

S. RES. 339

At the request of Mr. KERRY, the name of the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. LIEBERMAN) was added as a cosponsor of S. Res. 339, a resolution expressing the sense of the Senate on the situation in Burma.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mr. KOHL:

S. 2125. A bill to improve public awareness in the United States among older individuals and their families and caregivers about the impending Digital Television Transition through the establishment of a Federal interagency taskforce between the Federal Communications Commission, the Administration on Aging, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, and the outside advice of appropriate members of the aging network and industry groups; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce the Preparing America's Seniors for the Digital Television Transition Act of 2007. Seniors are particularly vulnerable to slipping through the cracks of the digital television transition. Not only are they more likely to rely on free over-the-air analog TV, but for many seniors television is their only link to the outside world. Yet the majority of the public remains unaware of the impending digital television transition. Millions of Americans may turn on their TVs on February 18, 2009, only to find themselves left in the dark without access to critical weather updates, emergency alerts, news or entertainment programming. In my home state of Wisconsin alone, over half a million households rely on free over-the-air TV.

As Chairman of the Special Committee on Aging, I recently held a hearing entitled, "Preparing for the Digital Television Transition: Will Seniors Be Left in the Dark?" Our hearing uncovered several concerns. First, seniors need targeted outreach about the transition and the related coupon program. Second, there is shockingly little coordination between the Government agencies overseeing the transition and the voluntary industry efforts to educate consumers. Third, nonprofit organizations require additional resources to sufficiently assist seniors with navigating the transition. Finally, the Government's plan to provide coupons to partially offset the cost of a converter box is fraught with confusion and vulnerable to fraud and abuse.

My legislation will address these problems by creating a formalized partnership between the Federal Communications Commission, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the Administration on Aging with specific reporting requirements. Together these entities will work with stakeholders such as

the broadcasters, the aging network, disability groups, rural Americans, and State, local and tribal governments to craft a coordinated outreach campaign. This legislation will also establish a grant program to ensure that nonprofits and state and local government agencies, like area agencies on aging, have access to assistance as they help seniors and other vulnerable populations navigate the transition and the coupon program.

This legislation will help safeguard seniors and their families by facilitating a number of common sense solutions. The bill requires commercial broadcasters to air public service announcements and develop consumer education plans to meet the needs of local viewers. It requires that coupon-eligible converter boxes are easily identifiable to mitigate the potential of consumers being swayed into purchasing expensive equipment they do not need. It also requires that manufacturers of converter boxes maintain a toll-free 1-800 number to assist individuals with installation. It sets specific reporting requirements for the FCC and NTIA to monitor the progress of their consumer awareness campaign and the coupon program. The legislation also modifies the coupon program to ensure that households relying solely on over-the-air television sets are prioritized and that residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities are eligible to participate.

I want to thank the following organizations for endorsing this legislation: AARP, the Association for Public Television Stations, the National Association of State Units on Aging, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, the Meals on Wheels Association of America, and the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs.

Senior citizens deserve to receive targeted outreach and complete information about the upcoming transition. They do not deserve to be the brunt of fraudulent schemes or to be left in the dark after February 17, 2009. I believe we must prepare America's seniors, and I hope my colleagues will join in my effort to do so.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the text of the bill was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

S. 2125

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 "Preparing America's Seniors for the Digital Television Transition Act of 2007".

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

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

Sec. 2. Findings.

Sec. 3. DTV educational partnership to benefit older individuals.

Sec. 4. Provisions relating to forfeitures.

Sec. 5. Digital television transition public education outreach and installation assistance grants program.

Sec. 6. Modification of the digital-to-analog converter box program.

Sec. 7. Reporting requirements.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds that—

(1) on February 17, 2009, television stations will cease broadcasting analog signals and traditional analog televisions will stop working unless they are connected to a digital-to-analog converter box, cable, or satellite;

(2) a study conducted by the National Association of Broadcasters revealed that over half of the respondents had "seen, read, or heard nothing" about the transition to digital television, and only 10 percent were able to guess that the transition would occur in 2009;

(3) according to a July 2007 study released by the Association of Public Television Stations, older individuals—

(A) over the age of 65 are more likely to be found in over-the-air households and are, therefore, a much more vulnerable group with respect to maintaining television service as the digital transition is completed;

(B) as a group, are less likely to have purchased a new television in the past 3 years, are less likely to have HDTV capabilities in their households, and are less likely to own a digital television;

(C) will not have the same exposure to digital television transition messages from electronic retailers as will younger members of the population; and

(D) will need special focus in efforts to educate the public with respect to the transition from analog to digital television;

(4) according to a Nielsen Media Research report, approximately 20,000,000 households rely exclusively on analog or free over-the-air broadcasts;

(5) of these 20,000,000 households, approximately 8,000,000 include at least 1 person over the age of 50, according to the Nielsen Media Research TV Household Estimates;

(6) according to the General Accountability Office, about 48 percent of over-the-air households have incomes under \$30,000;

(7) frail, homebound, rural, minority, disabled, limited English proficient, and low-income older individuals will need specific guidance and assistance in order to purchase and properly install a digital-to-analog converter box;

(8) without a targeted outreach program residents in nursing homes and assisted living facilities represent a segment of the population at risk for losing television service as a result of the digital transition;

(9) failure to seamlessly transition from analog to digital television will restrict or eliminate the access of older individuals to essential preparedness and safety information in the event of an emergency or disaster, as such individuals will be unable to receive national and local alerts aired over television;

(10) it is now 6 years after the communication failures of September 11, 2001, which spurred Federal Government adoption of a firm digital television transition date;

(11) unfortunately the Department of Commerce and the Federal Communications Commission have not adequately assured Congress that vulnerable households will be properly educated and prepared for such transition; and

(12) older individuals, their families, caregivers, and aging support networks will need targeted outreach to inform them of steps to take in order to ensure uninterrupted television service and to help mitigate potential

digital television transition scams that may target the elderly.

SEC. 3. DTV EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP TO BENEFIT OLDER INDIVIDUALS.

Part I of title III of the Communications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C. 301 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“SEC. 342. FEDERAL INTERAGENCY TASKFORCE TO EDUCATE OLDER INDIVIDUALS ON THE DTV TRANSITION OF 2009.

