To reauthorize and amend the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 26, 2012

Mr. BEGICH (for himself, Mr. INOUYE, Ms. SNOWE, Ms. MURKOWSKI, and Mr. WHITEHOUSE) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

A BILL

To reauthorize and amend the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the “National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Amendments Act of 2012”.

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.
Sec. 2. Strength and distribution in grade.
Sec. 3. Exclusion of officers recalled from retired status and positions of importance and responsibility from number of authorized commissioned officers.

Sec. 4. Obligated service requirement.

Sec. 5. Training and physical fitness.

Sec. 6. Appointments.

Sec. 7. Personnel boards.

Sec. 8. Temporary appointments.

Sec. 9. Officer candidates.

Sec. 10. Involuntary retirement or separation.

Sec. 11. Separation pay.


Sec. 13. Education loan repayment program.

Sec. 14. Interest payment program.

Sec. 15. Student pre-commissioning education assistance program.

Sec. 16. Applicability of certain provisions of title 37, United States Code.

Sec. 17. Application of certain provisions of competitive service law.

Sec. 18. Eligibility of all members of uniformed services for Legion of Merit award.

Sec. 19. Application of Employment and Reemployment Rights of Members of the Uniformed Services to members of commissioned officer corps.

Sec. 20. Protected communications for members of uniformed services and prohibition of retaliatory personnel actions.

Sec. 21. Criminal penalties for wearing uniform without authority.


Sec. 23. Technical correction.

SEC. 2. STRENGTH AND DISTRIBUTION IN GRADE.

Section 214 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3004) is amended to read as follows:

“SEC. 214. STRENGTH AND DISTRIBUTION IN GRADE.

“(a) GRADES.—The commissioned grades in the commissioned officer corps of the Administration are the following, in relative rank with officers of the Navy:

“(1) Vice admiral.

“(2) Rear admiral.

“(3) Rear admiral (lower half).

“(4) Captain.
“(5) Commander.

“(6) Lieutenant commander.

“(7) Lieutenant.

“(8) Lieutenant (junior grade).

“(9) Ensign.

“(b) PROPORTION.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—The officers on the lineal list shall be distributed in grade in the following percentages:

“(A) 8 in the grade of captain.

“(B) 14 in the grade of commander.

“(C) 19 in the grade of lieutenant commander.

“(2) GRADES BELOW LIEUTENANT COMMANDER.—The Secretary shall prescribe, with respect to the distribution on the lineal list in grade, the percentages applicable to the grades of lieutenant, lieutenant (junior grade), and ensign.

“(c) ANNUAL COMPUTATION OF NUMBER IN GRADE.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Not less frequently than once each year, the Secretary shall make a computation to determine the number of officers on the lineal list authorized to be serving in each grade.
“(2) METHOD OF COMPUTATION.—The number in each grade shall be computed by applying the applicable percentage to the total number of such officers serving on active duty on the date the computation is made.

“(3) FRACTIONS.—If a final fraction occurs in computing the authorized number of officers in a grade, the nearest whole number shall be taken. If the fraction is 1⁄2, the next higher whole number shall be taken.

“(d) TEMPORARY INCREASE IN NUMBERS.—The total number of officers authorized by law to be on the lineal list during a fiscal year may be temporarily exceeded if the average number on that list during that fiscal year does not exceed the authorized number.

“(e) POSITIONS OF IMPORTANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY.—Officers serving in positions designated under section 228(a) and officers recalled from retired status shall not be counted when computing authorized strengths under subsection (c) and shall not count against those strengths.

“(f) PRESERVATION OF GRADE AND PAY.—No officer may be reduced in grade or pay or separated from the commissioned officer corps of the Administration as
the result of a computation made to determine the authorized number of officers in the various grades.”.

SEC. 3. EXCLUSION OF OFFICERS RECALLED FROM RETIRED STATUS AND POSITIONS OF IMPORTANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY FROM NUMBER OF AUTHORIZED COMMISSIONED OFFICERS.

Section 215 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3005) is amended—

(1) in the matter before paragraph (1), by striking “Effective” and inserting the following:

“(a) IN GENERAL.—Effective”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(b) POSITIONS OF IMPORTANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY.—Officers serving in positions designated under section 228 and officers recalled from retired status—

“(1) may not be counted in determining the total number of authorized officers on the lineal list under this section; and

“(2) may not count against such number.”.

SEC. 4. OBLIGATED SERVICE REQUIREMENT.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subtitle A of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Offi-
cer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3001 et seq.) is amend-
ed by adding at the end the following:

“SEC. 216. OBLIGATED SERVICE REQUIREMENT.

“(a) IN GENERAL.—

“(1) RULEMAKING.—The Secretary shall pre-
scribe the obligated service requirements for appoint-
ments, training, promotions, separations, continu-
ations, and retirement of officers not otherwise cov-
ered by law.

