MAKING IN ORDER ADDITIONAL TIME FOR GENERAL DEBATE ON H.R. 2, HOUSING OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY ACT OF 1997

Mr. LAZIO of New York. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that there be an additional 20 minutes of general debate on H.R. 2, equally divided between myself and the gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. KENNEDY], at the request of the minority.

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

There was no objection.

HOUSING OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY ACT OF 1997

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 133 and rule XXIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the further consideration of the bill, H.R. 2.

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IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the further consideration of the bill (H.R. 2) to repeal the United States Housing Act of 1937, deregulate the public housing program and the program for rental housing assistance for low-income families, and increase community control over such programs, and for other purposes, with Mr. GOODLATTE in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. When the Committee of the Whole rose earlier today, 30½ minutes remained in general debate.

Pursuant to the order of the House of today, each side will control an additional 10 minutes. Therefore, the gentleman from New York [Mr. LAZIO] has 26 minutes remaining, and the gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. KENNEDY] has 24½ minutes remaining.

Mr. KENNEDY of Massachusetts. Mr. Chairman, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from New York [Mr. LAFALCE].

Mr. LAFALCE. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to H.R. 2. I know that the bill is extremely well intentioned. I have the highest professional respect and personal regard for its principal author, but I do think that this legislation will in fact undermine both our Nation's 60-year commitment to assisting the very poor and also the effective administration of our public housing programs.

The issue before us today has been miscast. It is not whether you are for reform or the status quo. That is a false dichotomy that the majority has attempted to perpetrate. We are all for reforming this present situation. We all believe that reforms are necessary. In fact, reform of every program must in fact be a constant. But what kind of reform? Reform is just another word for change. We can have good changes or bad changes. We happen to think that the changes you have proposed are very, very bad.

We are proposing a substitute to the status quo, significant reform, significant change. And so the battle is not as you have tried to cast it between your bill and the status quo. The battle is between the substitute that we offer and your main bill.

I believe the substitute we offer will make the changes in a manner consistent with the core values and purposes of public housing. I believe that the changes you propose will divert public housing resources to serve a broader political agenda.

I have serious concerns about many, many aspects of H.R. 2. First, the fact that it summarily repeals the 1937 Housing Act, on which Federal housing programs have been based for 60 years with little, if any, attention to the disruption this may cause for current housing assistance and the litigation that may well ensue because of it. I further see no reason, as H.R. 2 proposes to burden public housing authorities and staff and residents with new work, immigration and welfare reform responsibilities, all of which are unfunded, all of which are unenforceable, all of which are in my judgment discriminatory.

The gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. KENNEDY] makes a good point. If we are going to have these work requirements, why not for the investors in oil shelters? Why not for the investors in section 8? Why not for those who receive public subsidies through the Tax Code? No, we discriminate.

I also strongly oppose the abrupt change in public housing admission and income targeting requirements.

They will permit diversion of the best public housing facilities for mixed income housing and the warehousing of very poor families into the worst public projects.

In addition, I must strongly oppose those provisions that could further politicize public housing administration. These include providing huge unfettered block grants of most remaining housing assistance to local mayors rather than independent housing authorities, withdrawing needed CDBG funding from cities that have troubled housing authorities, and allowing Governors to allocate capital improvement funding among smaller public housing authorities within their States. Each of these proposals offers the potential for the diversion of scarce housing funds for political objectives rather than the needs of our poorest families.

I would hope that we can proceed in a bipartisan manner. That is not what happened in the reporting of the bill. Most amendments were adopted or rejected on partisan grounds. I think it is only possible to achieve a housing bill, and we have not seen a housing bill passed in over 6 years now, if we proceed in a bipartisan fashion. Hopefully at some point in time we will come to that realization.

Mr. LAZIO of New York. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I just found it curious, Mr. Chairman, that there is a discussion about alternatives now when this bill is on the floor and ready for action, the son of status quo that is now being discussed or the status quo substitute that is being discussed that even negates the reforms that the Clinton administration would put forward. It appears that there are some Members in this body that are clinging on desperately to the failure that exists in certain areas. I think again that mocks compassion. What we need to do is create environments where people can make it.

Mr. Chairman, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Ohio [Mr. NEY], the distinguished vice chairman of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity.

Mr. NEY. I thank the gentleman from New York [Mr. LAZIO] for yielding me this time.

Mr. Chairman, I guess we have heard it all today. The people I assume we are saying are investors make money. The people who are building projects, the people who are building housing should in fact, I guess, volunteer some time also? So I am assuming that the union working people that work for those companies should also volunteer time because they are working on the projects? Is that what we are saying? Is this some type of great philosophy we have today? We are talking about the residents.

I have got plenty of residents in my district who would like to put in a little time, 2 hours a week, to feel productive, to do something toward the housing that in fact the Government is cooperating with them to provide some living situations for their family. That is all we are talking about. To stretch this out to who builds it and maybe the workers for that company should in fact put in some volunteer time, that is not what this is about. This debate is occurring today because let me tell you what the U.S. Government did from 1937 forward, when the poor of this country, the people that needed some housing, needed some assistance, came to their Government and said, ''Help me. I need some help for my family.''

The Government looked at those individuals and said, ''OK, we're going to put you all in one category, we're going to consider you all the same, we'll build something called a project, then we'll create a bureaucracy to oversee that project. We won't try to help you out in neighborhoods. We'll just take you to a high-rise. We'll warehouse you. We'll make it effectively easy for drug dealers and thieves to have a captive audience to get at your families.''

That was the philosophy. I think we should have had the attitude in 1937 to put people in neighborhoods, just like we were raised, in neighborhoods with rich and with poor, and with middle-class working Americans.