

returning home after activation. In addition, activated military personnel have received collection notices for student loans while serving in combat zones.

The goal of the VETS Act is to provide our servicemembers with certain rights when they must delay their educational pursuits to defend our country.

The legislation requires colleges and universities to refund tuition and fees for unearned credit, and in addition, guarantee our servicemembers a place when they return home.

The bill would also amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to treat student loan debt the same way it treats other forms of debt by capping interest at 6 percent during deployments.

Finally, the legislation would give servicemembers 13 months to begin paying their student loans after an activation should they decide not to return to school immediately.

The deferment will give them time to readjust back to civilian life should they decide they need extra time to go back to school.

Senator SHERROD BROWN has introduced the VETS Act in the U.S. Senate and I am proud to introduce companion legislation in the House of Representatives.

The VETS Act is centered on the recommendations made by the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) based on the experiences of the group's members.

Madam Speaker, I urge passage of this legislation to give rights and protections to the servicemembers activated while attending a college or university.

INTRODUCTION OF THE POLLINATOR HABITAT PROTECTION ACT

HON. EARL BLUMENAUER

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Madam Speaker, today I am introducing, along with my colleagues, ALCEE HASTINGS and RANDY KUHLMAN, the Pollinator Habitat Protection Act. This legislation amends the Department of Agriculture's conservation programs to put a greater emphasis on increasing habitat and establishing cropping and integrated pest management practices to protect native and managed pollinators.

The bill also states that the Secretary of Agriculture should designate pollinator protection as a "national priority resource concern" for the conservation programs administered by the Department.

As Congress prepares to reauthorize our national agricultural policies, raising awareness and placing a greater emphasis on pollinators and their habitat could not come at a more important time—particularly as research and newspaper headlines continue to highlight the collapse of bee colonies and general population declines and threats to pollinators.

The risks to our food supply and ecosystems from which pollinators are declining cannot be underestimated. Pollinators are integral to the very survival of an astounding number and variety of plant life that sustains us. The numbers tell the story—nearly 75 percent of the world's flowering plants, more than two-thirds of the world's crop species, and one out

of every three mouthfuls of food have a direct connection to pollinators. Disruptions of localized pollinating systems and declines of certain species of pollinators have been reported on every continent except Antarctica.

Populations of a variety of pollinator species have been declining in recent years, due to a loss of habitat, improper use of pesticides and herbicides, and replacement of native plant species with non-native or engineered plants. The introduction of non-native, invasive species—either by accident or through farming practices—has significantly contributed to this problem.

I introduce this bill as one important step to address these problems by recognizing the contributions that pollinators make to our agricultural production and our food supply. Another step is the legislation of my colleague ALCEE HASTINGS, H.R. 1709, which I support and which authorizes research funding to strengthen native bee, as well as honey bee, populations. I look forward to working with the Agriculture Committee and the House to ensure pollinators and their habitats receive further attention and protection as we reauthorize the Farm Bill in the coming weeks.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

HON. GABRIELLE GIFFORDS

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Ms. GIFFORDS. Madam Speaker, I rise today deeply disappointed that proposed legislation to deal with our failed immigration laws fell short today on a procedural vote in the other body.

An impressive bipartisan coalition of Senators—including Arizona Senators KYL and MCCAIN—worked tirelessly for the past several months to craft immigration reform legislation. Unfortunately, their efforts were not fruitful.

Doing nothing to address our nation's immigration crisis is irresponsible. The Federal Government cannot continue to shirk its responsibility to protect our borders. Today's failure leaves the burden of dealing with illegal immigration on State and local governments.

My district in Southern Arizona deals with the negative impact of illegal immigration every day. I will not relent in my efforts to find ways to remove the unfair burden placed on local law enforcement, health and social service agencies and our public schools.

I urge my colleagues and the leadership of the House to come together in a bi-partisan fashion to craft smart immigration reform that is tough, practical, and effective. We must roll up our sleeves and exhibit the leadership that is needed on this critical issue.

The House has already made some progress. I applaud our efforts to address the problems we face along our border in our Homeland Security Appropriations bill. This includes adding more border patrol agents and increasing the use of technology to secure our border. I also urge fully fund federal programs, such as SCAAP, that reimburse local law enforcement agencies for the apprehension and detention of illegal immigrants.

The cost and burden of illegal immigration remains primarily on the shoulders of local and state governments, especially those on the border. The fight for Comprehensive Immi-

gration reform goes on and it must remain a top priority in Congress. We must pass comprehensive immigration reform.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2008

SPEECH OF

HON. SHEILA JACKSON-LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 26, 2007

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2643) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior, Environment, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2008, with Mr. WATT (Acting Chairman) in the chair.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of H.R. 2643, the Interior and Environment Appropriations Act of 2008 and to commend Chairman DICKS and Ranking Member TIAHRT for their leadership in shepherding this bill through the legislative process. Madam Chairwoman, I support this bill because it focuses our efforts on global climate change and ensures that America's water and air will be cleaner.

It is said the Arctic region is warming fastest, threatening the livelihoods of indigenous hunters by thawing the polar ice-cap and driving species like polar bears toward extinction by the end of the century. Today, more than one third of the world's population lives within 60 miles of a shoreline. Thirteen of the world's twenty largest cities are located on a coast. Because of their precarious location and unique meteorology, these cities are particularly vulnerable to the effects of global warming. As industrial and commercial centers, many are also net contributors of greenhouse gas emissions, extending the effects of global warming.

Given the earth is "committed" to rises in temperature over the next 30–40 years, it was only rational these futures be built into business models. But reducing emissions did not need to be at the expense of competitiveness: in fact, carbon trading, clean technologies, and sustainable energy generation all promised new opportunities for skilled jobs and economic growth.

Houston is also experiencing more frequent and more powerful storms and rain fall, in terms of flooding, some of the old structural solutions—the concreted bayous of Houston need additional measures to ensure the safety of the population. Unfortunately, Houston's development pattern had made such weaknesses more acute. The city represented "classic urban sprawl over coastal ecology." With its large, low density population and high density roads and impervious surfaces the city was highly vulnerable to flooding. Before the development arrived, the natural ecology of the Houston delta would have managed increases in rainfall and flooding. But the constructed environment had pushed back forest and wetland ecologies and undermined natural flood alleviation mechanisms.