“(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—The Chairman and Commissioners of the Federal Communications Commission shall enter into a partnership with the Administration on Aging and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, to create a comprehensive public education campaign that provides information and assistance to older individuals, their families, caregivers, and aging support networks about measures that may be taken—

“(A) to ensure that such older individuals receive uninterrupted television service during the transition from analog to digital television that is to occur on February 17, 2009; and

“(B) to mitigate the likelihood of success of fraudulent schemes relating to such transition that may target such older individuals.

“(2) ACCESS TO RESOURCES.—In carrying out the educational campaign required under paragraph (1), the federal interagency taskforce established under such paragraph shall utilize existing resources and efforts of the Federal, State, and local governments, industry, and other appropriate entities.

“(3) TIMING.—The educational campaign required under paragraph (1) shall commence not later than January 1, 2008 or 60 days after the date of enactment of this section.

“(b) ADVISORY BOARD.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—The Commission, the Administration on Aging, and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration shall establish an advisory board to recommend to the federal interagency task force established under subsection (a) the type, manner, and content of the information to be used as part of the educational campaign required under such subsection.

“(2) MEMBERSHIP.—The advisory board established under paragraph (1) shall consist of 2 designees each from the Commission, the Administration on Aging, and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and no more than 30 additional members, which shall include—

“(A) representatives from the aging network, as such term is defined in section 102 of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3002), such as the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, Meals on Wheels Association of America, and National Association of State Units on Aging;

“(B) representatives from the entity or entities that the Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information selects or assigns to administer the digital-to-analog converter box program required under section 3005(c)(2)(A) of the Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-171; 120 Stat. 23);

“(C) representatives from the associations of industry and related stakeholder groups to include—

“(i) commercial and noncommercial broadcasters;

“(ii) manufacturers and retailers of consumer electronics equipment;

“(iii) cable operators; and

“(iv) satellite providers;

“(D) State, local, and tribal governments, such as the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors and the National Governors Association;

“(E) members from the general public who have expertise in consumer education and outreach;

“(F) older individuals;

“(G) representatives from—

“(i) minority groups, including Hispanic Americans;

“(ii) Americans whose primary language is not English;

“(iii) tribal groups;

“(iv) Americans with disabilities;

“(v) Americans living in rural communities;

“(vi) nursing homes and assisted living facilities; and

“(vii) consumer protection groups; and

“(H) representatives from low-income assistance program providers.

“(3) APPOINTMENT.—Not later than 30 days after the date of enactment of this section, the Commission, the Administration on Aging, and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration shall appoint each member of the advisory board.

“(4) CHAIRMAN.—The members of the Advisory Board shall elect 1 member to serve as Chairman within 30 days after the date of enactment of this section, in order to facilitate rapid creation and implementation of the Advisory Board.

“(c) DUTIES.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—The Federal interagency taskforce established under subsection (a) shall carry out a nationwide program with the assistance of the advisory board established under subsection (b) that includes, at a minimum—

“(A) an easily comprehensible explanation of the digital television transition, including—

“(i) the effective date of such transition; and

“(ii) who is affected by such transition;

“(B) the public safety and emergency preparedness concerns the transition will address, such as the Digital Emergency Alert System and reverse 911, and the potential public safety hazards to older individuals of not successfully transitioning to digital television;

“(C) instructions to determine whether a television will receive a digital signal and, if not, the options to ensure reception of a digital signal and the related costs;

“(D) information related to the digital-to-analog converter box coupon program, eligible versus noneligible converter boxes, certified retailers, and important associated deadlines; and

“(E) tips on how to avoid potential fraudulent schemes related to the digital television transition that may target older individuals.

“(2) ADDITIONAL DUTIES.—The Federal interagency taskforce established under subsection (a) shall—

“(A) examine ways to simplify the purchasing and installing of a digital-to-analog converter box for older individuals and take into consideration the unique needs of frail, homebound, minority, disabled, limited English proficient, rural, and low-income older individuals, as well as residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities;

“(B) consult with and seek assistance from the Commission's Homeland Security and Public Safety Bureau;

“(C) establish specific and realistic benchmarks for identifying the estimated reach of the public education campaign required under this section to older individuals, their families, caregivers, and aging support networks;

“(D) coordinate with stakeholder to properly implement the comprehensive education campaign;

“(E) provide, at no cost, to non profit entities such as entities within the aging net-

work consumer education materials and technical assistance regarding the transition from analog to digital television that is to occur on February 17, 2009; and

“(F) specifically analyze the impact of the transition from analog to digital television on the residents of non profit nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

“(d) REPORT.—

“(1) INITIAL REPORT.—Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this section, the Commission, the Assistant Secretary for Aging, and the Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information shall submit a report to Congress on—

“(A) the ability of the Federal interagency taskforce to meet the requirements and duties described under subsection (c); and

“(B) that summarizes each agency's efforts to increase consumer education and awareness about the transition from analog to digital television among older individuals, as well as that agency's efforts to coordinate with the other Federal and non-Federal members of the taskforce and the advisory board.

“(2) CONTENT OF REPORT.—The report required under paragraph (1) shall, at a minimum, also include the following:

“(A) How the Federal interagency taskforce will meet the specific benchmarks established under subsection (c)(2)(C) to ensure that older individuals who rely on over-the-air broadcasting are not left without television service after February 17, 2009.

“(B) How the Federal interagency taskforce will address the unique needs of frail, homebound, disabled, minority, rural, limited English proficiency and low-income older individuals, as well as residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities, all of whom will need specific guidance and assistance in order to purchase and install a digital-to-analog converter box through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's Digital-to-Analog Converter Box Coupon Program without any undue burden.

“(C) How the Federal interagency taskforce will provide guidance and technical assistance to the families, caregivers, and aging support networks of these vulnerable older individuals.

“(D) How the Federal interagency taskforce will mitigate potential scams that may target the elderly throughout the course of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's Digital-to-Analog Converter Box Coupon Program.

“(E) How the Federal interagency taskforce will coordinate between State, local, and tribal governments and the head of each Federal agency overseeing a low-income assistance program, such as the Supplemental Security Income Program, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, the Lifeline Assistance, and Link Up America programs, to ensure that such programs disseminate information about the transition from analog to digital television to their program recipients.

