 2020, the Abraham Accords included the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Morocco joined the following December after normalizing ties with Israel.

While Israeli officials are taking meaningful steps to bring other countries into the Abraham Accords, none have joined since 2020 or the beginning of 2021.

It is critical, now more than ever, that we build upon this unprecedented progress, and the establishment of a special envoy is a definitive step in that direction.

Having a special envoy entirely dedicated to the Abraham Accords would underscore the United States' commitment to nurturing the growth of these historic agreements, and it sends a clear message to our allies and, indeed, to the entire world about the immense value we place on normalized relations with Israel and increased cooperation and stability in the Middle East.

This special envoy would also be critical for bringing Saudi Arabia into the Abraham Accords. Both countries have taken incremental steps to improve relations since Saudi Arabia's Gulf neighbors, the UAE and Bahrain, first normalized relations.

Israeli airlines can now use Saudi Arabia's airspace, and the kingdom recently agreed to respect freedom of navigation in the Strait of Tiran for Israeli ships.

As a leader in the Arab world, Saudi Arabia joining the Abraham Accords would make serious inroads for Israel's relationships not only in the Middle East but across the globe. Additionally, strengthening ties between Israel

and Saudi Arabia would create immense pushback against Iran.

Moreover, this legislation calls for a comprehensive report to Congress detailing our Nation's efforts to expand the Abraham Accords. It requests specific information on diplomatic engagements and the status of normalization efforts with various other countries. This report, in effect, ensures a system of checks and balances, holding the special envoy, the Biden administration, and all future administrations accountable for prioritizing the strengthening of these accords.

Passing this bill would be a profound affirmation of our steadfast commitment to fostering peace, productive bilateral relationships in the Middle East and, we hope, well beyond. It embodies our vision of a world where peace in the region is not just a distant dream but a tangible reality within our reach.

Today, I stand before you, urging all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in championing this critical piece of legislation. Together, let's take this significant stride toward peace, prosperity, and a better future for all.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation shows that when Congress wants to work together, we can. We can advance legislation that not only makes a difference in the United States but makes a difference around the world.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, RITCHIE TORRES, for making that possible.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Mr. TORRES), a friend.

Mr. TORRES of New York. Mr. Speaker, I thank Ranking Member MEEKS for his friendship and mentoring, and I thank Chairman MCCAUL and Ranking Member MEEKS for setting the gold standard of bipartisan-ship here in Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. LAWLER) for his legislative partnership and leadership.

If there is one cause that should transcend partnership, it is the cause of peace in the Middle East.

Building a bridge between Israel and the Arab world is neither a Democratic value nor a Republican value. It is an American value.

The Abraham Accords is both an affirmation of Arab-Israeli peace and a rejection of BDS as a relic of the past.

Indeed, the three noes of the Khar-toum Resolution have been replaced by the three yeses of the Abraham Accords: yes to recognition of Israel, yes to negotiations with Israel, and yes to peace with Israel.

The Abraham Accords is an achievement so monumental that it demands and deserves its own special envoy whose sole and singular mission is to build on the inexorable progress of peace in the Middle East.

Today, we in the United States Congress are bending the long arc of the Middle East exactly where it belongs, toward peace and prosperity for Jews,

Christians, and Muslims. The children of Abraham are finally standing together as one, divided no longer.

□ 1700

Mr. MCCAUL. Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

As we have heard here today, there is strong support in this Congress for the normalization of diplomatic relations between Israel and countries in the Arab and Muslim world.

"Diplomatic" and "diplomacy" are words that we need to use more often, and we need to get more engaged in diplomatic activity, working for peace and working for true recognition of Israel in the Middle East.

Sustained agreement from the United States with a special envoy will help maintain the momentum that has built and will lead to a more peaceful region.

Imagine that, Madam Speaker, nations talking and working together in a region where it had been full of war and where people are recognizing Israel's right to exist, working in a diplomatic way across borders for better lives for everyone in the region.

For peace in the region, there is work to do, but it gives us hope that others will join and that we will be able to assist with a special envoy bringing people to the same table to support a more peaceful region.

Madam Speaker, I hope my colleagues will join me in support of this important resolution.

Again, I thank Mr. MCCAUL, Mr. LAWLER, and Mr. TORRES for bringing this resolution to the floor of the House of Representatives so that all can hear that, again, we are united and working collectively together, without party affiliation, for the betterment of the world.

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

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

Madam Speaker, I thank all the gentlemen from New York—Congressman LAWLER, Ranking Member MEEKS, and Congressman TORRES—for putting this legislation forward.

We have all talked about peace in the Middle East our entire lifetime, but we really have a chance to make a difference. The Abraham Accords jump-started that process, built upon the agreements with Egypt and then Jordan, and now this.

We are really, I think, privileged to be a part of the new era of ushering in cooperation between Israel and the Muslim-majority countries.

