

Afghani women no longer have to fear the terrible cruelty of their past because they now control their own future.

With our support, these women will continue to fan the flame of democracy and build a brighter future.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. EMERSON). Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote is objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken after 6:30 p.m. today.

FLEXIBILITY FOR DISPLACED WORKERS ACT

Mr. BOUSTANY. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3761) to provide special rules for disaster relief employment under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 for individuals displaced by Hurricane Katrina, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3761

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 "Flexibility for Displaced Workers Act".

SEC. 2. SPECIAL RULES FOR NATIONAL EMERGENCY GRANTS RELATED TO HURRICANE KATRINA.

(a) USE OF GRANTS FOR PROJECTS OUTSIDE DISASTER AREA.—Funds provided to States that submit applications for assistance described in section 173(a)(2) of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (29 U.S.C. 2918(a)(2)) to address the effects of Hurricane Katrina may be used to provide disaster relief employment and other assistance under section 173(d)(1) of such Act (29 U.S.C. 2918(d)(1)) on projects that provide assistance in areas outside of the disaster area (as such term is defined in section 173(a)(2) of such Act).

(b) EXPANDED ELIGIBILITY FOR DISASTER RELIEF EMPLOYMENT.—Funds provided to States that submit applications for assistance described under section 173(a)(2) of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (29 U.S.C. 2918(a)(2)) to address the effects of Hurricane Katrina may be used to provide disaster relief employment and other assistance under section 173(d)(1) of such Act, or public sector employment authorized under subsection (c) of this Act, to individuals affected by Hurricane Katrina, including those who have relocated from States in which a major disaster was declared under section 102 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5122) due to the effects of Hurricane Katrina, who were unemployed at the time of the disaster or who are without employment history, in addition to individuals who are eligible for such employment under section 173(d)(2) of Workforce Investment Act of 1998.

(c) AUTHORIZATION FOR GENERAL PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYMENT.—Funds provided to States that submit applications for assistance described in section 173(a)(2) of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to address

the effects of Hurricane Katrina may be used to provide to eligible individuals temporary employment by public sector entities for a period not to exceed 6 months in addition to disaster relief employment described in section 173(d)(1) of such Act.

(d) EXTENSION OF THE DURATION OF DISASTER RELIEF EMPLOYMENT.—The Secretary of Labor may extend the 6-month maximum duration of employment under this Act and under section 173(d) of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (29 U.S.C. 2918(d)) for not more than an additional 6 months due to extraordinary circumstances.

(e) PRIORITY FOR DISASTER RELIEF EMPLOYMENT FUNDS.—In awarding national emergency grants to States under section 173(a)(2) of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (29 U.S.C. 2918(a)(2)) to address the effects of Hurricane Katrina by providing disaster relief employment, the Secretary of Labor shall—

(1) first, give priority to States in which areas that have suffered major disasters (as defined in section 102 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5122)) are located; and

(2) second, give priority to the remaining States that have been most heavily impacted by the demand for services by workers affected by Hurricane Katrina.

(f) ELIGIBILITY FOR NEEDS-RELATED PAYMENTS.—Funds provided to States that submit applications for assistance described in section 173(a)(2) of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (29 U.S.C. 2918(a)(2)) to address the effects of Hurricane Katrina may be used to provide needs-related payments (described in section 134(e)(3) of such Act (29 U.S.C. 2864(e)(3))) to individuals described in subsection (b) who do not qualify for (or have ceased to qualify for) unemployment compensation, and who are not employed on a project described under section 173(d) of such Act, for the purpose of enabling such individuals to participate in activities described in paragraphs (2), (3), or (4) of section 134(d) of such Act.

(g) USE OF AVAILABLE FUNDS.—With the approval of the Secretary of Labor, any State may use funds that remain available for expenditure under any grants awarded to the State under section 173 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (29 U.S.C. 2918) or under this section, to provide any assistance authorized under such section 173 or this section, or personal protective equipment not otherwise available through public funds or private contributions, to assist workers affected by Hurricane Katrina, including workers who have relocated from areas for which an emergency or major disaster (as defined in section 102 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5122)) was declared, due to the effects of Hurricane Katrina.

(h) EXPANDED ELIGIBILITY FOR EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—In awarding national emergency grants under section 173(a)(1) of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (29 U.S.C. 2918(a)(1)), the Secretary may award such a grant to an entity to provide employment and training assistance available under section 173(a)(1) of such Act to workers affected by Hurricane Katrina, including workers who have relocated from areas for which an emergency or major disaster (as defined in section 102 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5122)) was declared, due to the effects of Hurricane Katrina.