“(F) What resources will be necessary to provide outreach and assistance at the community level and how the taskforce will prioritize such resources.

“(3) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than 3 months before February 17, 2009, the Commission, Assistant Secretary for Aging, and the Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information shall submit a report to Congress that describes—

“(A) the level of outreach and success achieved by the education campaign required under subsection (a); and

“(B) the necessary remaining steps that must be taken in order to ensure that older

individuals who rely on over-the-air broadcasting are not left without television service after February 17, 2009.

“(e) DEFINITION OF OLDER INDIVIDUAL.—For purposes of this section, the term ‘older individual’ means an individual who is 50 years of age or older.

“(f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated to the Federal interagency taskforce established under subsection (a) such sums as are necessary to carry out the provisions of this section in addition to—

“(1) amounts transferred pursuant to section 344(c)(5) of this Act; and

“(2) amounts transferred pursuant to section 503(b)(7) of this Act.

“(g) Return of unexpended funds.—Upon termination of the federal interagency taskforce, any unexpended funds shall be paid back to the original source of such funds, including to the general accounts of the Federal Communications Commission held at the Treasury for any amounts deposited in the fund pursuant to paragraphs (1) or (2) of subsection (f).

“SEC. 343. ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS RELATED TO THE DTV TRANSITION.

“(a) REQUIREMENTS ON BROADCASTERS.—

“(1) PSAs.—Beginning on the date of enactment of this section and ending on March 31, 2009, the Commission shall require each full power commercial television broadcast licensee or permittee to broadcast during each day between the hours of 6 a.m. and 11 p.m., public service announcements notifying the public, in particular older individuals and their families, caregivers, and aging support networks, of the transition from analog to digital television that is to occur after February 17, 2009.

“(2) TIME REQUIREMENTS AND TOTAL RUNNING TIME.—Based on the overall concentration of over-the-air households by State and locality, broadcasters shall air a minimum of 60 seconds of public service announcements per day at variable time slots throughout the week, with half airing between 5 p.m. and 11 p.m.

“(3) REQUIRED CONTENT.—Any public service announcement broadcast after January 1, 2008, shall include—

“(A) information concerning the digital-to-analog converter box program required under section 3005 of the Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-171; 120 Stat. 23);

“(B) such additional consumer information as the Federal interagency taskforce may recommend based on input from the advisory committee established under section 342; and

“(C) such additional information as local broadcasters may determine necessary to appropriately educate their viewers about the transition from analog to digital television.

“(4) CONSUMER EDUCATION PLANS.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than January 1, 2008, or 30 days after the date of enactment of this Act if this Act is enacted after such date, each full power commercial television broadcast licensee or permittee shall have in place a comprehensive consumer education plan to inform local viewers about the impending transition from analog to digital television based on the overall concentration of over-the-air households by State and locality.

“(B) PROGRAMS.—Programs carried out under the plan required by subparagraph (A) may include educational programming, donut spots, crawls, and speaking events.

“(5) PERIODIC REPORTS TO THE FCC.—

“(A) COMMERCIAL BROADCASTERS.—Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this section, and every 90 days thereafter until March 31, 2009, each commercial television broadcast licensee or permittee shall submit a report to the Commission de-

tailoring their efforts to comply with the requirements of this subsection.

“(B) NON COMMERCIAL BROADCASTERS.—Not later than June 18, 2008 the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, as defined in section 397(2) shall submit a report to the Commission on behalf of television public broadcast stations—

“(i) detailing the activities of the public television industry in educating the public about the digital transition; and

“(ii) including information relating to—

“(I) airtime allocated towards consumer education; and

“(II) other outreach efforts.

“(C) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY.—The Commission shall make any report required under subparagraph (A) or (B) available to the public on the Internet, without fee or other access charge, in a searchable and downloadable manner.

“(b) REQUIREMENTS ON MVPD.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than January 1, 2008, or 30 days after the date of enactment of this Act if this Act is enacted after such date, each multichannel video programming distributor (as defined in section 602) shall develop a plan to notify subscribers about the transition from analog to digital television that is to occur on February 17, 2009.

“(2) REQUIREMENTS OF PLAN.—The plan required under paragraph (1) shall explain—

“(A) what the digital transition is;

“(B) how the transition will affect subscribers of the multichannel video programming distributor; and

“(C) such additional information as multichannel video programming distributors may determine necessary to appropriately educate their viewers about the transition from analog to digital television.

“(c) REQUIREMENTS FOR ELECTRONICS RETAILERS AND DISTRIBUTORS OF CONVERTER BOXES.—

“(1) REQUIREMENTS FOR MANUFACTURERS OF CONVERTER BOXES.—The manufacturer of any digital-to-analog converter box that is eligible to be obtained using a redeemable Federal coupon and that is manufactured in the United States or shipped in interstate commerce shall—

“(A) place an appropriate label on the retail packaging of the converter box; and

“(B) maintain a toll-free 1-800 number that customers can call to obtain installation assistance.

“(2) LABEL REQUIREMENT.—For purposes of paragraph (1), an appropriate label is a label that meets the following requirements:

“(A) The label is displayed—

“(i) in a clear and conspicuous manner; and

“(ii) in large and visible font.

“(B) The label informs the consumer that the converter box is fully compliant with all Federal standards relating to the eligibility of that converter box to be used with the Federal coupon program described under section 3005 of the Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-171; 120 Stat. 23). The information required to be included on a label under this subparagraph may be conveyed by affixing the following phrase to the label: ‘NTIA Coupon-Eligible’.

“(3) REQUIREMENTS FOR IN-STORE RETAILERS.—Each in-store retailer shall place adjacent to digital-to-analog converter boxes that such retailer displays for sale or rent, a separate sign that identifies which converter boxes are ‘NTIA Coupon-Eligible’.

“(4) REQUIREMENTS FOR OTHER RETAILERS.—Any retailer of digital-to-analog converter boxes that sells such converter boxes via direct mail, catalog, or electronic means, shall ensure that all advertisements or descriptions of such converter box identifies whether or not such converter box is ‘NTIA Coupon-Eligible’.