“(2) WRITTEN AGREEMENTS.—The Secretary
and officers shall enter into written agreements that
describe the officers’ obligated service requirements
prescribed under paragraph (1) in return for such
appointments, training, promotions, separations, and
retirements as the Secretary considers appropriate.

“(b) REPAYMENT FOR FAILURE TO SATISFY RE-
QUIREMENTS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may require
an officer who fails to meet the service requirements
prescribed under subsection (a)(1) to reimburse the
Secretary in an amount that bears the same ratio to
the total costs of the training provided to that offi-
cer by the Secretary as the unserved portion of ac-
tive duty bears to the total period of active duty the
officer agreed to serve.
“(2) Obligation as debt to United States.—An obligation to reimburse the Secretary under paragraph (1) shall be considered for all purposes as a debt owed to the United States.

“(3) Discharge in bankruptcy.—A discharge in bankruptcy under title 11 that is entered less than 5 years after the termination of a written agreement entered into under subsection (a)(2) does not discharge the individual signing the agreement from a debt arising under such agreement.

“(c) Waiver or Suspension of Compliance.—The Secretary may waive the service obligation of an officer who—

“(1) becomes unqualified to serve on active duty in the commissioned officer corps of the Administration because of a circumstance not within the control of that officer; or

“(2) is—

“(A) not physically qualified for appointment; and

“(B) determined to be unqualified for service in the commissioned officer corps of the Administration because of a physical or medical condition that was not the result of the officer’s own misconduct or grossly negligent conduct.”.
(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections in section 1 of the Act entitled “An Act to authorize the Hydrographic Service Improvement Act of 1998, and for other purposes” (Public Law 107–372) is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 215 the following:

“Sec. 216. Obligated service requirement.”.

SEC. 5. TRAINING AND PHYSICAL FITNESS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subtitle A of title II of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3001 et seq.), as amended by section 5, is further amended by adding at the end the following:

“SEC. 217. TRAINING AND PHYSICAL FITNESS.

“(a) TRAINING.—The Secretary may take such measures as may be necessary to ensure that officers are prepared to carry out their duties in the commissioned officer corps of the Administration and proficient in the skills necessary to carry out such duties. Such measures may include the following:

“(1) Carrying out training programs and correspondence courses, including establishing and operating a basic officer training program to provide initial indoctrination and maritime vocational training for officer candidates as well as refresher training, mid-career training, aviation training, and such
other training as the Secretary considers necessary for officer development and proficiency.

“(2) Providing officers and officer candidates with books and school supplies.

“(3) Acquiring such equipment as may be necessary for training and instructional purposes.

“(b) Physical Fitness.—The Secretary shall ensure that officers maintain a high physical state of readiness in preparation for functioning as a service in the Navy during times of war, including by establishing standards of physical fitness for officers that are substantially equivalent to those prescribed for officers in the Navy.”.

(b) Clerical Amendment.—The table of sections in section 1 of the Act entitled “An Act to authorize the Hydrographic Service Improvement Act of 1998, and for other purposes” (Public Law 107–372), as amended by section 5(b), is further amended by inserting after the item relating to section 216, as added by such section 5(b), the following:

“Sec. 217. Training and physical fitness.”.

SEC. 6. APPOINTMENTS.

(a) Original Appointments.—

(1) In General.—Section 221 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3021) is amended to read as follows:
“SEC. 221. ORIGINAL APPOINTMENTS AND REAPPOINTMENTS.

“(a) ORIGINAL APPOINTMENTS.—

“(1) GRADES.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subparagraph (B), an original appointment of an officer may be made in such grades as may be appropriate for—

“(i) the qualification, experience, and length of service of the appointee; and

“(ii) the commissioned officer corps of the Administration.

“(B) APPOINTMENT OF OFFICER CANDIDATES.—

“(i) LIMITATION ON GRADE.—An original appointment of an officer candidate, upon graduation from the basic officer training program of the commissioned officer corps of the Administration, may not be made in any other grade than ensign.

“(ii) RANK.—Officer candidates receiving appointments as ensigns upon graduation from basic officer training program shall take rank according to their
proficiency as shown by the order of their merit at date of graduation.

“(2) SOURCE OF APPOINTMENTS.—An original appointment may be made from among the following:

“(A) Graduates of the basic officer training program of the commissioned officer corps of the Administration.

“(B) Graduates of the military service academies of the United States who otherwise meet the academic standards for enrollment in the training program described in subparagraph (A).

“(C) Licensed officers of the United States merchant marine who have served 2 or more years aboard a vessel of the United States in the capacity of a licensed officer, who otherwise meet the academic standards for enrollment in the training program described in subparagraph (A).

