

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—
NOMINATION OF MICHAEL GARCIA

Mr. MCCONNELL. As in executive session, I ask unanimous consent that when the Governmental Affairs Committee reports the nomination of Michael Garcia (PN 451), to be Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security, the nomination then be sequentially referred to the Judiciary Committee for a period not to exceed 15 days of session; provided further that if the nomination is not reported by that time, the nomination be automatically discharged and placed on the calendar.

Mr. President, I withdraw that request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The request is vitiated.

WOMEN'S BUSINESS CENTERS
PRESERVATION ACT OF 2003

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 1247.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will state the bill by title. The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1247) to increase the amount to be reserved during FY2003 for sustainability grants under section 29(1) of the Small Business Act.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I rise in support of the "Women's Business Centers Preservation Act of 2003" in recognition of the critical need to preserve the operations of existing Women's Business Centers currently serving women entrepreneurs in almost every state and territory. I am pleased to be joined in offering this bill by Senator KERRY, Ranking Member, Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, and Senators BOND, CANTWELL, BURNS, LEVIN, ENZI, GRASSLEY, BAUCUS, DOMENICI, and BINGAMAN.

While I am totally supportive of the Administration's efforts to add new centers to serve a broader constituency, I am very concerned that we may lose valuable resources established in rural and urban areas. The value of the Women's Business Center Program is stated best by the text taken from the Small Business Administration's (SBA) promotional materials on the Women's Business Center Program:

Each women's business center is uniquely designed to serve the needs of its individual community and to place special emphasis on helping those who are economically disadvantaged.

The Women's Business Center Program has become a strong and effective part of the SBA's entrepreneurial-development efforts.

And—

In tough economic times, when both employment and funding resources are harder to come by, support for the WBC Program is more important than ever.

As Chair of the Small Business Committee, I totally agree with the SBA's assessment. In fact, Congress has

agreed six times since the program was introduced through the Small Business Ownership Act of 1988, and made permanent in 1997, that this program is critical for women-business owners. The program's appropriations has grown from \$2 million in 1989 to \$12 million in 2003, and the results have been impressive. In Fiscal Year 2002, for every dollar invested in the program, centers reported a return of \$161 in gross receipts of clients.

Even more remarkable is the fact that since 1997, the Women's Business Centers have served more than 240,000 women entrepreneurs. In Fiscal Year 2002, almost 86,000 customers were served through the centers. As reported in the SBA Performance and Accountability Report of 2002, "the WBC Program has more than doubled its goal of a 3 percent annual increase in the number of clients served in the past two years. This is due in large part to the success of the sustainability grants, which enable established centers to continue SBA funding. SBA expects this trend to continue as more centers become firmly established and as their reputations for excellence spread."

If we look at the centers that are achieving the greatest impact, it is the established centers. The results of their outreach and one-on-one assistance has made it possible for the Small Business Administration to achieve its goals as it measures the success of the products and programs offered by these centers.

It is true that this month only five Women's Business Centers face the possibility of closing their doors without the dollar-to-dollar matching funds that are provided through sustainability funding. The sustainability grant provisions reserve 30.2 percent of the \$12 million program funding for sustainability grants for existing centers with the balance of available funds designated for the creation and operation of new centers. Based on information provided by the SBA, there are not sufficient sustainability reserve funds to offer continuation contracts to five centers in Iowa, Illinois, North Carolina, Texas and Washington. Therefore, SBA has proposed a reduction in grants for all centers currently funded by sustainability grants. By increasing the reserve amount to 36 percent, only during Fiscal Year 2003, adequate funds will be available for eligible existing centers operating with sustainability grants.

Next year, there will be more than 20 States and the U.S. Virgin Islands affected by the lack of funding to continue operations. Last month, I introduced the "Women's Small Business Programs Improvement Act of 2003", S. 1154, to correct deficiencies in the program and provide a fair, competitive process to operate and grow the Women's Business Center Program. I expect that bill will be taken up as part of the SBA reauthorization legislation my Committee will consider in July.