“(5) PENALTIES.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—The forfeiture penalties established by section 503(b) shall apply to a violation of any requirement under this section.

“(B) TRANSFER TO FEDERAL INTERAGENCY TASKFORCE.—The amount of any forfeiture penalty determined, imposed, or otherwise assessed by the Commission for violations of this section shall be transferred to the accounts of the Federal interagency taskforce established pursuant to section 342.

“(d) REPORT OF CERTIFIED RETAILERS.—The National Telecommunications and Information Administration shall require—

“(1) each retailer certified by the Administration to participate in the digital-to-analog converter box coupon program under section 3005 of the Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-171; 120 Stat. 23); and

“(2) not later than 30 days after certification, each such retailer to report to the Administration on their employee training or consumer information plans regarding the transition from analog to digital television that is to occur on February 17, 2009.

“(e) REPORT OF OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this section, the head of each Federal agency that oversees a low-income assistance program, as determined by the Federal interagency taskforce, and including the Supplemental Security Income Program, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, shall report to the Commission on how such agency or program will work with the Federal interagency taskforce established under section 342 to ensure coordinated efforts are made to disseminate consumer education materials developed under such section on the transition from analog to digital television to eligible program participants.

“(2) REQUIRED CONTENT.—The report required under paragraph (1) should affirm each Federal agency’s commitment to assist with the nationwide transition from analog to digital television.

“(f) DEFINITION OF OLDER INDIVIDUAL.—For purposes of this section, the term ‘older individual’ means an individual who is 50 years of age or older.”

SEC. 4. PROVISIONS RELATING TO FORFEITURES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 503(b) of the Communications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C. 503(b)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(7) Beginning on the date of enactment of this paragraph and ending on February 17, 2009, the amount of any forfeiture penalty determined, imposed, or otherwise assessed by the Commission, and payable into the Treasury of the United States, for violations of the point of sale disclosure requirements for analog-only television equipment as described in the Second Periodic Review of the Commission’s Rules and Policies Affecting the Conversion To Digital Television (MB Docket No. 03-15; RM-9832; adopted April 25, 2007) during such period shall be transferred to the accounts of the Federal interagency taskforce established pursuant to section 342.”

(b) FUTURE RULEMAKINGS RELATED TO DIGITAL TELEVISION TRANSITION.—The Federal Communications Commission shall in any future rulemaking related to the nationwide transition from analog to digital television that is to occur on February 17, 2009, ensure that any proposed forfeiture penalty for violation of such rule is transferred to the accounts of the Federal interagency taskforce established pursuant to section 343 of the Communications Act of 1934 (as added under section 3 of this Act).

SEC. 5. DIGITAL TELEVISION TRANSITION PUBLIC EDUCATION OUTREACH AND INSTALLATION ASSISTANCE GRANTS PROGRAM.

(a) PROGRAM AUTHORIZED.—

(1) GRANTS.—The Federal Communications Commission shall award grants, on a competitive basis, to eligible entities to—

(A) provide public education outreach about the digital television transition taking place on February 17, 2009 to vulnerable populations particularly at risk for losing television reception as a result of the digital television transition; and

(B) provide assistance with the purchasing and installation of digital-to-analog converter boxes to vulnerable populations particularly at risk for losing television reception as a result of the digital television transition.

(2) GRANT PERIODS.—The Commission shall award grants under this section for a period of up to 3 years.

(b) APPLICATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—To be eligible to receive a grant under this section, an entity shall submit an application to the Commission at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as the Commission may require.

(2) ACTION.—The Commission shall take such action necessary to award grants not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this section.

(c) PREFERENCE.—The Commission shall give priority in awarding grants under this section to an entity that—

(1) will provide public education outreach and installation assistance to older individuals and other vulnerable populations (with particular attention to individuals with disabilities, individuals with limited English proficiency, individuals residing in rural areas, minorities, and low-income communities);

(2) has demonstrated experience in providing outreach and assistance to older individuals and other vulnerable populations; and

(3) can demonstrate the ability and commitment to identifying, after February 17, 2009, the date of the transition, those households that may have lost television reception and can aid in reinstating television reception for such households.

(d) PARTNERSHIPS.—In awarding grants under this section, the Commission may encourage applicants to enter into a partnership with 1 or more private entities who may assist with training or providing donated technologies including digital televisions or digital-to-analog converter boxes.

(e) USE OF FUNDS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—An eligible entity shall use funds made available under a grant awarded under this section to—

(A) carry out a project described in subsection (a); and

(B) evaluate the project in accordance with subsection (h).

(2) RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER FUNDING SOURCES.—Funds made available under this section shall supplement, and not supplant, any Federal, State, and local funds expended by a State or unit of general purpose local government to provide the services described in subsection (a).

(f) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—An entity eligible to receive a grant under subsection (a) shall be—

(1) a nonprofit organization, an area agency on aging or other local government agency, a State unit on aging or other State government agency, and a tribal government or organization (including a consortium thereof) that—

(A) has the ability to conduct the coordination, promotion, and facilitation described in subsection (a); and

(B) has experience providing outreach and assistance targeted at older individuals and other vulnerable populations (with particular attention to individuals with disabilities, individuals with limited English proficiency, individuals residing in rural areas, minorities, and low-income communities); or

(2) any other entity not described in paragraph (1) that—

(A) the Commission determines to be appropriate to carry out a project under subsection (a); and

(B) demonstrates experience conducting public education outreach campaigns and providing assistance targeted at older individuals and other vulnerable populations.

(g) COMPETITIVE GRANTS FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The Commission may make a grant, on a competitive basis, to an eligible nonprofit organization, to enable the organization to—

(1) provide technical assistance to recipients of grants under subsection (a); and

(2) carry out other duties, as determined by the Commission.

(h) LOCAL EVALUATION AND REPORT.—

(1) EVALUATION.—Each entity or consortium thereof receiving a grant under subsection (a) to carry out a project described in subsection (a) shall evaluate the outreach and assistance carried out under the project to determine—

(A) the effectiveness of the outreach and assistance involved; and

(B) the impact of such outreach and assistance on the community being served and the organization providing the outreach and assistance.

