

Judy Biggert- Statement during House debate of HR2634, April 16, 2008, 1:24pm ET.

"I thank the gentleman and Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of this legislation and applaud Chairman Waters for her hard work on this legislation. Mr. Chairman I must admit that I wanted to cosponsor this bill for a very long time, but the bill as introduced had a number of problems for me. But, I am pleased to say that they have been resolved and I want to thank Chairman Frank for offering in the Financial Services Committee a manager's amendment that addressed many of my concerns and allowed me to become a co-sponsor, and also for the managers amendment that will be brought up today. So I am pleased to join him and Ranking Member Bachus in offering the managers amendment today that makes an even better bill addressing the most important concerns including economic conditionality that the administration expressed in its statement of administrative policy issued on Monday.

Mr. Chairman over a decade of hard work and determination has produced results for the poorest countries in the world. Poverty has been reduced and living conditions are improving. Today's bill recognizes and builds upon the previous work of this body on debt and development issues and I hope that this trend will continue. When I served in 2004 and 2005 on the Domestic and International Monetary Policy Committee as the Vice Chair, I was pleased to work with many members of the Financial Services committee, the administration and interested organizations to craft legislative language that eventually authorized funding for the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, or MDRI. And MDRI expanded the Highly Indebted Poor Country, HIPC, initiative of 1999. In short this historic U.S. led initiative called on the international community to provide up to 100% of debt relief and performance based grants to the world's poorest countries. Congress has since then appropriated about 2/3 of its financial obligation towards MDRI and HIPC and unfortunately we've fallen a little bit short on our commitment, but despite this shortfall, the program is working for 41 of the poorest countries in the world. Twenty-two have graduated from the HIPC program, 10 are on their way and 9 are beginning the process. So I'm pleased that the bill under consideration today with both the committee and floor manager's amendments recognizes these facts and seeks to preserve and build upon the impressive progress made under MDRI and HIPC.

So why do we need the Jubilee Act? Well, the fundamental purpose of today's legislation is to establish a plan for phase 2 of the U.S. debt relief initiative. And that's what we need. The bill sets out to forgive the debt and issue grants to the next group of the world's poorest countries, 24 in total, which do not currently qualify under HIPC self sufficiency and sustainable debt initiatives. Importantly, it also seeks to prevent these countries from entering new lending post relief debt so that they don't squander the economic and social progress achieved through the debt relief. I would like to note that the statement of administrative policy on this bill recognizes that debt relief should be tied to economic conditionality to ensure that it will promote economic growth and provide real benefits to the poor. In addition, the bill including the manager's amendment would ensure that countries eligible for this bill don't have excessive levels of military expenditures, don't support acts of international terrorism, are cooperating with the U.S. on international narcotics control matters and are complying with U.S. standards to eliminate human trafficking and working with the U.S. to stop illegal immigration to the U.S. I've worked really closely with constituents from my district and I really want to thank Sister Sheila Kinsey, Dan Driscoll Shaw, Ron Durbin and my other constituents too numerous to mention here, for their guidance, their compassion and encouragement of this bill, it's an honor to work with them. And as I close, just that the important part of our discussion today is to recognize that the ultimate goal of both phase one and now phase two of the U.S. international debt relief & poverty reduction initiatives is to improve the life of the people of impoverished countries around the world and this is going to happen because of this bill. I yield back."