While we can fix the funding problem in the long-run, we still face a crisis

today. That is the reason for the bill I am introducing. By increasing the formula for sustainability grants from 30.2 percent to 36 percent, existing centers would be able to operate without disruption in funding and the programs and services currently offered in our communities. This provision will not require an additional appropriation, just a reallocation of current funds.

I believe this approach offers the best path available to sustain the centers approaching the end of their grant cycles without creating undue hardship for all existing centers. At the same time, it should not hinder the Administration's efforts to create new centers.

These centers have been extraordinarily successful in providing assistance to women in all walks of life—from those who once received public assistance but now operate businesses and create jobs, to women transitioning from employee to small business employer, to established women-business owners who create and manufacture products for sale at home and abroad. The Centers nurture women entrepreneurs through business and financial planning and help with critical issues like securing funding for startup and expansion. Yet—despite these successes—funding questions have long plagued the program.

I am committed to resolving the temporary funding crisis through the bill I introduce today and will work with my colleagues to ensure the long-term viability of the Women's Business Center program for today's women entrepreneurs and those of tomorrow.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I rise today as Ranking Member of the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship with my esteemed colleague and Chair of the Committee, Senator SNOWE, to offer legislation to fix a funding gap that exists for meritorious Women's Business Centers that are graduating from the first stage of the program and entering the sustainability portion.

I would first like to thank Senator SNOWE for working very closely with me on this issue. Her leadership and support has been invaluable. I would also like to thank our House counterparts on the Small Business Committee, Chairman MANZULLO and Ranking Member VELÁZQUEZ, who have also been working diligently on the issue of sustainability grants as we take on the process of reauthorizing the majority of the SBA's programs. In addition, I want to thank all of the cosponsors of this legislation, all of which have shown resounding support for women entrepreneurs and recognize the positive impact all small businesses have on our national economy.

As I have said on more than one occasion, women business owners do not get the recognition they deserve for their contribution to our economy: Eighteen million Americans would be without jobs today if it weren't for

these entrepreneurs who had the courage and the vision to strike out on their own. For 18 years, as a member of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, I have worked to increase the opportunities for these enterprising women in a variety of ways, leading to greater earning power, financial independence and asset accumulation. These are more than words. For these women, it means having a bank account, buying a home, sending their children to college, calling the shots.

And helping them at every step are the Women's Business Centers. In 2002 alone, these centers helped 85,000 women with the business counseling and assistance they likely could not find anywhere else. Cutting funding for any centers would be harmful to the centers, to the women they serve, to the States, and to the national economy.

The funding gap for Women's Business Centers in the sustainability portion of the program exists because the Small Business Administration has chosen to adopt a funding policy that short-changes existing, proven centers in order to open new, unproven ones. By incorrectly interpreting the funding formula set up in statute for the Women's Business Center program, the SBA intends to make way for new centers at the expense of those that are already established, operational and successful. This is both bad policy and contrary to congressional intent.

As the author of the Women's Business Centers Sustainability Act of 1999, I can tell that when the Women's Business Centers Sustainability Act of 1999 was signed into law, it was Congress's intent to protect the established and successful infrastructure of worthy, performing centers. The law was designed to allow all graduating Women's Business Centers that meet certain SBA standards to receive continued funding under sustainability grants, while still allowing for new centers—but not by penalizing those that have already demonstrated their effectiveness.

Currently there are 81 Women's Business Centers in 48 states. Forty-six of these are in the initial program, 29 are already in sustainability, and six more are graduating or have graduated from the initial program and are now applying for sustainability grants. Because the SBA is incorrectly interpreting the funding formula for sustainability grants in order to open new centers, and in order to accommodate funding for potentially six new sustainability centers, those from Georgia, Iowa, Illinois, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington State, the amount of funds reserved for Women's Business Centers in sustainability must be increased from 30.2 percent to 36 percent.