(2) REPORT.—The organization shall submit a report to the Commission containing the evaluation not later than 3 months after the expiration of the period for which the grant is in effect.

(i) ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than 60 days after the close of fiscal year 2008 and fiscal year 2009, the Commission shall prepare and submit a full and complete report to Congress on the activities carried out under this section which shall—

(1) summarize the distribution of funds authorized for grants under this section and the expenditure of such funds;

(2) summarize the scope and content of the public education outreach campaigns and assistance carried out under this section; and

(3) make recommendations for legislative or administrative action, as the Commission determines appropriate.

(j) FINAL REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than 60 days after the close of fiscal year 2010 the Commission shall prepare and submit a full and complete report to Congress on the activities carried out under this section which shall—

(1) summarize the distribution of funds authorized for grants under this section and the expenditure of such funds;

(2) summarize the scope and content of the public education outreach campaigns and assistance carried out under this section;

(3) summarize findings from the reports containing the evaluations from subsection (h)(2); and

(4) make recommendations for legislative or administrative action, as the Commission determines appropriate.

(k) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as necessary to carry out this section for fiscal years 2008, 2009, and 2010.

SEC. 6. MODIFICATION OF THE DIGITAL-TO-ANALOG CONVERTER BOX PROGRAM.

Section 3005(c) of the Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-171; 120 Stat. 23) is amended—

(1) by amending paragraph (1) to read as follows:

“(1) APPLICATIONS.—

“(A) PROCUREMENT OF COUPONS.—

“(i) SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION.—Not later than December 31, 2007, the Assistant Secretary shall by regulation develop and produce a standard application that each household shall submit to the Assistant Secretary between January 1, 2008, and March 31, 2009, inclusive, in order to obtain a coupon that can be applied toward the purchase of a digital-to-analog converter box.

“(ii) REQUIREMENT FOR APPLICATIONS.—The application developed under clause (i) shall—

“(I) be uniform in style and form regardless of the medium through which it is available, including for printed applications, application available by e-mail, or available on the website of the Assistant Secretary or of the Federal Communications Commission;

“(II) require each household to submit—

“(aa) the name, address, phone number, and e-mail address of the applicant;

“(bb) the number of coupons that the household seeks to obtain;

“(cc) a certification of whether the household receives—

“(AA) only over-the-air broadcast programming; or

“(BB) cable or satellite service and over-the-air broadcast programming;

“(III) inform households about—

“(aa) the transition from analog to digital television, including information on the—

“(AA) digital-to-analog converter box coupon program; and

“(BB) important associated deadlines; and

“(bb) the various options and alternatives that households may utilize to ensure reception of a digital signal, including that if the household—

“(AA) has an analog television set and receives only over-the-air broadcast programming that a digital-to-analog converter box is required;

“(BB) has a digital television set and receives only over-the-air broadcast programming that a digital-to-analog converter box is not required; and

“(CC) has either an analog or digital television set and receives cable or satellite service that a digital-to-analog converter box is not required.

“(iii) SHIPPING OF COUPONS.—The Assistant Secretary shall ensure that each household that submits an application for a coupon under this subparagraph receives such coupon via the United States Postal Service.

“(iv) DURATION OF COUPONS.—All coupons shall expire 4 months after issuance.

“(v) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—For purposes of this paragraph, the term ‘household’ shall include residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities.”;

(2) by amending paragraph (2) to read as follows:

“(2) DISTRIBUTION OF COUPONS.—

“(A) PRIORITY CONSIDERATION FOR OTA HOUSEHOLDS.—

“(i) IN GENERAL.—The Assistant Secretary shall for the period beginning January 1, 2008, and ending March 31, 2009, distribute coupons only to households that have certified on their coupon application submitted under paragraph (1) that such household receives only over-the-air broadcast programming.

“(ii) CAP ON COUPONS.—The total maximum value of all the coupons distributed under clause (i) shall not exceed \$990,000,000.

“(B) OTHER HOUSEHOLDS.—

“(i) IN GENERAL.—The Assistant Secretary shall for the period beginning July 1, 2008, or the period beginning on the date that the total maximum value established under subparagraph (A)(ii) is reached, whichever is earlier, and ending March 31, 2009, distribute

coupons to any household that has submitted a coupon application under paragraph (1).

“(ii) CAP ON COUPONS.—The total maximum value of all the coupons distributed under clause (i) shall not exceed \$510,000,000.

“(C) LIMITATION.—The Assistant Secretary shall ensure that—

“(i) no household that receives only over-the-air broadcast programming receives more than 2 coupons; and

“(ii) no other household receives more than 1 coupon.

“(D) REQUIRED DISCLOSURES.—The Assistant Secretary shall include along with any coupon distributed pursuant to this subsection a list of—

“(i) certified retailers of digital-to-analog converter boxes by zip code and area code, including each retailer's phone number and address;

“(ii) at least 2 national certified retailers or mail order companies and the 1-800 numbers of such retailers or companies so that households may order digital-to-analog converter boxes over the phone; and

“(iii) digital-to-analog converter boxes that are eligible to be purchased with a coupon.

“(E) PROHIBITION ON RESALE OF COUPONS.—No person, including any retailer or manufacturer, may sell or offer to sell a coupon distributed under this section for any monetary amount.”

SEC. 7. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.

(a) REPORT BY THE NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION.—Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, and every 90 days thereafter until March 31, 2009, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration shall report to Congress on the following:

(1) CONSUMER EDUCATION EFFORTS.—The effectiveness of its outreach efforts to inform the public about the transition from analog to digital television, including a summary of any materials distributed, surveys and focus groups conducted, and any other efforts targeted at high-risk market segments, such as low-income individuals, the elderly, or individuals located in rural communities. The ongoing efforts and coordination of the Administration with industry groups (such as broadcasters, retailers, and manufacturers), other Federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community-based organizations.

(2) CONVERTER BOX MANUFACTURING.—With respect to the digital-to-analog converter box program required under section 3005 of the Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-171; 120 Stat. 23):

(A) The participation level of manufacturers in such program.

(B) The number of digital-to-analog converter box models manufactured pursuant to such program.

(C) The number of digital-to-analog converter boxes shipped in the prior 90 days.