“(3) MILITARY SERVICE ACADEMIES OF THE UNITED STATES DEFINED.—In this subsection, the term ‘military service academies of the United States’ means the following:
“(A) The United States Military Academy, West Point, New York.

“(B) The United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

“(C) The United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

“(D) The United States Coast Guard Academy, New London, Connecticut.

“(E) The United States Merchant Marine Academy, Kings Point, New York.

“(b) REAPPOINTMENT.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in paragraph (2), an individual who previously served in the commissioned officer corps of the Administration may be appointed by the Secretary to the grade the individual held prior to separation.

“(2) REAPPOINTMENTS TO HIGHER GRADES.— An appointment under paragraph (1) to a position of importance and responsibility designated under section 228 may only be made by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.

“(c) QUALIFICATIONS.—An appointment under subsection (a) or (b) may not be given to an individual until the individual’s mental, moral, physical, and professional fitness to perform the duties of an officer has been estab-
lished under such regulations as the Secretary shall pre-
scribe.

“(d) PRECEDENCE OF APPOINTEES.—Appointees
under this section shall take precedence in the grade to
which appointed in accordance with the dates of their com-
missions as commissioned officers in such grade. Ap-
pointees whose dates of commission are the same shall
take precedence with each other as the Secretary shall de-
termine.”.

(2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sec-
tions in section 1 of the Act entitled “An Act to au-
thorize the Hydrographic Service Improvement Act
of 1998, and for other purposes” (Public Law 107–
372) is amended by striking the item relating to sec-
tion 221 and inserting the following:

“Sec. 221. Original appointments and reappointments.”.

(b) APPOINTMENTS TO PERMANENT GRADES.—Sec-
tion 226 of such Act (33 U.S.C. 3026) is amended by
striking “Appointments” and all that follows and inserting
the following:

“(a) HIGHER GRADES.—Original appointments
under section 221 in and promotions to the grades of lieu-
tenant commander and above shall be made by the Presi-
dent, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.
“(b) LOWER GRADES.—Original appointments under section 221 in and promotions to the grades of ensign through lieutenant shall be made by the President alone.”.

SEC. 7. PERSONNEL BOARDS.

Section 222 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3022) is amended to read as follows:

“SEC. 222. PERSONNEL BOARDS.

“(a) CONVENING.—Not less frequently than once each year and at such other times as the Secretary determines necessary, the Secretary shall convene a personnel board.

“(b) MEMBERSHIP.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—A board convened under subsection (a) shall consist of 5 or more officers who are serving in or above the permanent grade of the officers under consideration by the board.

“(2) RETIRED OFFICERS.—Officers on the retired list may be recalled to serve on such personnel boards as the Secretary considers necessary.

“(3) NO MEMBERSHIP ON 2 SUCCESSIVE BOARDS.—No officer may be a member of 2 successive personnel boards convened to consider officers of the same grade for promotion or separation.

“(c) DUTIES.—Each personnel board shall—
“(1) recommend to the Secretary such changes as may be necessary to correct any erroneous position on the lineal list that was caused by administrative error; and

“(2) make selections and recommendations to the Secretary and the President for the appointment, promotion, involuntary separation, continuation, and involuntary retirement of officers in the commissioned officer corps of the Administration as prescribed in this title.

“(d) Action on Recommendations Not Acceptable.—If any recommendation by a board convened under subsection (a) is not accepted by the Secretary or the President, the board shall make such further recommendations as the Secretary or the President consider appropriate.”.

SEC. 8. TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS.

Section 229 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3029) is amended to read as follows:

“SEC. 229. TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS.

“(a) Appointments by President.—Temporary appointments in the grade of ensign, lieutenant junior grade, or lieutenant may be made by the President alone.
“(b) TERMINATION.—A temporary appointment to a position under subsection (a) shall terminate upon approval of a permanent appointment for such position made by the President alone.

“(c) ORDER OF PRECEDENCE.—Appointees under subsection (a) shall take precedence in the grade to which appointed in accordance with the dates of their appointments as officers in such grade. The order of precedence of appointees who are appointed on the same date shall be determined by the Secretary.

“(d) ANY ONE GRADE.—When determined by the Secretary to be in the best interest of the commissioned officer corps, officers in any permanent grade may be temporarily promoted one grade by the President alone. Any such temporary promotion terminates upon the transfer of the officer to a new assignment.”.

SEC. 9. OFFICER CANDIDATES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subtitle B of title II of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3021 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“SEC. 234. OFFICER CANDIDATES.

“(a) DETERMINATION OF NUMBER.—The Secretary shall determine the number of appointments of officer candidates.
“(b) APPOINTMENT.—Appointment of officer candidates shall be made under regulations which the Secretary shall prescribe, including regulations with respect to determining age limits, methods of selection of officer candidates, term of service as an officer candidate before graduation from the program, and all other matters affecting such appointment.