This legislation does just that. It directs the SBA to reserve 36 percent of the appropriated funds for the sustainability portion of Women's Business Centers program—even though the

SBA already has the authority on its own to increase the reserve—thereby protecting the established Women's Business Centers from almost certain grant funding cuts and still providing enough funds to open six or more new centers across the country.

I want to again express my sincere and steadfast support for the growing community of women entrepreneurs across the Nation and for the invaluable programs through which the SBA provides women business owners with the tools they need to succeed. As a long-time advocate for women entrepreneurs and SBA's programs, my record in support of the SBA's women's programs and for women business owners speaks for itself. I have continually fought for increased funding for the women's programs at the SBA, for sustaining and expanding the women's business centers, and for giving women entrepreneurs their deserved representation within the Federal procurement process, to name a few. With respect to laws assisting women-owned businesses, I have been proud to either introduce the underlying legislation or strongly advocate to ensure their passage and adequate funding.

This bill is necessary to continue the good work of SBA's Women's Business Center network, and I urge all of my colleagues to support it.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read the third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements regarding this matter be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (S. 1247) was read the third time and passed, as follows:

S. 1247

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

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Women's Business Centers Preservation Act of 2003".

SEC. 2. SUSTAINABILITY GRANTS FOR WOMEN'S BUSINESS CENTERS.

Section 29(k)(4)(A)(iv) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 656(k)(4)(A)(iv)) is amended by striking "30.2 percent" and inserting "36 percent".

SUPPORTING THE GOALS AND IDEALS OF NATIONAL EPILEPSY AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Judiciary Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. Con. Res. 48 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report the concurrent resolution by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 48) supporting the goals and ideals of "National Epilepsy Awareness Month" and urging funding for epilepsy research and service programs.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the concurrent resolution.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the amendment to the concurrent resolution be agreed to; that the resolution, as amended, be agreed to; that the amendment to the preamble be agreed to; that the preamble, as amended, be agreed to; that the amendment to the title be agreed to; that the title, as amended, be agreed to; that the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, all without intervening action or debate; and that any statements relating to the concurrent resolution be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment (No. 924) was agreed to, as follows:

On page 3, line 2, strike "an annual" and insert "a".

On page 3, line 6, after the semicolon insert "and".

On page 3, line 7, strike "an increase in funding" and insert "support".

On page 3, line 10, strike "; and" and all that follows and insert a period.

The concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 48), as amended, was agreed to.

The amendment (No. 925) was agreed to, as follows:

After the eighth clause of the preamble, insert the following:

Whereas a significant number of people with epilepsy may lack access to medical care for the treatment of the disease;

The preamble, as amended, was agreed to.

The resolution, as amended, with its preamble, as amended, reads as follows:

S. CON. RES. 48

Whereas epilepsy is a neurological condition that causes seizures and affects 2,300,000 people in the United States;

Whereas a seizure is a disturbance in the electrical activity of the brain, and 1 in every 12 Americans will suffer at least 1 seizure;

Whereas 180,000 new cases of seizures and epilepsy are diagnosed each year, and 3 percent of Americans will develop epilepsy by the time they are 75;

Whereas 41 percent of people who currently have epilepsy experience persistent seizures despite the treatment they are receiving;

Whereas a survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention demonstrated that the hardships imposed by epilepsy are comparable to those imposed by cancer, diabetes, and arthritis;

Whereas epilepsy in older children and adults remains a formidable barrier to leading a normal life by affecting education, employment, marriage, childbearing, and personal fulfillment;

Whereas uncontrollable seizures in a child can create multiple problems affecting the child's development, education, socialization, and daily life activities;

Whereas the social stigma surrounding epilepsy continues to fuel discrimination, and isolates people who suffer from seizure disorders from mainstream life;

Whereas a significant number of people with epilepsy may lack access to medical care for the treatment of the disease;

Whereas in spite of these formidable obstacles, people with epilepsy can live healthy and productive lives and make significant contributions to society;