(D) The performance testing results of each digital-to-analog converter box model manufactured pursuant to such program.

(E) The number of digital-to-analog converter boxes in the marketplace that are—

(i) compliant with the requirements under such program; and

(ii) noncompliant with the requirements under such program.

(3) CONVERTER BOX RETAILING.—With respect to retailers:

(A) The compliance rates of retailers with the labeling requirements under section 344(c) of the Communications Act of 1934.

(B) The supply levels of retailers of digital-to-analog converter boxes, such levels shall be categorized on a—

(i) State by State level; and

(ii) regional level.

(C) The price charged by such retailers for digital-to-analog converter boxes, and the sales efforts of such retailers with respect to such boxes.

(D) The efforts of retailers on training and educating their sales force regarding the transition from analog to digital television.

(4) COUPON ADMINISTRATION.—With respect to the digital-to-analog converter box coupon program established under section 3005(c) of the Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-171; 120 Stat. 23):

(A) The number of coupons issued, categorized nationally, by State, and by 5 digit zip code.

(B) The number of coupons redeemed by households, categorized nationally, by State, and by 5 digit zip code.

(C) The efforts of the Administration and the Assistant Secretary of Communications and Information to inform retailers about the coupon program and the process needed to redeem coupons, categorized by 5 digit zip code.

(D) The number of households that have an analog television set and receive only over-the-air broadcast programming and that have submitted an application for a coupon, categorized nationally, by State, and by 5 digit zip code.

(E) The number of households that have a digital television set and receive only over-the-air broadcast programming and that have submitted an application for a coupon, categorized nationally, by State, and by 5 digit zip code.

(F) The number of households that have either an analog or digital television set and receive cable or satellite service and that have submitted an application for a coupon, categorized nationally, by State, and by 5 digit zip code.

(G) The efforts of the Administration to utilize the household demographics collected under subparagraphs (D), (E), and (F) to determine an appropriate strategy for the distribution of print applications for coupons, such as distribution at post-offices, departments of motor vehicles, and community centers.

(H) The average time of redemption of a coupon, measured from the date of issuance of the coupon to a household to the date of redemption of that coupon at a certified retailer of digital-to-analog converter boxes.

(I) The top 10 retailers, by volume, where coupons are redeemed.

(J) The results of quarterly surveys conducted between January 1, 2008 and March 31, 2009, on consumer satisfaction with the coupon program, including results related to ease of redemption, availability of digital-to-analog converter box, and the certified retailer's knowledge of the impending transition from analog to digital television.

(b) REPORT BY THE FCC.—Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, and every 90 days thereafter until March 31, 2009, the Federal Communications Commission shall report to Congress on—

(1) the effectiveness of its outreach efforts to inform the public about the transition from analog to digital television, including a summary of any materials distributed, surveys and focus groups conducted, and any other efforts targeted at high-risk market segments, such as low-income individuals, the elderly, or individuals located in rural communities;

(2) the ongoing efforts and coordination of the Commission with industry groups (such as broadcasters, retailers, and manufacturers), other Federal agencies, States, nonprofit organizations, and community-based organizations; and

(3) the ongoing efforts of the Commission to—

(A) prevent fraud and abuse with respect to the transition from analog to digital television;

(B) educate high-risk market segments, such as low-income individuals, the elderly, or individuals located in rural communities, on how to—

(i) avoid potential fraudulent schemes related to the digital television transition; and

(ii) identify occurrences of fraud;

(C) prosecute those individuals accused of participating in fraudulent schemes related to the digital television transition; and

(D) monitor the compliance of retailers and manufacturers with the labeling requirements under section 344(c) of the Communications Act of 1934.

(c) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the Federal Communications Commission such sums as are necessary to carry out the provisions of this section.

By Mr. CRAPO (for himself, Mr.

JOHNSON, and Mr. GREGG):

S. 2126. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow individuals to defer recognition of reinvested capital gains distributions from regulated investment companies; to the Committee on Finance.

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce, along with my colleagues TIM JOHNSON of South Dakota and JUDD GREGG of New Hampshire, an important bill that will allow Americans to save more for the long term and will better prepare them for a secure retirement. The Generating Retirement Ownership Through Long-Term Holding, GROWTH Act, had substantial bipartisan support in the House last Congress, and has been introduced in a bipartisan manner again in the House this Congress. Mr. JOHNSON and I are proud to introduce in the Senate this bipartisan legislation that provides Americans a better tool to grow their long-term retirement savings.

The GROWTH Act would allow investors in mutual funds to keep more retirement savings invested longer and growing longer by deferring taxation of automatically reinvested capital gains until fund shares are sold, rather than allowing those long-term gains, which generate no current income or cash in hand, to be taxed every year.

To understand how beneficial this bill would be, it is important to understand the role of mutual funds in long-term retirement savings. Among households owning mutual funds, 92 percent are investing for retirement, with more than 70 percent saying their primary purpose in investing in funds is to prepare for retirement. Many of today's workers do not yet have in place the retirement savings supplement to Social Security that will prepare them for the future. In fact, almost half of American workers, nearly 75 million of 155 million workers—are not offered any form of pension or retirement savings plan at work.

Meanwhile, the number of years spent in retirement is growing and the

costs individuals can expect to bear in retirement are growing, too. The Employee Benefit Research Institute estimates that an individual retiring at age 65 in 2016 will need more than \$300,000 just to cover health coverage premiums and expenses. Individual savings efforts also face significant obstacles. Those not covered by an employer's retirement plan, for example, can set aside a deductible IRA contribution of only \$4,000 this year, \$5,000 if they are age 50 or older.

Mutual funds are a hugely important part of American workers' preparation for retirement, both through their employers' retirement plans and on their own. Mutual funds now make up about half of the \$4.1 trillion held by American workers through 401(k) plans and other similar job-based savings programs. About 38 million American investors hold mutual funds through their defined contribution plans. More than 31 million American investors are saving through taxable mutual fund accounts, either as supplements to their employers' plans or because they do not have such plans.