“(c) DISMISSAL.—The Secretary may dismiss from the basic officer training program of the Administration any officer candidate who, during the officer candidate’s term as an officer candidate, the Secretary considers unsatisfactory in either academics or conduct, or not adapted for a career in the commissioned officer corps of the Administration. Officer candidates shall be subject to rules governing discipline prescribed by the Director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps.

“(d) AGREEMENT.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Each officer candidate shall sign an agreement with the Secretary in accordance with section 216(a)(2) regarding the officer candidate’s term of service in the commissioned officer corps of the Administration.
“(2) ELEMENTS.—An agreement signed by an officer candidate under paragraph (1) shall provide that the officer candidate agrees to the following:

“(A) That the officer candidate will complete the course of instruction at the basic officer training program of the Administration.

“(B) That upon graduation from the such program, the officer candidate—

“(i) will accept an appointment, if tendered, as an officer; and

“(ii) will serve on active duty for at least 4 years immediately after such appointment.

“(e) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary shall prescribe regulations to carry out this section. Such regulations shall include—

“(1) standards for determining what constitutes a breach of an agreement signed under such subsection (d)(1); and

“(2) procedures for determining whether such a breach has occurred.

“(f) REPAYMENT.—An officer candidate or former officer candidate who does not fulfill the terms of the obligation to serve as specified under section (d) shall be subject to the repayment provisions of section 216(b).”
(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections in section 1 of the Act entitled “An Act to authorize the Hydrographic Service Improvement Act of 1998, and for other purposes” (Public Law 107–372) is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 233 the following:

“Sec. 234. Officer candidates.”.

(e) OFFICER CANDIDATE DEFINED.—Section 212 of such Act (33 U.S.C. 3002) is amended—

(1) by redesignating paragraphs (4) through (6) as paragraphs (5) through (7), respectively; and

(2) by inserting after paragraph (4) the following:

“(5) OFFICER CANDIDATE.—The term ‘officer candidate’ means an individual who is enrolled in the basic officer training program of the Administration and is under consideration for appointment as an officer under section 221(a)(2)(A).’’.

(d) PAY FOR OFFICER CANDIDATES.—Section 203 of title 37, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(f)(1) An officer candidate enrolled in the basic officer training program of the commissioned officer corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is entitled, while participating in such program, to monthly officer candidate pay at monthly rate equal to the basic
pay of an enlisted member in the pay grade E–5 with less than two years service.

“(2) An individual who graduates from such program shall receive credit for the time spent participating in such program as if such time were time served while on active duty as a commissioned officer. If the individual does not graduate from such program, such time shall not be considered creditable for active duty or pay.”.

SEC. 10. INVOLUNTARY RETIREMENT OR SEPARATION.

Section 241 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3041) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(d) DEFERMENT OF RETIREMENT OR SEPARATION FOR MEDICAL REASONS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—If the Secretary determines that the evaluation of the medical condition of an officer requires hospitalization or medical observation that cannot be completed with confidence in a manner consistent with the officer’s well being before the date on which the officer would otherwise be required to retire or be separated under this section, the Secretary may defer the retirement or separation of the officer.
“(2) CONSENT REQUIRED.—A deferment may only be made with the written consent of the officer involved. If the officer does not provide written consent to the deferment, the officer shall be retired or separated as scheduled.

“(3) LIMITATION.—A deferral of retirement or separation under this subsection may not extend for more than 30 days after completion of the evaluation requiring hospitalization or medical observation.”.

SEC. 11. SEPARATION PAY.

Section 242 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3042) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(d) EXCEPTION.—An officer discharged for twice failing selection for promotion to the next higher grade is not entitled to separation pay under this section if the officer—

“(1) expresses a desire not to be selected for promotion; or

“(2) requests removal from the list of selectees.”.
SEC. 12. APPLICABILITY OF CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF 
TITLE 10, UNITED STATES CODE.

Section 261(a) of the National Oceanic and Atmos-
pheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 
2002 (33 U.S.C. 3071(a)) is amended—

(1) by redesignating paragraphs (13) through 
(16) as paragraphs (20) through (23), respectively;
(2) by redesignating paragraphs (7) through 
(12) as paragraphs (12) through (17), respectively;
(3) by redesignating paragraphs (4) through 
(6) as paragraphs (8) through (10), respectively;
(4) by inserting after paragraph (3) the fol-
lowing:

“(4) Section 771, relating to unauthorized 
wearing of uniforms.

“(5) Section 774, relating to wearing religious 
apparel while in uniform.

“(6) Section 982, relating to service on State 
and local juries.

