

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 re-adjust 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 KUHL, 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.

The major causes of flooding in the Houston basin are due to Houston's highly developed area; the intensity and duration of Texas rainfall; and flat topography with little storage. These conditions led to Houston suffering heavily at the hands of flooding—most recently, the \$5 billion price tag after the inundations accompanying Tropical Storm Allison. The flooding heavily damaged the urban infrastructure and, because of the release of human waste from sewers and medical waste from hospitals, posed a severe public health risk.

Improving the security of our nation's drinking water and wastewater infrastructures has become a top priority since the events of 9/11. This legislation takes significant actions in assessing and reducing vulnerabilities relating to the toxic contamination of our water system. The quality of water should be of the utmost importance when it comes to the health and well-being of the people in this country but the effects of storm water compromises this quality. Individuals who swim in front of flowing storm drains are susceptible to earaches, sinus problems, diarrhea, fever, and rashes; these individuals are 50 percent more likely to develop a variety of symptoms than those who swim 400 yards away from the same drains.

In a ranking of environmental risks posed to the metropolitan Houston area, an Environmental Foresight Committee has identified water pollution as having a relatively high risk. Houston needs to address the trash and odor problems in our waterways which significantly affect quality of life, and economic tourism, development.

Maintaining the biological soundness of the state's rivers, lakes, bays, and estuaries is of great importance to the public's economic health and general well-being. The fact that greater pressures and demands are being placed on the federal government pertaining to security of our water resources makes H.R. 2643 paramount to reexamine the process for ensuring that these important priorities effectively address the maintenance of a proper ecological environment of the bays and estuaries of the nation and the health of related living marine resources.

It is time that we as Americans start becoming more aware and better activists in keeping the air we breathe clean. Air pollution can damage trees, crops, other plants, lakes, and animals. Breathing polluted air can make your eyes and nose burn. It can irritate your throat and make breathing difficult. Each day, air pollution causes thousands of illnesses leading to lost days at work and school. Air pollution also reduces agricultural crop and commercial forest yields by billions of dollars each year.

There are 900,000 children in Harris County alone who are at risk of the health effects from the pollutants in the air. Children are more vulnerable to air pollution than adults because they spend more time outdoors than adults, are usually outdoors most in the summer when air pollution levels are highest, and have immature immune systems.

It is time to put a stop to global pollution, it is time to build a better and healthier earth and we can do so by supporting H.R. 2643.

For these reasons I strongly urge my colleagues to support this resolution.

IN TRIBUTE TO BILLY E. SHIELDS
ON THE OCCASION OF HIS RE-
TIREMENT

HON. HARRY E. MITCHELL

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mr. MITCHELL. Madam Speaker, this past week the nation commemorated the bravery and heroism of firefighters who risk their lives every day to protect the lives and safety of others. I would like to turn my colleagues' attention to the accomplishments of Phoenix firefighter Captain Billy Shields, who is leaving the ranks of his brother and sister firefighters this Friday, June 30, to start a new phase of his life.

When Captain Shields retires from the Phoenix Fire Department and the United Phoenix Firefighters Association Local 493, where he served as president, he will do so with a long record of accomplishments. He has been a stalwart advocate for his fellow firefighters, and as president of United Phoenix Firefighters Association, advanced improvements in fire health and safety standards for firefighters, ambulance and emergency response personnel in Arizona.

Since 1997, Captain Shields has led the way in negotiating contracts for the United Phoenix Firefighters Association that protected the job rights of firefighters and the security of their families. He worked with management; city officials and other community stakeholders and reached a consensus to enhance fire and emergency response capabilities. Because of his work, Central Arizona's fire services are state of the art.

It is important to recognize that Captain Shields is unique among union leaders in his commitment to working closely with the business community to improve the local economy. He was appointed to the Greater Phoenix Economic Council where he serves on its Executive Committee. He has labored to advance an economy for a new generation. He was one of the visionaries who helped advance the biotechnology industry in Arizona with the establishment of the Translational Genomics Research Institute, which is known to Arizonans simply as T-Gen. He partnered with others to improve education at all levels—preschool, primary, secondary and higher education. To help accommodate the explosive growth we are facing in Central Arizona, he has played an instrumental role in the development of our transportation infrastructure and the expansion of transportation options.

All Arizonans who have had a chance to work with Captain Shields are indebted to him for his commitment to make our communities a better place to live, work and raise a family. I've seen this commitment first hand. I worked closely with him as Mayor of Tempe and as an Arizona State Senator, and came to rely on him as a friend and counselor. It has been a pleasure to work with him and I look forward to the chance to collaborate with him as he undertakes new challenges.

Captain Shields, I am proud of your service. Arizona is proud of your service, and forever indebted to you for making our communities stronger, safer and more secure. Marianne joins me in wishing you and your family the very best in this new chapter of your life.

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

SPEECH OF

HON. MARIO DIAZ-BALART

OF FLORIDA

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:

Mr. MARIO DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and staff of the Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee for their continued support of the Florida Everglades in the FY08 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill.

This legislation includes funding for implementation of the Modified Waters Deliveries Project. This project is critical to Everglades Restoration, and will ensure natural water flows continue through Everglades National Park.

The Florida Everglades is a unique and precious ecosystem that must be preserved for future generations. Everglades Restoration is a long-term investment that will ensure the Everglades is restored and protected.

I am pleased that the Chairman included \$72 million for Everglades Restoration, which is so critical to ensuring continuation of this vital project. The Interior share of funding combined with the appropriations made to the Army Corps of Engineers in the Energy and Water Appropriations bill will help to ensure restoration moves forward. This funding is a step in the right direction, showing the continued support of the Committee for Restoration. As the FY08 Appropriations cycle moves forward, I will work to ensure that Everglades Restoration remains a top priority.

I thank my colleagues from Florida for their continued support of the Florida Everglades and Restoration funding. Additionally, I would like to thank the President for his steadfast support as well as the Governor of Florida. Floridians understand the great benefit the Everglades provide not just to our ecological diversity, but also to our economy, which is so dependent upon tourism and ecotourism.

On behalf of the residents of Southern Florida I am so proud to represent, I thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and their hard-working staff for their support of this funding.

HONORING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS OF SOUTH ALABAMA

HON. JO BONNER

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mr. BONNER. Madam Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to the Boys and Girls Clubs of South Alabama on the occasion of their 50th anniversary.