The GROWTH Act is also a good idea because it remedies an unfairness in the tax code that can make saving difficult for many Americans. Mutual fund investors who are struggling to save for retirement should not have to pay taxes on "profits" they have not realized. If they don't have money in hand, it makes no sense for them to have to pay taxes. The GROWTH Act would defer taxes until the mutual fund shares are sold and the investor has actual funds to pay the taxes.

The GROWTH Act would be a valuable contributor to retirement savings efforts. Mutual fund savers who automatically reinvest are doing what policymakers want to see. They are holding for the long term, contributing to national savings, and building up their own retirement nest egg. These Americans should be encouraged to save, not discouraged through a tax on automatic reinvestments. The GROWTH Act is a step that will show immediate results, a step that will help tens of millions of American savers and "should-be savers" over the course of their working lives, and a step that with time can make a real difference in the retirement readiness of American families.

I urge my colleagues to join Mr. JOHNSON and me in supporting the GROWTH Act. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the text of the bill was ordered to be placed in the RECORD, as follows:

S. 2126

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 "Generate Retirement Ownership Through Long-Term Holding Act of 2007".

SEC. 2. DEFERRAL OF REINVESTED CAPITAL GAIN DIVIDENDS OF REGULATED INVESTMENT COMPANIES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Part III of subchapter O of chapter 1 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (relating to common nontaxable exchanges) is amended by inserting after section 1045 the following new section:

"SEC. 1046. REINVESTED CAPITAL GAIN DIVIDENDS OF REGULATED INVESTMENT COMPANIES.

"(a) NONRECOGNITION OF GAIN.—In the case of an individual, no gain shall be recognized on the receipt of a capital gain dividend distributed by a regulated investment company to which part I of subchapter M applies if such capital gain dividend is automatically reinvested in additional shares of the company pursuant to a dividend reinvestment plan.

"(b) DEFINITIONS AND SPECIAL RULES.—For purposes of this section—

"(1) CAPITAL GAIN DIVIDEND.—The term 'capital gain dividend' has the meaning given to such term by section 852(b)(3)(C).

"(2) RECOGNITION OF DEFERRED CAPITAL GAIN DIVIDENDS.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—Gain treated as unrecognized in accordance with subsection (a) shall be recognized in accordance with subparagraph (B)—

"(i) upon a subsequent sale or redemption by such individual of stock in the distributing company, or

"(ii) upon the death of the individual.

"(B) GAIN RECOGNITION.—

"(1) IN GENERAL.—Upon a sale or redemption described in subparagraph (A), the taxpayer shall recognize that portion of total gain treated as unrecognized in accordance with subsection (a) (and not previously recognized pursuant to this subparagraph) that is equivalent to the portion of the taxpayer's total shares in the distributing company that are sold or redeemed.

"(ii) DEATH OF INDIVIDUAL.—Except as provided by regulations, any portion of such total gain not recognized under clause (i) prior to the taxpayer's death shall be recognized upon the death of the taxpayer and included in the taxpayer's gross income for the taxable year ending on the date of the taxpayer's death.

"(3) HOLDING PERIOD.—

"(A) GENERAL RULE.—The taxpayer's holding period in shares acquired through reinvestment of a capital gain dividend to which subsection (a) applies shall be determined by treating the shareholder as having held such shares for one year and a day as of the date such shares are acquired.

"(B) SPECIAL RULE FOR DISTRIBUTIONS OF QUALIFIED 5-YEAR GAINS.—In the case of a distribution of a capital gain dividend (or portion thereof) in a taxable year beginning after December 31, 2010, and properly treated as qualified 5-year gain (within the meaning of section 1(h), as in effect after such date), subparagraph (A) shall apply by substituting '5 years and a day' for 'one year and a day'.

"(c) SECTION NOT TO APPLY TO CERTAIN TAXPAYERS.—This section shall not apply to—

"(1) an individual with respect to whom a deduction under section 151 is allowable to another taxpayer for a taxable year beginning in the calendar year in which such individual's taxable year begins, or

"(2) an estate or trust.

"(d) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary shall prescribe such regulations as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of this section."

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

(1) Section 852(b)(3)(B) of such Code is amended by adding at the end the following new sentence: "For rules regarding non-recognition of gain with respect to rein-

vested capital gain dividends received by individuals, see section 1046."

(2) The table of sections for part III of subchapter O of chapter 1 of such Code is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 1045 the following new item:

"Sec. 1046. Reinvested capital gain dividends of regulated investment companies."

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall apply to taxable years ending after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I am pleased today to once again join my colleague MIKE CRAPO of Idaho in introducing a bill with growing bipartisan support, a bill that promises to be an important part of the many steps we will need to take to help Americans save more effectively for the many long-term needs they must increasingly plan for on their own—health, education and retirement.

Currently, mutual fund investors who are saving outside a 401(k) plan or an IRA find themselves taxed every year as a result of the buying and selling that is part of fund diversification, even if they have arranged to automatically reinvest any capital gains, even though they sold no shares, in fact, even if the value of their investments have fallen.

As a result, each year during tax season, we hear from investors who have worked hard and played by the rules. These are Americans who are committed to a plan of saving for the long term, who nevertheless find themselves hit with a tax bill although they are simply staying the course. Mr. CRAPO and I don't believe that these people should be discouraged from long-term investing and taxed prematurely when a better-timed tax—one that comes in when investments are sold—would better facilitate long-term investing, retirement readiness, and perhaps even tax compliance through simpler calculations and fewer annual adjustments.

Congress has spent a great deal of effort trying to strengthen and promote pension promises, through both defined benefit and defined contribution plans. Yet many of today's workers do not yet have in place the retirement savings to supplement Social Security benefits. In fact, almost half of American workers—nearly 75 million of 155 million workers—are not offered any form of pension or retirement savings plan at work. These are the people who need GROWTH the most.

And the challenge they face for the future is growing. The number of years Americans and their families can expect to spend in retirement is growing, as are the costs individuals can expect to bear in retirement. Individual savings opportunities for those who spend some or all of their working years without participating or vesting in an employer's retirement plan are modest. Those workers covered by an employer's retirement plan, for example, can set aside a deductible IRA contribution of only \$4,000 this year, \$5,000 if they

are age 50 or older. Many will want and need to save more every year if they are to be ready for retirement. These are the people who need GROWTH.