(2) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—In this subsection, the term "entity" means a State, a local board (as defined in section 101 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (29 U.S.C. 2801)), or an entity described in section 166(c) of such Act (29 U.S.C. 2911(c)), that submits an

application for assistance described in section 173(a)(1) of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to address the effects of Hurricane Katrina.

SEC. 3. SENSE OF CONGRESS.

(a) MOBILE ONE-STOP CENTERS.—It is the sense of Congress that States that operate mobile one-stop centers, established as part of one-stop delivery systems authorized under subtitle B of title I of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (29 U.S.C. 2811 et seq.) should, where possible, make such centers available for use in the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina, and areas where large numbers of workers affected by Hurricane Katrina have been relocated.

(b) EXPANDED OPERATIONAL HOURS.—It is the sense of Congress that one-stop operators (as such term is defined in section 101 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (29 U.S.C. 2801)) should increase access for workers affected by Hurricane Katrina to the one-stop delivery systems authorized under subtitle B of title I of such Act, including through the implementation of expanded operational hours at one-stop centers and on-site services for individuals in temporary housing locations.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BOUSTANY) and the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BOUSTANY).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BOUSTANY. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 3761.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Louisiana?

There was no objection.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3761, the Flexibility for Displaced Workers Act, which I sponsored, to provide critical assistance for workers affected by Hurricane Katrina.

The bill creates new uses for the National Emergency Grant Disaster Relief Employment Assistance Program, which is part of the Workforce Investment Act, to address unique needs created by Hurricane Katrina damage.

The Department of Labor has already awarded \$191 million in disaster relief grants to the States affected by Hurricane Katrina, including \$62 million to my home State of Louisiana. These funds can already be used to hire displaced workers, long-term unemployed individuals, individuals laid off as a result of the disaster for jobs that will aid in the recovery of the gulf coast. These jobs include projects that provide humanitarian assistance for disaster victims and projects that aid in the repair, renovation, and reconstruction of facilities and lands located in the affected area.

The grants also may be used for training activities, which is especially critical for our residents who may need employment in new industries.

While this existing assistance is crucial for our region's recovery, the impact of Hurricane Katrina has created unique needs because so many workers from New Orleans have been relocated to other parts of the country, including over 100,000 alone in my district, and also who are unable to return immediately to their homes.

In addition, the sheer number of newly unemployed, as many as 400,000 workers in the region, as well as the high poverty level of many evacuees, requires the use of innovative solutions.

This bill would make important improvements to the Disaster Relief Assistance Program to address these unique needs.

First, it would allow States to provide disaster relief employment for services to victims to occur at locations outside of the declared disaster area. This is critical to help those who have been forced to temporarily relocate.

While the current assistance program focuses on those who lost their jobs as a result of a disaster, the bill allows funds to serve those who were not employed at the time of the disaster, including those with no work history. This critical improvement will allow the program to provide such individuals with work experience and training that will help them obtain long-term private sector employment in the future.

The bill would also permit the funds to be used to subsidize temporary public-sector employment in work other than restoration and recovery, as long as the projects benefit the local community. Given the substantial number of individuals who have lost their jobs in this disaster, temporary work will help families maintain income while they work to rebuild their lives.

The grants could also be used to provide need-related payments to workers who have exhausted or did not qualify for unemployment compensation benefits. Workers could receive such payments as long as they were engaged in job search, job preparation or training, thus ensuring that families will have some security as they prepare for new employment.

Finally, the bill would allow the Secretary of Labor to extend disaster relief employment assistance for an additional 6 months, beyond the 6 months permitted under current law. Given the extraordinary circumstances of Hurricane Katrina, such assistance may be needed for a longer period of time to help families recover.

This bill makes commonsense changes that would provide new flexibility and allow our States to respond immediately to the extreme needs created by this disaster. While additional job training and reemployment services may be needed, this is a critical first step. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I am glad to see the majority is acting quickly to provide assistance to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

I believe it is moments like this that we see the greatness in America, when Americans join together and help one another in a positive, can-do spirit. As we know, much help is needed, home, jobs, school, counseling, the list goes on and on. I am also glad to see the Department of Labor is on the frontlines of providing job assistance and arranging jobs for and estimated 400,000 unemployed.

