

rate of elderly women was 13.1 percent, compared to 7.0 percent among men. We are on the horns of a dilemma: How do we meet the need for affordable housing for senior citizens at a time when the senior population continues to grow?

H.R. 202 is designed to restructure Section 202 contracts in order to make them more affordable. The measure attempts to accomplish this by relieving non-profit entities from excessive debt service, thus providing the opportunity for greater program self-sufficiency. H.R. 202 is a win-win bill that provides assistance to our most vulnerable—the elderly poor. It also saves taxpayers money over the long term by reducing the need for project-based rental assistance. For these reasons and for America's seniors, I urge you to support H.R. 202.

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 202, the Preserving Affordable Housing for Seniors and Families into the 21st Century Act.

By making the bipartisan, common-sense reforms necessary to provide affordable housing for seniors and the disabled, this legislation is helping many individuals retain their independence while living in safe housing.

There is a great need for affordable housing for seniors and the disabled. This important bill aims to provide affordable senior and disabled housing at a time when the need is high, and ever increasing.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) and Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) have determined at least 1.4 million seniors are experiencing "worst case" housing needs. This need is combined with a growing senior population—projected at 53 million people by 2020, or one in six Americans.

Additionally, the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Housing Task Force determined more than 4 million individuals with disabilities suffer from an acute need of affordable, accessible housing.

This bill requires HUD to convert all direct loan contracts for pre-1990 projects into interest-free capital advances and five-year renewable project rental assistance programs. These changes are designed to help preserve senior and disability housing by preventing residents from being forced from their homes of more than 20 years or paying additional rent.

These provisions are especially important steps to make housing affordable, given the more than 500,000 units of Section 8 housing at risk of being lost to "opt outs" as contracts expire in increasing numbers.

By allowing multi-year Section 8 contract renewals, this legislation gives seniors and the disabled the peace of mind to know that their contracts will not be at risk of being canceled each year. This provision is especially important to seniors in Connecticut who have advocated for multiple-year renewals in order to ensure greater housing stability.

I also support provisions to promote the use of service coordinators used to help elderly and disabled residents gain access to local community services and promote independence. This greater flexibility of funds—including "enhanced vouchers" and assisted living programs—will help seniors and the disabled live independently in safe, affordable housing and increase quality of life, while saving taxpayer dollars.

In conclusion, I urge support for the Preserving Affordable Housing for Seniors and Families into the 21st Century. This is a bill which goes a long way in making smart, flexible reforms to provide safe, affordable housing for seniors and the disabled.

Mr. RAMSTAD. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support for the bill before us today.

Lack of affordable housing has an adverse effect on the most vulnerable in our society, namely senior citizens, children and people with disabilities.

A recent HUD report noted that the number of affordable housing units dropped 19 percent between 1996 and 1998. Now, the central cities have company as far as waiting lists for subsidized housing. Ninety percent of Minneapolis' inner-ring suburbs have added poor children at a faster rate in the '90s than Minneapolis. Virtually all of the suburban cities I represent have waiting lists—and they are long!

Mr. Speaker, that's why I have sought to work in a bipartisan, common sense way to address this critical problem and provide the necessary dollars to help these groups.

And that's why I am a cosponsor and strong supporter of H.R. 425, the Housing Preservation Matching Grant Act. Provisions based on this important legislation were included in the bill before us today. This bipartisan legislation will provide the necessary federal matching funds to assist states and localities seeking to preserve federal housing.

The "Vento-Ramstad" proposal rewards Minnesota's innovation and encourages other states to follow our lead.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 202 and expand access to housing for senior citizens.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to H.R. 202. "Preserving Housing for Senior Citizens and Families into the 21st Century." While my views on respecting our Constitution limitations regarding Federal issues are well known and need not be repeated here now, I have other concerns regarding this bill specifically.

That the House of Representatives would consider any bill authorizing about a billion dollars of taxpayer funds annually on the suspension calendar (an expedited procedure reserved for "non controversial" bills) show how far we have moved from our posturing that we claim to respect the concerns of taxpayers.

The consideration of this bill succumbs to the misperception that the best course of action to any perceived problem is further (Federal) governmental response. Clearly, that is not the case. Recently, John Stossel hosted an ABC television special, "Is America Number One!" In that show, he examined the premise of governmental solutions to problems always being best and concluded:

Intuition would suggest that countries with the most government planning, places where you're taken care of, would be the best places to live. But in fact the opposite is true, countries with the most planning are the most poor. Several organizations rank countries by economic freedom. At one end are places with lots of government planning. Invariably, these are the worst places to live. At the other end on the list—Hong Kong, New Zealand, Switzerland, and the United States. The best places to live are places with the fewest rules. Freedom isn't everything. Climate matters. Religion, geography, even luck can make a difference. But nothing matters as much as . . . Liberty.

In the show, Peter Jennings said that "Nearly 37 million Americans now live below the official poverty line." Federal Reserve economist Michael Cox explained, "The government says now 13.3 percent of households are in poverty. Let's go see what households in poverty have. Ninety-seven percent of households in poverty have color televisions. Two thirds have microwave ovens and live in air-conditioned buildings. Seventy-five percent have one or more cars."

Unfortunately, H.R. 202 makes the situation worse by diluting our current policy of helping the truly needy in favor of creating a middle class entitlement by expanding eligibility for occupancy to as high as 80% of the area median income for existing housing developments for seniors. I commend Mr. Stossel for illustrating clearly that choosing liberty is the best path for making a difference. I wish more of my colleagues heeded his advise.

Mr. CAPUANO. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 202, the Preserving Affordable Housing for Senior Citizens and Families Act. This bipartisan legislation will help save thousands of units of affordable housing throughout America for seniors and working families.

H.R. 202 provides several tools to help the Department of Housing and Urban Development deal with the loss of affordable housing, including authorizing the Department of "mark-up-to-market" the rents of those Section 8 properties that would otherwise opt-out of the program. Preserving these units is essential in maintaining a stock of high-quality affordable housing for future generations.

Many times these Section 8 properties are the only housing option for low-income individuals. While this bill also provides enhanced vouchers for those tenants affected by Section 8 opt-outs, in many cities, including Boston, the cost of housing is so high and the vacancy rates are so low, vouchers are not a viable solution. Giving HUD the ability to keep these properties in the Section 8 program by offering these owners reasonable rent increases is essential to maintaining affordable housing in high-cost areas.

In addition to preserving Section 8 properties, this legislation authorizes a commission that will study seven specific areas of concern related to elderly housing. One such concern is the issue of grandparents raising their grandchildren. It is estimated that more than 1.5 million children are being raised by their grandparents or other relatives. Many of these families live in public or subsidized housing in both urban and rural communities, although their unique needs may not be best served in these situations.

A group in my District, Boston Aging Concerns/Young and Old United, has developed the first affordable housing in the country designated specifically for grandparents raising their grandchildren. This innovative development, called the Grandfamilies House, has a playground, computer learning center, and after-school programs to serve the children, as well as service coordinators, and exercise classes for the elderly residents.

The staff of the Grandfamilies House has had inquiries from groups across the country interested in developing similar projects. It is my hope that the Commission will focus attention on this critical issue and develop recommendations to help us better serve these unique families.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. I rise today to voice my support for H.R. 202, the Preserving Housing