“(7) Section 1031, relating to administration of 
oaths.”;

(5) by inserting after paragraph (10), as redes-
ignated, the following:

“(11) Chapter 58, relating to the Benefits and 
Services for members being separated or recently 
separated.”; and
(6) by inserting after paragraph (17), as redesignated, the following:

“(18) Subchapter I of chapter 88, relating to Military Family Programs.

“(19) Section 2005, relating to advanced education assistance, active duty agreements, and reimbursement requirements.”

SEC. 13. EDUCATION LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM.

(a) In general.—Subtitle E of title II of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3071 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“SEC. 267. EDUCATION LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM.

“(a) Authority to repay education loans.—For the purpose of maintaining adequate numbers of officers of the commissioned officer corps of the Administration on active duty who have skills required by the commissioned officer corps, the Secretary may repay, in the case of a person described in subsection (b), a loan that—

“(1) was used by the person to finance education; and

“(2) was obtained from a governmental entity, private financial institution, educational institution, or other authorized entity.
“(b) ELIGIBLE PERSONS.—To be eligible to obtain a loan repayment under this section, a person must—

“(1) satisfy 1 of the requirements specified in subsection (c);

“(2) be fully qualified for, or hold, an appointment as a commissioned officer in the commissioned officer corps of the Administration; and

“(3) sign a written agreement to serve on active duty, or, if on active duty, to remain on active duty for a period in addition to any other incurred active duty obligation.

“(c) ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS.—One of the following academic requirements must be satisfied for purposes of determining the eligibility of an individual for a loan repayment under this section:

“(1) The person is fully qualified in a profession that the Secretary has determined to be necessary to meet identified skill shortages in the commissioned officer corps.

“(2) The person is enrolled as a full-time student in the final year of a course of study at an accredited educational institution (as determined by the Secretary of Education) leading to a degree in
a profession that will meet identified skill shortages 
in the commissioned officer corps.

“(d) Loan Repayments.—

“(1) In general.—Subject to the limits estab-
lished under paragraph (2), a loan repayment under 
this section may consist of the payment of the prin-
cipal, interest, and related expenses of a loan ob-
tained by a person described in subsection (b).

“(2) Limitation on amount.—For each year 
of obligated service that a person agrees to serve in 
an agreement described in subsection (b)(3), the 
Secretary may pay not more than the amount speci-
fied in section 2173(c)(2) of title 10, United States 
Code.

“(e) Active Duty Service Obligation.—

“(1) In general.—A person entering into an 
agreement described in subsection (b)(3) incurs an 
active duty service obligation.

“(2) Length of obligation determined 
under regulations.—

“(A) In general.—Except as provided in 
subparagraph (B), the length of the obligation 
under paragraph (1) shall be determined under 
regulations prescribed by the Secretary.
“(B) Minimum Obligation.—The regulations prescribed under subparagraph (A) may not provide for a period of obligation of less than 1 year for each maximum annual amount, or portion thereof, paid on behalf of the person for qualified loans.

“(3) Persons on active duty before entering into agreement.—The active duty service obligation of persons on active duty before entering into the agreement shall be served after the conclusion of any other obligation incurred under the agreement.

“(f) Effect of failure to complete obligation.—

“(1) Alternative obligations.—An officer who is relieved of the officer’s active duty obligation under this section before the completion of that obligation may be given any alternative obligation, at the discretion of the Secretary.

“(2) Repayment.—An officer who does not complete the period of active duty specified in the agreement entered into under subsection (b)(3), or the alternative obligation imposed under paragraph (1), shall be subject to the repayment provisions under section 216.
“(g) Rulemaking.—The Secretary shall prescribe regulations to carry out this section, including—

“(1) standards for qualified loans and authorized payees; and

“(2) other terms and conditions for the making of loan repayments.”.

(b) Clerical Amendment.—The table of sections in section 1 of the Act entitled “An Act to authorize the Hydrographic Service Improvement Act of 1998, and for other purposes” (Public Law 107–372) is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 266 the following:

“Sec. 267. Education loan repayment program.”.

SEC. 14. INTEREST PAYMENT PROGRAM.

(a) In General.—Subtitle E of title II of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3071 et seq.), as amended by section 13, is further amended by adding at the end the following:

“SEC. 268. INTEREST PAYMENT PROGRAM.

“(a) Authority.—The Secretary may pay the interest and any special allowances that accrue on 1 or more student loans of an eligible officer, in accordance with this section.

“(b) Eligible Officers.—An officer is eligible for the benefit described in subsection (a) while the officer—

“(1) is serving on active duty;
“(2) has not completed more than 3 years of
service on active duty;

“(3) is the debtor on 1 or more unpaid loans
described in subsection (c); and

“(4) is not in default on any such loan.

“(e) STUDENT LOANS.—The authority to make pay-
ments under subsection (a) may be exercised with respect
to the following loans:

“(1) A loan made, insured, or guaranteed under
part B of title IV of the Higher Education Act of
1965 (20 U.S.C. 1071 et seq.).