The bill before us today takes the first step by permitting the Secretary of Labor to provide National Emergency grants outside the disaster area so that the individuals who have been evacuated throughout the country can receive assistance. It permits the Secretary to help individuals who may not have proper documents with them. It permits the Secretary to give grants to States to place individuals in public sector jobs. And it permits the Secretary to provide income support for those individuals if they exhaust their unemployment benefits and are in training programs. Changes made today would permit States to use unspent funds for protective safety equipment.

I laud the majority for recognizing and supporting the role of the public sector jobs and income support play in getting the unemployed into the workforce and into good jobs. However, I do want to note that there are a lot of unanswered questions about this bill and how it will be implemented, and I am hopeful that these questions will be answered in the coming weeks and months as additional legislation is needed and as we work out this legislation.

The first question is, in what types of jobs will individuals be placed? Will displaced individuals be placed in low-wage jobs? Under the Department's existing regulations, unemployed individuals can be employed in jobs earning up to a maximum of \$12,000 over 6 months. That means a maximum of \$8 an hour.

Will all individuals be placed at the maximum rate, or will some jobs be dead-end, minimum-wage jobs? Will the focus be on short-term cleanup jobs or jobs that can lead to a decent standard of living?

These are important questions to those individuals in the area who are trying to restore their lives and restore the ability to maintain the standard of living for their families.

The second question is, how much money will the Department of Labor seek for providing job assistance to the Katrina victims? The bill expands the Department's national emergency grant authority, but the DOL does not have any grant funds remaining. The fiscal year 2005 budget by the Depart-

ment of Labor appropriates \$157.8 million in national emergency grant funds, and DOL has already promised \$191 million to help Katrina victims.

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House 2006 appropriations would only award DOL \$212 million. Any significant effort to assist Katrina victims will require additional funding. DOL has not yet sent up or in any way indicated how much additional funding it will seek for these efforts, nor has the Department of Labor indicated how much, if any, of the already appropriated \$62 billion will be used for training or job creation.

Third, what health, safety, and labor protections will be afforded displaced workers assigned to this work? The administration has issued an executive order taking Davis-Bacon wage protections away from construction workers who will rebuild the gulf coast, suspended many affirmative action rules for reconstruction contracts, and suspended regulations limiting the number of hours truck drivers can drive while transporting fuel.

After September 11, many workers at and near the cleanup grounds of Ground Zero did not have proper health and safety protections. A change made this morning permits States to use unspent emergency funds on protective safety gear. And this is a good beginning, but the bill still does not make this a requirement. This is especially disturbing in light of the fact that the bill creates public employment in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, which do not have health and safety protections for their State and local workforces.

Fourth, will the funds be used to oppose extended unemployment benefits for long-term unemployed or an expanded disaster unemployment assistance program? The bill permits States to provide income-related payments to individuals who are unemployed and have exhausted unemployment benefits. It also expands the current authority from just individuals in training to those who are seeking work, but not in training.

In the past, the Bush administration proposed similar initiatives as a way of preventing Congress from providing extended unemployment benefits to the long-term unemployed. Will DOL grants be used as a vehicle to weaken the unemployment insurance system? Will this program be a substitute for an expanded disaster unemployment assistance program which would provide unemployment benefits to all workers unemployed as a result of the disaster? If this program is a substitute for extended unemployment insurance or expanded disaster unemployment assistance, and the administration seeks only limited WIA national emergency grant funding, far fewer workers would be helped. These requests must be answered soon.

Finally, what accountability requirements will apply? Many speakers, some

today, talked on the floor about their concern about the rate at which we are spending money and whether or not there is an accountability system for the expenditure of that money. These grants are made by the Secretary of Labor on a discretionary basis. There is no requirement for adequate coordination with the State's needs and activities. There must be standards by which Congress and the public can monitor the use and the effectiveness of these grants.

I urge the majority to answer these unanswered questions. And in closing, again I commend the majority for making this a very important first step to try to get these funds to help these individuals who need employment and need the income from that employment.

We need a comprehensive and thoughtful plan to address this crisis. This bill is that first step, and I look forward to the majority's consideration of a comprehensive, long-term effort to rebuild the affected southern coastal States.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BOEHNER), the distinguished chairman of the Committee on Education and the Workforce.