When I would talk to Ambassadors from UAE and other countries, they would say: We are just tired. We are just tired of Palestinians saying no. We just can't do it. We just can't do it.

They just said: We want to move forward. We want progress. We want peace in the region.

They want economic prosperity, which this does.

These accords mark a generational shift in Middle Eastern relations. This bill will further that effort and that mission, and we must continue the work. This special envoy will be dedicated to this purpose.

I have to say that RITCHIE TORRES came up with this idea. He worked with our side of the aisle, and he and Congressman LAWLER worked together on this legislation. That is what Congress should look like, working together on a goal that can promote peace, prosperity, and cooperation—in this case, in the Middle East.

I may not see it in my lifetime, but I hope I do. However, I do know that this bill will move it one step forward toward that great goal that we all share here today.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. McCLAIN). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. McCAUL) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3099, as amended.

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. McCAUL. Madam 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, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

CHANGING AGE-DETERMINED ELIGIBILITY TO STUDENT INCENTIVE PAYMENTS ACT

Mr. BERGMAN. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 467) to modify the age requirement for the Student Incentive Payment Program of the State maritime academies.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 467

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 “Changing Age-Determined Eligibility To Student Incentive Payments Act” or the “CADETS Act”.

SEC. 2. AGE REQUIREMENT FOR THE STUDENT INCENTIVE PAYMENT PROGRAM OF THE STATE MARITIME ACADEMIES.

Section 51509 of title 46, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(i) AGE REQUIREMENT.—The Secretary may make an agreement under this section only with a qualified student who will meet the age requirement for enlistment or commission in the Navy Reserve at the time of graduation from the academy.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BERGMAN) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. KIM) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BERGMAN. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and insert extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of S. 467, the CADETS Act.

The CADETS Act was introduced earlier this year by a bipartisan group of Senators led by Senator PETERS of Michigan. It passed the Senate by unanimous consent last month. I am the proud sponsor of the companion legislation here in this House.

The CADETS Act will begin to help solve the problem our Nation faces in recruiting qualified mariners to serve in the Navy Reserve and crew our strategic sealift vessels.

Our fleet of strategic sealift vessels is critical to our ability to project and sustain U.S. forces around the world and defend ourselves and our allies. However, we can't do that without qualified Americans willing and able to crew these ships.

S. 467 will incentivize Americans to serve in this critical defense role by making those older than 25 years of age eligible for MARAD's Student Incentive Payment Program.

The Student Incentive Payment Program provides financial assistance to cadets who attend one of the six State maritime academies and commit to a post-graduation service obligation in the Navy Reserve.

I am proud to represent the Great Lakes Maritime Academy in Traverse City, Michigan, and I was honored to address the cadets at their graduation ceremony just a few weeks ago in May.

Cadets at Great Lakes and other maritime academies can receive up to \$32,000 in incentive payments over 4 years to help offset the cost of tuition and other education expenses. However, current law prohibits candidates older than 25 years of age from participating in the program. This is despite the fact that Americans between the ages of 18 and 42 can currently join the Navy Reserve and that State maritime academies are actively seeking to enroll veterans and servicemembers, many of whom are older than age 25.

S. 467 amends the Student Incentive Payment Program to align its eligibility age with the age requirements for enlisting or commissioning in the United States Navy Reserve.

This is a good bipartisan bill that will help our veterans transition to well-paying jobs, support the great work done by our State maritime academies, and help fill critical national security vacancies.

Madam Speaker, I urge all Members to support the bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. KIM of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I join my colleague, Mr. BERGMAN, and rise in support of the CADETS Act.

This bipartisan bill raises the age requirement for MARAD's Student Incentive Payment Program, which provides financial support to cadets who attend one of six State maritime academies and commit to a post-graduation service obligation.

Current age requirements for the Student Incentive Payment Program limit participation to people between 17 and 25 years of age. This proposal would expand eligibility to people up to age 42. This bill would widen the pool of potential candidates and aligns the age requirements with that of the Navy Reserve.

Many military veterans attend these State academies, but many applicants are too old to qualify for aid or the program.

Graduates from the State maritime academies become licensed officers in the U.S. Merchant Marine and are part of the Navy's Strategic Sealift Officer Force. Currently, our merchant mariner force is around 1,800 officers short of wartime needs. Because the average age of a merchant mariner is 47, we need to increase the number of eligible individuals for this program.

This bill would open up additional opportunities to our best and brightest and bolster our national security.

State maritime academies provide our veterans unique opportunities to transition to well-paying jobs and continue to serve in support of our Nation.

For those reasons, Madam Speaker, I urge Members to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BERGMAN. Madam Speaker, I urge all Members to support 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 Michigan (Mr. BERGMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, S. 467.

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. BERGMAN. Madam 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, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

BLOCK GRANT ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2023

Mrs. CAMMACK. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 662) to amend the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations