

business plans, struggling farmers improve their crop production, and families devastated by HIV/AIDS receive the care they need.

Currently, volunteers are serving in 76 countries, providing development assistance while fostering new bonds of friendship and seeking common ways to address global challenges. Over 400 men and women have volunteered from California's Sixth District, including the following current volunteers: Samantha Atkins, Gail Bachman, Tracey Bloch, Jamie Bowen, Catherine Carlton, John Cervetto, Rebecca Como, Jed D'Abravanel, Fionah Dominis, Jillian Geissler, Emilie Greenhalgh Stam, Daniel Grinnell, Alexis Guild, James Gurney, Amy Howland, Larissa Hsia-Wong, David Hughes, Frank Lester, Ryan Loughlin, Alissa Mayer, Reid Miller, Ryan Reichert, NurAliyya Shelley, Robin Smith, Jessica Souza, and Jessica Wright.

Madam Speaker, the 48th anniversary of the establishment of the Peace Corps is an achievement that we should all commemorate. I celebrate the leadership and accomplishments of these compassionate Americans who have committed themselves to promoting global peace, diplomacy, and understanding.

FEMA INDEPENDENCE ACT OF 2009

HON. JAMES L. OBERSTAR

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Mr. OBERSTAR. Madam Speaker, I am proud today to introduce H.R. 1174, the "FEMA Independence Act of 2009", a bill to re-establish the Federal Emergency Management Agency ("FEMA") as an independent, cabinet-level agency reporting directly to the President.

This bill restores FEMA's ability to be a nimble and effective response agency, re-instates FEMA's role in building basic emergency management capability around the country, and removes FEMA from the large bureaucracy within the Department of Homeland Security ("DHS") that has hindered the agency's disaster response and recovery efforts for six years.

On March 1, 2003, President Bush delegated to the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security the responsibility for administering the Federal Government's assistance to States and local governments whose citizens and communities are affected by disasters, and subsumed the Federal Emergency Management Agency into the newly-created Department of Homeland Security.

Since 2003, FEMA has failed the American people. Hurricane Katrina remains foremost in our minds. It is shameful that, to this day, many citizens and communities in Louisiana have still not recovered from the disaster. Beyond Hurricane Katrina, FEMA's performance has continued to be deficient, such as in the agency's inadequate response to the discovery of formaldehyde in FEMA trailers, a serious threat to public health. More recently, residents in Texas experienced significant shortcomings in the delivery of recovery assistance, including debris removal and housing, in the aftermath of Hurricane Ike. Today, the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Emergency Management, and Public Buildings is holding yet another hearing on the status of

recovery efforts in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas from these hurricanes. The fact that there are still individuals and communities in need demonstrates that dramatic improvements that can and must be made to the Federal government's provision of disaster assistance and leadership in emergency management.

Oversight hearings since 2003 held by the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure have shown a clear correlation between the absorption of FEMA into DHS and the deterioration of FEMA's effectiveness. One reason for this trend is that since becoming a part of DHS, FEMA's emergency management mission has been distorted by a focus on terrorism. Key Federal grant programs that previously helped build basic emergency management and fire fighting capability in communities around the country are now made available only if applicants can show a nexus to terrorism. In the last six years, the Federal Government has spent ten times more on terrorism preparedness (nearly \$15 billion) than on core emergency management preparedness (\$1.5 billion). Yet since 2000, the President has declared only two disasters because of terrorist attacks, but nearly 500 disasters due to natural hazards.

Further, quick decision-making and the flexibility to shift course as events change are two fundamental hallmarks of successful emergency management. Within DHS, FEMA officials have had to run all decisions through the Secretary of Homeland Security. FEMA has also had to work through the Secretary to access non-FEMA Federal resources in a response effort. These additional layers, which did not exist when FEMA was an independent agency, cause delays, impact the speed and flexibility of services that are provided to citizens and communities, and add unnecessary obstacles following a disaster. Being subsumed in a DHS bureaucracy has impaired FEMA's ability to carry out its mission quickly and effectively.

Since 2003, DHS has centralized disaster response and recovery capabilities at the Federal level, which has shut out FEMA's partnerships with State and local governments, and undermined the emergency management system. DHS has also created separate functions under the direct control of the Secretary to perform functions that by law are the sole responsibility of FEMA, such as pre-designation of individuals to serve as Principal Federal Officials ("PFOs") for disasters during the 2008 Hurricane season. Since its incorporation into DHS, FEMA has also had to rely increasingly on support from contractors, due to a loss of experienced FEMA personnel and a reduction of emergency management capacity at the State and local level as the focus of emergency management grant funding has shifted to terrorism-preparedness programs.

For these reasons, I have long opposed the incorporation of FEMA into DHS. During House consideration of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, I said:

This is July 2002. Let us fast forward to July 2003. The majority has prevailed. FEMA is a box in the mammoth bureaucracy of the Department of Homeland Security. Flood waters are swirling around your city. You call for help. You get the Department of Homeland Security. The switchboard sends your call to the Under Secretary's office which looks up "disaster" on their organizational chart and sends

you to the Congressional Liaison Office, which then promises to get a message back to you in 24 hours. Eventually, they find FEMA, by which time you are stranded on the roof of your house waving a white handkerchief and screaming for help. FEMA, the word comes back, sorry, is looking for suspected terrorists some place and will get back to you as soon as we can.

Unfortunately, we have seen these predictions come true. Unless FEMA is re-established as an independent, cabinet-level agency, I expect this history to repeat itself.

After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Congress enacted changes to try to fix the problems plaguing FEMA by enhancing the agency's authority within the Department of Homeland Security. Unfortunately, these changes have done little to restore the type of robust emergency management agency that is needed at the Federal level. Tinkering around the edges will not work; fixing this flawed system requires fundamental change. This bill takes the most important and necessary first step to fix the problem—re-instating FEMA as an independent agency.

Specifically, H.R. 1174 affirms FEMA's mission to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the United States from all hazards, by leading and supporting a comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation.

As prescribed by the bill, an independent FEMA will be led by an Administrator and a Deputy Administrator with extensive experience in emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation from hazards. The bill maintains and strengthens FEMA's regional structure of ten regional offices and three area offices. Each regional office will be led by a Regional Administrator with a demonstrated ability in and knowledge of emergency management.

The bill provides for the transfer of core emergency management programs and functions to the newly independent FEMA, including: FEMA's disaster assistance programs authorized by the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act; the National Flood Insurance Program; the Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program; the National Dam Safety Program; the U.S. Fire Administration; the Emergency Food and Shelter Program; and FEMA's programs for Continuity of Operations and Continuity of Government.

The bill does not transfer any grant programs, currently administered by FEMA, that are specific to terrorism, such as the Urban Area Security Initiative and the State Homeland Security Grant Program. This will ensure that the Department of Homeland Security will continue to lead our Nation's efforts to prevent and protect against terrorist incidents and attacks.

The bill further requires the FEMA Administrator to maintain the National Advisory Council and to retain a Disability Coordinator within the newly-established entity; continues the authorization of the National Integration Center within FEMA; and ensures that FEMA will proceed on the development of standards for credentialing and typing in collaboration with the administrators of the Emergency Management Assistance Compact and other State, local, and tribal entities. Each of these activities is currently authorized and being implemented by FEMA.

The transfer of all functions relegated to FEMA by the bill must be completed within 120 days of enactment of the bill.

This matter is far too important, and impacts directly the lives of too many of our nation's citizens, to delay any further. We must act quickly to restore FEMA's autonomy and effectiveness.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 1174, the "FEMA Independence Act of 2009".

CONGRATULATIONS TO RON HULL

HON. ADRIAN SMITH

OF NEBRASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Mr. SMITH of Nebraska. Madam Speaker, I rise today to offer my hearty congratulations to Ron Hull on his reception of the Pioneer Award from the NEBRASKAland Foundation for his efforts to portray the spirit of Nebraska's heritage through his good works.

Each year, the NEBRASKAland Foundation celebrates Nebraska's entrance into the union. During this event, the Foundation honors distinguished Nebraskans for the impressive contributions to the State of Nebraska.

Nothing sums up the spirit and values of Nebraska more than a person's willingness to reach out to friends, neighbors, and even strangers to help make our world a better place. Ron's dedication to tourism, historical leadership, and his career in public broadcasting is an inspiration.

I thank Ron for his dedication and his service.

PRIMARY CARE VOLUNTEER INCENTIVE ACT

HON. KATHY CASTOR

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Ms. CASTOR of Florida. Madam Speaker, America is facing a troubling physician shortage. It is estimated that the U.S. could be short 200,000 physicians by next year, while the number of patients is expected to increase by 24 percent. Furthermore, most medical school students incur more than \$100,000 in student debt and primary care doctors are becoming scarce. New physicians are entering more lucrative specialties that better assist in their student debt payoff.

To join efforts that are underway across the country to address health care workforce shortages, today I will introduce the Primary Care Volunteer Incentive Act. This legislation will create a volunteer program for primary care physicians that will allow them to receive medical school loan repayment for their dedication to a community health center with high needs.

The Primary Care Volunteer Incentive Act will implement a program for doctors who specialize in family medicine, general pediatrics and general internal medicine. This program will request a five year volunteer commitment that will help doctors to develop a strong and longstanding relationship with their patients and communities. The program will build on

the current National Health Service Corps program by allowing doctors to volunteer only part-time at a community health center in an area with a large primary care physician shortage.

This legislation is a vital step in closing the gaps that exist for medically disenfranchised Americans. Fifty-two percent of uninsured Americans do not have a primary care provider and at least two in five residents in Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Kansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Oregon, South Carolina and Utah have inadequate access to routine health services. We know that lack of access to a primary care provider means that patients are not receiving preventive care, which helps people to lead healthier lives and keeps them out of emergency rooms for preventable and manageable conditions.

Too many of our neighbors are without basic care. Ensuring access and affordable health care should be our top priority. I have seen first hand the positive impact that access to community health care has given my district in the Tampa Bay area, and today my bill will help to see that communities will not continue to suffer losses in primary care providers that cannot be afforded.

INTRODUCTION OF THE PART-TIME FEDERAL EMPLOYEES EQUITY ACT

HON. JAMES P. MORAN

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce legislation that will correct an inequity in the computation of retirement annuities for some federal employees. The Part-Time Federal Employees Equity Act is intended to help support the federal government's ability to retain current employees in the face of the oncoming wave of retirement that will hit the federal workforce in less than a decade.

I am proud to represent more than 98,000 Virginians who have served our country within the ranks of the federal civil service. Protecting the quality of life of these beneficiaries and ensuring the future strength of the federal retirement system are two of the most important issues to my district. It is essential that Congress support efforts that maintain the integrity, quality and vitality of the federal workforce.

It has been well documented that over the next ten years, the federal workforce will undergo significant demographic changes that threaten the federal government's strength and effectiveness. As the baby-boom generation, which makes up a disproportionately large part of the overall workforce, nears retirement age, federal agencies will face a crisis in manpower, especially within its senior executives and management ranks. Information from OPM shows that approximately "60 percent of the government's 1.6 million white-collar employees and 90 percent of about 6,000 Federal executives will be eligible for retirement within the next ten years."

This likely wave of retirement threatens to drain the federal workforce of its most experienced and talented employees at a pace that will be difficult to replace with a well-qualified,

trained workforce. Congress, in coordination with the Executive Branch, must develop an overall strategy with specific policy solutions so that the potential "brain drain" doesn't threaten the efficient delivery of government services.

One leading factor that influences the retention of senior personnel is the retirement package offered by the federal government. As currently structured, the federal retirement system for some workers actually penalizes employees that wish to extend their careers by working part-time. As the federal workforce faces the prospect of losing an unprecedented number of employees over the next 10 years, many of the anticipated shortages can be met with part-time employees. One of the greatest impediments to allowing part-time work are disincentives and restrictions imposed by the federal pension system.

I have introduced the Part-Time Federal Employees Equity Act to address the annuity computations of federal employees retiring under the Civil Servant Retirement System (CSRS). I believe that this legislation can serve the dual purpose of correcting a longstanding inequity for retiring federal employees, as well as offering employees nearing retirement the option for continued part-time service without negatively impacting their retirement benefits.

Over 10 years ago, the 100th Congress included a provision in the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) of 1986 (P.L. 99-272) that amended the civil service retirement law for federal workers with part-time service. Section 15204 prevented part-time employees from being credited with the same number of years of service as those who worked full-time over the same period. Before the law's passage, an individual who had worked part-time for most of his or her career could switch to full-time work the last three years of his or her career and receive the same retirement benefits as someone who worked full-time throughout the same period.

As the Subcommittee knows, federal annuities are calculated by multiplying the average three highest continuous years of salary, times years of service, by an accrual rate. The new methodology determines the proportion of a full-time career that a part-time employee works and scales annuities accordingly. Under the formula, a part-time salary is calculated on a full-time equivalent basis (FTE) for retirement purposes. Thus, a worker's "high-three salary" could occur during a period of part-time service. This often happens when a senior-level worker cuts back on his or her hours. The disproportionate share of these workers appears to be women, who leave the federal service to care for others.

The problem with the new formula is that it has negative consequences for workers hired before 1986. First, it fails to provide the accrued full year of credit for each year of part-time service of workers who, before 1986, had completed part-time service for which they had understood they would receive full-time credit. Second, the formula can have a negative impact on retirees' annuity if the computation of the "high-three salary" occurs during part-time service. Specifically, the formula incorrectly minimizes full-time employment before 1986, which hurts agencies' ability to retain experienced federal workers by offering part-time employment. Finally, this complex formula can lead to computational errors involving annuities with part-time service. There are possibly