

THE EMPLOYMENT NON-DISCRIMINATION ACT

HON. RICHARD A. GEPHARDT

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 31, 2001

Mr. GEPHARDT. Mr. Speaker, I strongly support the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) which is being reintroduced today. This bill will make sure that individuals have protections against workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Today, there is no federal law to fight discrimination of this kind. This is unacceptable. Under current law, law-abiding, hard-working Americans can be denied a job, fired or discriminated against in other ways simply because they are or are perceived to be gay or lesbian.

ENDA will extend the promise of equal opportunity and civil rights to more Americans. Twelve states have such laws on the books. The private sector realizes the need and value of these workplace protections; in fact, more than 50 percent of Fortune 500 companies have nondiscrimination policies which include sexual orientation. And an overwhelming number of Americans support equal workplace rights for gay and lesbian Americans.

This legislation says simply that discrimination in employment because of sexual orientation is illegal, and will not be tolerated. This is strong, badly-needed legislation for countless Americans who have suffered, or who are vulnerable to discrimination because they do not have protections similar to those afforded millions of their fellow citizens. I strongly hope that we will debate and pass this bill this year.

TREASURY AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2002

SPEECH OF

HON. ROBERT WEXLER

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 25, 2001

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2590) making appropriations for the Treasury Department, the United States Postal Service, the Executive Office of the President, and certain Independent Agencies, for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2002, and for other purposes:

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of the Hastings amendment to the bill, and I commend my neighbor and colleague for bringing this issue to the Floor of the House.

America is the freest and most prosperous nation on earth. We are the strongest and most resilient democracy on the planet. Yet last November, we failed our citizens in the most fundamental way.

The right to vote cuts to the very bone of our democracy. When tens of thousands of Americans cast their ballots—only to have them thrown out—whether you like the results of the Presidential election or not—it is undeniable that something is wrong in America. If we fail to learn from this tragic experience then shame on us.

What happened in Palm Beach County, Florida on election day is personal to me. I

saw it with my own eyes. I experienced it myself. I stood in front of voting precincts and witnessed a horrible state of confusion.

I rise today representing the citizens of my district who went to vote on election day only to be confronted with a puzzle rather than a ballot. I watched the dismay and felt the anger of patriotic Americans, many of whom fought in World War II and Korea, and haven't missed an election in over 50 years, as their votes were rendered meaningless.

I support the Hastings electoral reform amendment to give a voice to those Floridians whose votes were callously discarded due to a ballot that was so confusing intelligent men and women unknowingly cast two votes for President, or one vote for the wrong man.

I support the Hastings electoral reform amendment because the collapse of the election system in Florida was not color-blind. The facts speak for themselves. Fifty-four percent of Florida's discarded ballots were cast by African-Americans, even though African-Americans only comprise eleven percent of Florida's voters.

Think about that. African-American voters were ten times more likely than white voters to have their ballots rejected in Florida. This reality is indefensible and we must act now to repair our citizens' faith in the system.

Have no doubt about it, this is not just a Florida problem. It stretches coast to coast. Many of the problems that confronted Florida on election day occurred in other states. In fact, more votes were thrown out in Illinois than in Florida. This is a federal problem that demands federal attention.

What happened in Florida on election day highlighted for the entire world that in America, even for a Presidential election, we have no national standards for the design of ballots—we have no national standards for the counting of ballots—we have no national standards for voting machinery—we have no national standards to prevent thousands of Americans from being purged from voter roles—and we have no reliable way to count the overseas ballots of the men and women in the military.

The good news is—this problem can be solved, but we must commit the necessary resources. I strongly support the amendment sponsored by Representative HASTINGS which makes a substantial down payment on our obligation to help state and local governments modernize their election equipment and renew the integrity of our democracy. Electoral reform must not be a partisan cause. It is our national obligation.

Election 2000 was a wake-up call to all Americans that we must not take our democracy for granted. We must commit the money, the resources and the energy to fix our election process once and for all. To do anything less is unforgivable.

I urge you to support the amendment.

RECOGNIZING THE ESCORT CARRIER SAILORS AND AIRMEN ASSOCIATION

HON. JOE BARTON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 31, 2001

Mr. BARTON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, today, I am honored to rise and speak in recognition

of the Escort Aircraft Carrier Sailors and Airmen Association. Members of the ECSAA served our country in both World War II and the Korean Conflict aboard the CVE Aircraft Carriers, better known as "Baby Flattops." Through their acts of bravery, these Veterans helped to bring World War II to an early conclusion and saved numerous lives. Until now, they have gone unrecognized for their invaluable contributions to the military successes of our nation. It is time for our Government to make its appreciation evident to these brave Veterans and recognize them, as a whole, for their valor and dedication to the preservation of our great country and its people.

DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2002

SPEECH OF

HON. BENJAMIN A. GILMAN

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, July 30, 2001

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2620) making appropriations for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development and for sundry independent agencies, boards, commissions, corporations, and offices for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2002, and for other purposes.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in strong support of the amendment being offered by my colleague, Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN, to prohibit any funds from being used to implement the veterans equity resource allocation system.

VERA was created to correct a perceived inequity in the manner in which veterans health care dollars were being distributed across the country.

While a noble effort, VERA was fundamentally flawed in that it did not look at the type of care being delivered to veterans in a given region. Furthermore, it also failed to consider the effect of regional costs of providing health care in its calculations.

Under VERA, the watchword was efficiency. Deliver the most care at the least cost. While ideal for outpatient care, VERA has unfairly penalized those VISNs that provide vital services such as substance abuse treatment, services for homeless veterans, mental health services, and spinal cord injury treatments. Under VERA, these services are all deemed too expensive and "inefficient."

VERA was also implemented at a time when the VA budget was essentially flat-lined. Thus, VISN directors were not provided additional funds to offset the costs of annual pay raises for VA staff, and annual medical inflation costs. This was not a problem for those directors of VISNs that received money under VERA. However, for those directors in VISNs, that were losing money under VERA, it was a double hit that crowded out additional funds needed for other vital services.

It is commendable that the subcommittee was able to find an additional \$1.2 billion for veterans medical care. Yet, thanks to VERA, very little of that money will find its way to the