

“THE OMNIBUS ADOPTION ACT OF 1999”

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 15, 1999

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing the Omnibus Adoption Act of 1999. I am pleased that my friend and colleague, Congressman Jim Oberstar, is joining me in introducing this key piece of legislation, which seeks to promote and raise awareness about adoption.

As someone who has been a passionate advocate for helping families and children through adoption, I urge all of my colleagues to support this important proposal, because adoption is truly a loving option for women and families who find themselves in less than optimal circumstances.

The existing evidence shows that adoption generates overwhelmingly positive benefits to all persons involved in the process—including the birth mother. In fact, some research indicates that those women who choose to make a adoption plan for their child are less likely to live in poverty, more likely to complete high school, and less likely to have additional unplanned pregnancies.

Adoption also provides a child who might otherwise face a bleak or difficult childhood the prospect of having loving parents, a stable home, a higher standard of living and enhanced career opportunities as the child matures into adulthood. Adoption also provides adoptive parents who desperately want to raise children and form a family the opportunity to fulfill that dream. It is estimated that about 1 million children in the United States live with adoptive parents, and that between 2% to 4% of American families include an adopted child.

The statistics about adoption reveal a downward trend away from this life-affirming choice made by women who face an unplanned or difficult pregnancy. For instance, the estimated number of annual adoptions by couples who are not related to the birth mother has been as high as 89,200 in 1970 to an estimated 60,000 in 1998. The number of children placed with relatives, known as kinship care, is estimated at 200,000 clearly, the benefits of adoption as they pertain to non-familial placement are for being clearly articulated to women in American today.

We can and should do more to help women with difficult pregnancies as they seek life-affirming alternatives.

The Omnibus Adoption Act takes a three pronged approach to this important issue. First, it assists the birth mother who chooses to make an adoption placement for her child by providing her with the resources that she will need during and after her pregnancy. The bill authorizes new vouchers that can be used for maternity homes, nutrition counseling and job training. Secondly, the bill assists the adoptive parents with the financial costs that come with an adoption by raising the current \$5,000 tax credit for adoption expenses to \$10,000. And, finally, it enhances the ability of non-profit organizations, such as maternity homes, who work with both birth mothers and adoptive par-

ents by providing services to the birth mothers, including room and board and medical care, as well as advising and facilitating adoptions in many cases.

The Omnibus Adoption Act contains the following 12 titles:

Title I: Expansion of Adoption Tax Credit from Current Level of \$5,000 to \$10,000.

Title II: Family Leave Equity for Adoptive/Foster Families—Provides leave benefits to employees who need leave for the care of a newly placed son or daughter through foster care or adoption.

Title III: Adoption Counseling for Public Health Grant Recipients: Requires adoption counseling training for staff in certain federally-funded clinics including Title X recipients and Section 330 health centers. Requires certain federally-funded health clinics to provide non-directive counseling and referrals regarding prenatal care and delivery, infant care, foster care, and adoption.

Title IV: Adoption Information for Members of the U.S. Armed Forces: Requires that the Department of Defense and its service branches, as well as the Coast Guard, make available to military couples information about adoption as well as information to unmarried female members of the military about adoption placement for their child if they are pregnant.

Title V: Federal Prisons: Requires the Attorney General to make available information on adoption options available to pregnant female prisoners.

Title VI: Adoption Counseling Accreditation: Requires states to accredit individuals or organizations who provide adoption services, as well as requiring states to establish standards for such adoption providers.

Title VII: Adoption and Foster Care Data Collection: Within 6 months of enactment, the Secretary of Health and Human Services shall submit a report to Congress which would provide information on adoption and foster placement in the United States as contained in the Advisory Committee's Report to the Secretary put forth in 1987. States would be required to transmit data on adoption and foster care to the Secretary on a quarterly basis for future reporting.

Title VIII: Refundable Tax Credit for Medical Expenses Associated With Pregnancy: Would provide a \$5,000 tax credit for the medical expenses of pregnant women who give their child up for adoption.

Title IX: Maternal Health Certificate Program: Pregnant women would be eligible for this program which could be used for maternity and housing services including room and board, medical care, counseling services, nutrition services and counseling, child and family development counseling, adoption counseling, vocational and educational counseling, and transportation services.

Title X: Rehabilitation Grants for Maternity Housing and Services Facilities: Requires the Department of Housing and Urban Development to establish a grant program for non-profit entities to rehabilitate structures for use as maternity housing and services facilities. These facilities could provide a variety of services including room and board, medical care, counseling (nutrition, health, prenatal, family, adoption, vocational/educational), and transportation.

Title XI: Repeal of the National Clearinghouse on Adoption Information.

Title XII: National Commission on Adoption: Establishes a commission to review all adoption programs, all activities pertaining to adoption in the United States including a focus upon how adoption is presented as an option to unmarried pregnant women and the extent to which prospective adoptive parents are made aware of children waiting to be adopted. Nine appointees (2—Speaker, 1—House Minority Leader, 2—Senate Majority Leader, 1—Senate Minority Leader, 3—President). Commission will report back to Congress within 3 years and will subsequently disband.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, The Omnibus Adoption Act brings to the table a solid package of provisions which would benefit children, their prospective parents, and their birth mothers. Any adoption legislation that Congress enacts must ensure that each of these groups is represented because they are all part of the adoption equation.

HONORING BILL WATSON OF WEST UNIVERSITY PLACE, TEXAS

HON. KEN BENTSEN

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 15, 1999

Mr. BENTSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor William (Bill) Watson for his outstanding contributions to West University Place, Texas where he has been selected as Citizen of the Year.

Bill Watson exemplifies the title Public Servant and well deserves the honor of being Citizen of the Year. Among his most outstanding professional accomplishments are:

Serving as a member of the West University City Council from 1989 to 1991 and as the city's Mayor from 1993 to 1997.

Founding Board Member of the Medical Center Chaplaincy, now known as the Lifeline Chaplaincy. The purpose of the organization is to provide training for chaplains to work in hospitals as well as provide housing and spiritual support for families.

Founding Board Member of the Christian Child Help Foundation that helps to place children in foster care.

Currently serving on the Board of Trustees of the Institute of Christian Studies, which is affiliated with the University of Texas.

Currently a member of the Greater Southwest Houston Chamber of Commerce, the West University Zoning and Planning Commission, and the West University Rotary Club, from which he recently received the 1997 Outstanding Vocational Service Award.

On a more personal note, Bill and his wife, Lois, have been residents of West University Place since 1961. They are active members of the Southwest Central Church of Christ where Bill has been teaching bible school since 1958.

While raising children in West University, Bill and Lois were active in Little League, the PTA, and Scouts. Bill was also President of the Parents Association at Southwest Texas State University. Bill and Lois will soon be retiring to their ranch in Luling, TX.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate Bill Watson. He is an ideal public servant and truly deserving of this award.