“(2) A loan made under part D of such title
(20 U.S.C. 1087a et seq.).

“(3) A loan made under part E of such title
(20 U.S.C. 1087aa et seq.).

“(d) MAXIMUM BENEFIT.—Interest and any special
allowance may be paid on behalf of an officer under this
section for any of the 36 consecutive months during which
the officer is eligible under subsection (b).

“(e) FUNDS FOR PAYMENTS.—The Secretary may
use amounts appropriated for the pay and allowances of
personnel of the commissioned officer corps of the Admin-
istration for payments under this section.

“(f) COORDINATION WITH SECRETARY OF EDU-
cation.—
“(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall consult with the Secretary of Education regarding the administration of this section.

“(2) TRANSFER OF FUNDS.—The Secretary shall transfer to the Secretary of Education the funds necessary—

“(A) to pay interest and special allowances on student loans under this section (in accordance with sections 428(o), 455(l), and 464(j) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1078(o), 1087e(l), and 1087dd(j)); and

“(B) to reimburse the Secretary of Education for any reasonable administrative costs incurred by the Secretary in coordinating the program under this section with the administration of the student loan programs under parts B, D, and E of title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1071 et seq., 1087a et seq., 1087aa et seq.).

“(g) SPECIAL ALLOWANCE DEFINED.—In this section, the term ‘special allowance’ means a special allowance that is payable under section 438 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087–1).”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Sections 428(o), 455(l), and 464(j) of the Higher Education Act of 1965
((20 U.S.C. 1078(o), 1087e(l), and 1087dd(j)) are each amended—

(1) by striking the subsection heading and inserting “ARMED FORCES AND NOAA COMMISSIONED OFFICER CORPS STUDENT LOAN INTEREST PAYMENT PROGRAMS”; and

(2) in paragraph (1)—

(A) by inserting “or section 264 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002” after “Code,”; and

(B) by inserting “or an officer in the commissioned officer corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, respectively,” after “Armed Forces”.

(e) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections in section 1 of the Act entitled “An Act to authorize the Hydrographic Service Improvement Act of 1998, and for other purposes” (Public Law 107–372), as amended by section 13(b), is further amended by inserting after the item relating to section 267, as added by such section 13(b), the following:

“Sec. 268. Interest payment program.”.
SEC. 15. STUDENT PRE-COMMISSIONING EDUCATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

(a) In General.—Subtitle E of title II of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3071 et seq.), as amended by sections 13 and 14, is further amended by adding at the end the following:

"SEC. 269. STUDENT PRE-COMMISSIONING EDUCATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

"(a) Authority to Provide Financial Assistance.—For the purpose of maintaining adequate numbers of officers of the commissioned officer corps of the Administration on active duty, the Secretary may provide financial assistance to a person described in subsection (b) for expenses of the person while the person is pursuing on a full-time basis at an accredited educational institution (as determined by the Secretary of Education) a program of education approved by the Secretary that leads to—

"(1) a baccalaureate degree in not more than 5 academic years; or

"(2) a postbaccalaureate degree.

"(b) Eligible Persons.—

"(1) In General.—A person is eligible to obtain financial assistance under subsection (a) if the person—
“(A) is enrolled on a full-time basis in a program of education referred to in subsection (a) at any educational institution described in such subsection;

“(B) meets all of the requirements for acceptance into the commissioned officer corps of the Administration except for the completion of a baccalaureate degree; and

“(C) enters into a written agreement with the Secretary described in paragraph (2).

“(2) AGREEMENT.—A written agreement referred to in paragraph (1)(C) is an agreement between the person and the Secretary in which the person agrees—

“(A) to accept an appointment as an officer, if tendered; and

“(B) upon completion of the person’s educational program, agrees to serve on active duty, immediately after appointment, for—

“(i) up to 3 years if the person received less than 3 years of assistance; and

“(ii) up to 5 years if the person received at least 3 years of assistance.
“(c) Qualifying Expenses.—Expenses for which financial assistance may be provided under subsection (a) are the following:

“(1) Tuition and fees charged by the educational institution involved.

“(2) The cost of books.

“(3) In the case of a program of education leading to a baccalaureate degree, laboratory expenses.

“(4) Such other expenses as the Secretary considers appropriate.

“(d) Limitation on Amount.—The Secretary shall prescribe the amount of financial assistance provided to a person under subsection (a), which may not exceed the amount specified in section 2173(e)(2) of title 10, United States Code, for each year of obligated service that a person agrees to serve in an agreement described in subsection (b)(2).

“(e) Duration of Assistance.—Financial assistance may be provided to a person under subsection (a) for not more than 5 consecutive academic years.