How many are there? More than 31 million Americans are saving through taxable mutual fund accounts, either as supplements to their employers' plans or because they do not have such plans. The GROWTH Act would provide sensible tax treatment that would defer, not avoid, taxation. In the process, it would better enable retirement savers in what they are trying to do, plan for an uncertain road ahead.

A bigger tax debate is ahead, along with a bigger debate about the future of Social Security and the way to modernize and improve private sector retirement savings tools that must supplement it. The GROWTH Act is one of those practical building blocks that deserves to be part of future debates on tax and retirement policy. Its impact illustrates just how many millions of American households are out there right now, households of modest incomes, saving on their own, through mutual fund investments, making up that growing middle class, a middle class that is facing a lot of squeezes, a lot of growing demands on their savings, but a group that is trying to save nevertheless. About three in five fund investors have household incomes between \$25,000 and \$100,000. Not high-flyers looking to be creative, but working people who deserve to find a few less obstacles in their way.

I urge my colleagues to join Mr. CRAPO and me in supporting the GROWTH Act and refocusing their attention to just who these savers are and what kind of sensible tax policy they need.

Mrs. MURRAY:

S. 2127. A bill to provide assistance to families of miners involved in mining accidents; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, today, I heard disturbing testimony during a Senate HELP Committee hearing on the Crandall Canyon Mine disaster about the misinformation that families received during the tragedy. When I met with many of the family members of the miners involved in the accident, I saw the enduring pain of their loss, and, although there is nothing I can do to take that pain away, I can work to ensure that if other families are ever faced with such tragedy in the future, they will be cared for with respect, dignity, and consistency.

I am proud to introduce the Mine Disaster Family Assistance Act of 2007, closely modeled after the National Transportation Safety Board's highly effective family assistance model used during major aviation accidents in this country to care for victims and their families.

This bill puts families who experience such a tragedy first by establishing a director of family support services at MSHA. This person would

serve as the Federal Government's point-of-contact for families during an emergency. The director would be responsible for the overall coordination of family services provided by all parties involved in a mine emergency and ensure that families receive consistent information first during rescue and investigation efforts.

Second, it requires the designation of an independent nonprofit organization with experience in disasters and post trauma family communication, such as the American Red Cross, ARC, as the primary coordinator of emotional care and support for families. This organization will provide mental health and counseling services to families, and a private place to grieve; meet with family members onsite; and update families on accident and post accident activities.

Third, it requires mine operators to submit a strategic plan to clearly establish accident protocols for meeting the needs of families before an emergency occurs. To ensure these plans are submitted and approved in a timely fashion, the bill also prohibits approval of other operating plans until a mine has an MSHA-approved family assistance plan.

Finally, it gives families a voice in the process by including them as a required partner in a task force designed to provide recommendations for program enhancements. Other partners include mine operators, including operators of small mines, labor, the ARC, and the Bureau of Land Management.

We all agree that families who have lost loved ones in mining tragedies like those at Sago and Crandall, deserve our best efforts to provide consistent communication and support. The landmark MINER Act, signed into law last year, was a good first step in this direction, but these tragedies demand that we take additional steps to ensure that the victims' families receive the best information and care possible during an emergency.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 341—CONCERNING THE RECENT FOREST FIRES IN GREECE

Ms. SNOWE (for herself and Mr. MENENDEZ) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 341

Whereas more than 3,000 forest fires have been recorded in Greece since June 2007;

Whereas over a 10-day period, an estimated 4,000 people saw their homes destroyed by the wildfires, which razed dozens of villages, destroyed livestock and charred an estimated 469,000 acres of mostly forest and farmland;

Whereas dozens of Greek families have lost their loved ones to the fires;

Whereas thousands of Greeks have been left homeless and hundreds of thousands of acres of pristine forest have been destroyed;

Whereas hundreds of thousands of mature olive trees, vineyards and thousands of animals perished in the flames;

Whereas damage to the Greek economy is estimated at between \$1,600,000,000 and \$5,400,000,000;

Whereas the United States and Greece have stood side by side in confronting world challenges throughout the 20th century, and will stand together in confronting this new challenge; and

Whereas the United States, through its government, its people and its Greek-American community, has already extended significant support to the people of Greece during this difficult time: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) extends its condolences and sympathy to the Government and the people of Greece for the grave loss of life and vast destruction caused by the devastating fires raging through Greece;

(2) vows its full support and solidarity to a close friend, a strategic partner, and a longstanding ally in this painful and difficult hour;

(3) fully supports the Administration's initiatives to provide assistance and relief to the people of Greece, including its pledge of \$1,500,000 in aid as well as expert and technical assistance;

(4) encourages public institutions, specialized agencies, as well as private citizens, to offer their resources; and

(5) expresses confidence that Greece and its people will succeed in overcoming the hardships incurred through this tragedy.

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce a resolution with my friend and colleague Senator MENENDEZ concerning the devastating series of forest fires which ravaged much of Greece, especially in the Peloponnese, this past summer.

Beginning in June, over 3,000 forest fires raged across the cradle of Democracy. Tragically, 9 people were killed in blazes in June and July, and 68 people lost their lives in the especially destructive fires between August 24 and September 4. The Greek economy ministry initially estimated that the fires caused 1.6 billion euros, or \$2.2 billion of damage. Subsequent assessments have placed that figure as high as \$5.4 billion.

I am proud that, more than offering its sympathy, the U.S. has also offered its help to the brave people and government of Greece. According to the State Department, the U.S. Government has thus far contributed nearly \$2 million in aid to Greece in response to the fires. The bulk of this aid was provided in a "wildfire assistance package" consisting of the deployment of a technical assistance team which arrived in Greece on September 1 representing the disciplines of: fire management, fire investigation, emergency management systems, burn area emergency rehabilitation, and ecosystem and watershed restoration. Additionally, the U.S. Government provided 3,000 complete fire suits for the national fire brigade.

Americans have also stepped up to give privately to the victims of these terrible fires as well. Charities organized by Greek-American organizations and the Orthodox Church in the U.S. have already raised millions to aid the people and government of Greece in rebuilding and mitigating the economic loss resulting from the fires.

It is essential for the Senate to both recognize and pledge its support for