Mr. BOEHNER. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of this bill which would provide significant flexibility for workers displaced by Hurricane Katrina as they seek temporary employment and training.

Our prayers are with the residents of the gulf coast region, as well as all those working on the relief and recovery effort. All of our colleagues from the region, including two of my own on the Committee on Education and the Workforce, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JINDAL) and the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BOUSTANY), should know that our thoughts are with them and their communities as well.

I commend the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BOUSTANY) for drafting this important piece of legislation in short order. It will make a world of difference for thousands of workers in his region of the country.

Hurricane Katrina has disrupted the lives of an unprecedented number of gulf coast residents. Among the harshest realities of the hurricane is that tens of thousands of workers have been displaced not just from their homes, but from their jobs as well. Through both legislative initiatives here in Congress and administrative actions by the U.S. Department of Labor, the Federal Government is working to eliminate bureaucratic red tape so that workers and their families in the impacted areas may access immediate assistance, including temporary job placement and training.

One way we are doing this is through the national emergency grants which provide temporary disaster relief em-

ployment of up to 6 months for individuals who participate in projects that provide assistance for victims of that particular disaster.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Labor Department has awarded more than \$191 million in national emergency grants thus far to help provide more than 40,000 temporary jobs in the gulf coast region. The legislation before us today takes another important step. It adds even more flexibility to these grants. In short, it makes more jobs and training available to more displaced workers more quickly.

For example, for the countless displaced workers who have left the gulf coast region, this measure makes national emergency grant funds available for employment projects located outside the designated Hurricane Katrina disaster area. It also expands the national emergency grant eligibility to displaced individuals who currently are unemployed, as well as those with no prior work history, and finally, to provide workers with the peace of mind that this assistance will not disappear too soon, this legislation will empower the Secretary of Labor to extend the duration of the national emergency grant projects from 6 months to 12 months.

Madam Speaker, we have made substantial progress over the past 2 weeks, both in the recovery efforts in the gulf coast area and in our own legislative efforts here in Washington. This bill marks another step in the long process that this Congress will undertake over the coming weeks and months to address the needs of all of those impacted by this tragedy.

Once again, I want to thank the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BOUSTANY) for his work and urge my colleagues to join me in support of this bill.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. MARCHANT).

Mr. MARCHANT. Madam Speaker, Hurricane Katrina has disrupted the life of an unprecedented number of gulf coast residents. A well-known reality of the hurricane is the tens of thousands of workers who have been displaced not just from their homes but from their jobs.

In the continuing wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Flexibility for Displaced Workers Act is essential to increase the flexibility of certain funds to respond to the reemployment needs of displaced workers. I commend the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BOUSTANY) for bringing forward this important piece of legislation.

One way to eliminate government red tape so workers and their families in impacted areas may access immediate assistance, including temporary job placement, is through increased flexibility of national emergency grants. National emergency grants are award-

ed by the Department of Labor. They are used to provide temporary disaster relief employment, for up to 6 months, to individuals who participate in projects that provide clothing, food, shelter, and other humanitarian assistance for victims of a particular disaster. Funds may also be used to provide jobs for those participating in the demolition, the cleanup, repair, renovation, and reconstruction of facilities and lands within the disaster area. These national emergency grants may be used by public or private entities which provide employment and training activities.

So far, in response to Hurricane Katrina, NEGs have been awarded to provide more than 40,000 temporary jobs in the gulf coast region. The Flexibility for Displaced Workers Act will significantly expand the flexibility of the NEGs for gulf coast workers, with the goal of making more jobs and training available to individuals faster. This bill will specifically make NEG funds available for displaced workers' employment projects outside the designated Hurricane Katrina disaster area. This is vital in areas like my home State of Texas, which has become a home away from home for hundreds of thousands of Louisianans, and which has sheltered a large majority of the evacuees.

It will permit previously awarded NEG funds to be directed to workers impacted by Hurricane Katrina and allow displaced workers to obtain public-private sector jobs not related to the disaster. Also, if necessary, the bill empowers the Secretary of Labor to extend the duration of the NEG grants from 6 months to 12 months.

Lastly, the bill will authorize gulf coast residents with expired unemployment compensation, who are participating in reemployment activities, to be eligible for NEG payments.

I urge all of my colleagues to vote for this valuable piece of legislation to assist victims of this horrible disaster.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Madam Speaker, I yield back my time as well.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. EMERSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BOUSTANY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3761, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Madam Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.