“(f) Subsistence Allowance.—

“(1) In general.—A person who receives financial assistance under subsection (a) shall be entitled to a monthly subsistence allowance at a rate
prescribed under paragraph (2) for the duration of
the period for which the person receives such finan-
cial assistance.

“(2) DETERMINATION OF AMOUNT.—The Sec-
retary shall prescribe monthly rates for subsistence
allowance provided under paragraph (1), which shall
be equal to the amount specified in section 2144(a)
of title 10, United States Code.

“(g) INITIAL CLOTHING ALLOWANCE.—

“(1) TRAINING.—The Secretary may prescribe
a sum which shall be credited to each person who re-
ceives financial assistance under subsection (a) to
cover the cost of the person’s initial clothing and
equipment issue.

“(2) APPOINTMENT.—Upon completion of the
program of education for which a person receives fi-
nancial assistance under subsection (a) and accept-
ance of appointment in the commissioned officer
corps of the Administration, the person may be
issued a subsequent clothing allowance equivalent to
that normally provided to a newly appointed officer.

“(h) TERMINATION OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall termi-
nate the assistance provided to a person under this
section if—
“(A) the Secretary accepts a request by
the person to be released from an agreement
described in subsection (b)(2);

“(B) the misconduct of the person results
in a failure to complete the period of active
duty required under the agreement; or

“(C) the person fails to fulfill any term or
condition of the agreement.

“(2) Reimbursement.—The Secretary may re-
quire a person who receives assistance described in
subsection (c), (f), or (g) under an agreement en-
tered into under subsection (b)(1)(C) to reimburse
the Secretary in an amount that bears the same
ratio to the total costs of the assistance provided to
that person as the unserved portion of active duty
bears to the total period of active duty the officer
agreed to serve under the agreement.

“(3) Waiver.—The Secretary may waive the
service obligation of a person through an agreement
entered into under subsection (b)(1)(C) if the per-
son—

“(A) becomes unqualified to serve on active
duty in the commissioned officer corps of the
Administration because of a circumstance not
within the control of that person; or
“(B) is—

“(i) not physically qualified for appointment; and

“(ii) determined to be unqualified for service in the commissioned officer corps of the Administration because of a physical or medical condition that was not the result of the person’s own misconduct or grossly negligent conduct.

“(4) Obligation as debt to United States.—An obligation to reimburse the Secretary imposed under paragraph (2) is, for all purposes, a debt owed to the United States.

“(5) Discharge in Bankruptcy.—A discharge in bankruptcy under title 11, United States Code, that is entered less than 5 years after the termination of a written agreement entered into under subsection (b)(1)(C) does not discharge the person signing the agreement from a debt arising under such agreement or under paragraph (2).

“(i) Regulations.—The Secretary may promulgate such regulations and orders as the Secretary considers appropriate to carry out this section.”.

(b) Clerical Amendment.—The table of sections in section 1 of the Act entitled “An Act to authorize the
Hydrographic Service Improvement Act of 1998, and for
other purposes” (Public Law 107–372), as amended by
section 14(c), is further amended by inserting after the
item relating to section 268, as added by such section
14(c), the following:

“Sec. 269. Student pre-commissioning education assistance program.”.

SEC. 16. APPLICABILITY OF CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF
TITLE 37, UNITED STATES CODE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subtitle E of title II of the Na-
tional Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commis-
sioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 3071 et seq.),
as amended by sections 13 through 15, is further amended
by adding at the end the following:

“SEC. 270. APPLICABILITY OF CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF
TITLE 37, UNITED STATES CODE.

“(a) PROVISIONS MADE APPLICABLE TO COMMISS-
SIONED OFFICER CORPS.—The provisions of law applica-
ble to the Armed Forces under the following provisions
of title 37, United States Code, shall apply to the commis-
sioned officer corps of the Administration:

“(1) Section 324, relating to accession bonuses
for new officers in critical skills.

“(2) Section 403(f)(3), relating to prescribing
regulations defining the terms ‘field duty’ and ‘sea
duty’.
“(3) Section 403(l), relating to temporary continuation of housing allowance for dependents of members dying on active duty.

“(4) Section 414(a)(2), relating to personal money allowance while serving as Director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps.

“(5) Section 428, relating to allowances for recruiting expenses.

“(6) Section 435, relating to allowances for funeral honors duty.

“(b) REFERENCES.—The authority vested by title 37, United States Code, in the ‘military departments’, ‘the Secretary concerned’, or ‘the Secretary of Defense’ with respect to the provisions of law referred to in subsection (a) shall be exercised, with respect to the commissioned officer corps of the Administration when the commissioned officer corps is not operating as a service in the Navy, by the Secretary of Commerce or the Secretary’s designee.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections in section 1 of the Act entitled “An Act to authorize the Hydrographic Service Improvement Act of 1998, and for other purposes” (Public Law 107–372), as amended by section 15(b), is further amended by inserting after the
item relating to section 269, as added by such section 15(b), the following:

“Sec. 270. Applicability of certain provisions of title 37, United States Code.”.

SEC. 17. APPLICATION OF CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF COMPETITIVE SERVICE LAW.

Section 3304(f) of title 5, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1), by inserting “and members of the commissioned officer corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (or its predecessor organization the Coast and Geodetic Survey) separated from such uniformed service” after “separated from the armed forces”;

(2) in paragraph (2), by striking “or veteran” and inserting “, veteran, or member”; and

(3) in paragraph (4), by inserting “and members of the commissioned officer corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (or its predecessor organization the Coast and Geodetic Survey) separated from such uniformed service” after “separated from the armed forces”.

SEC. 18. ELIGIBILITY OF ALL MEMBERS OF UNIFORMED SERVICES FOR LEGION OF MERIT AWARD.

Section 1121 of title 10, United States Code, is amended by striking “armed forces” and inserting “uniformed services”.
SEC. 19. APPLICATION OF EMPLOYMENT AND REEMPLOYMENT RIGHTS OF MEMBERS OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES TO MEMBERS OF COMMISSIONED OFFICER CORPS.

Section 4303(16) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting “the commissioned officer corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,” after “Public Health Service,”.

SEC. 20. PROTECTED COMMUNICATIONS FOR MEMBERS OF UNIFORMED SERVICES AND PROHIBITION OF RETALIATORY PERSONNEL ACTIONS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1034 of title 10, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsections (a) through (e), by striking “the armed forces” each places it appears and inserting “the uniformed services”;

(2) in subsection (e)(5)—

(A) by striking “Department of Defense, or” and inserting “Department of Defense (in the case of a member of the armed forces),”; and

(B) by inserting “the Inspector General of the Department of Commerce (in the case of a member of the Commissioned Office Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), or the Inspector General of the De-
partment of Health and Human Services (in
the case of a member of the commissioned
corps of the Public Health Service)” after
“Navy),”;

(3) in subsection (e), in paragraphs (1) and (3),
by striking “to the Secretary of Defense (or to the
Secretary of Homeland Security in the case of a
member of the Coast Guard when the Coast Guard
is not operating as a service in the Navy)” both
places it appears and inserting “to the Secretary of
Defense (in the case of a member of the armed
forces), to the Secretary of Homeland Security (in
the case of a member of the Coast Guard when the
Coast Guard is not operating as a service in the
Navy), to the Secretary of Commerce (in the case of
a member of the Commissioned Office Corps of the
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration),
or the Secretary of Health and Human Services (in
the case of a member of the commissioned corps of
the Public Health Service)”;

(4) in subsection (h)—

(A) by striking “and” after “of Defense,”;

and

(B) by inserting “the Secretary of Com-
merce with respect to the commissioned officer
corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services with respect to the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service” after “Navy,”; and

(5) in subsection (i)—

(A) in subparagraph (A), by inserting “, in the case of a member of the armed forces” before the period at the end; and

(B) by striking subparagraph (C) and inserting the following:

“(C) The Inspector General of the Department of Commerce, in the case of a member of the commissioned officer corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

“(D) The Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services, in the case of a member of the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service.

“(E) Any officer of the uniformed services or employee of the Department of Defense, the Department of Commerce, or the Department of Health and Human Services who is assigned or detailed to serve as an Inspector General at any level in the Department of Defense, De-
part of Commerce, or Department of
Health and Human Services.”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by
subsection (a) shall apply with respect to any unfavorable
personnel action taken or threatened, and any withholding
of or threat to withhold a favorable personnel action, on
or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 21. CRIMINAL PENALTIES FOR WEARING UNIFORM
WITHOUT AUTHORITY.

Section 702 of title 18, United States Code, is
amended by striking “Service or any” and inserting “Serv-
ice, the commissioned officer corps of the National Oce-
anic and Atmospheric Administration, or any”.

SEC. 22. REPORT ON STATUS OF OFFICERS IN COMMIS-
SIONED OFFICER CORPS OF NATIONAL OCE-
ANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
AND PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE DURING GOV-
ERNMENT SHUTDOWNS.

Not later than 60 days after the date of the enact-
ment of this Act, the Attorney General shall submit to
Congress a report that details whether officers of the com-
misioned officer corps of the National Oceanic and At-
mospheric Administration and the Public Health Service
are treated as performing an essential level of activity to
protect life and property during any period of a lapse in
appropriations.

SEC. 23. TECHNICAL CORRECTION.

Section 101(21)(C) of title 38, United States Code,
is amended by inserting “in the commissioned officer
corps” before “of the National”. 