

I support this bill because the Women's Business Centers are instrumental in assisting women with developing and expanding their own businesses. The Centers provide comprehensive training, counseling and information to help women succeed in business.

Women are starting new businesses at twice the rate of men and own almost 40 percent or 8 million of all small businesses in the United States. Women of color own nearly one in eight of the 8 million women-owned businesses or 1,067,000 businesses.

Women start businesses for a variety of reasons. With the recent spate of corporate downsizing in large companies and the various changes in the marketplace, small businesses are becoming a vital part of the economic stability of the country.

Women often start businesses because they want flexibility in raising their children, they want to escape gender discrimination on the job, they hit the glass ceiling, and many desire to fulfill a dream of becoming an entrepreneur. We should encourage this current trend of women-owned businesses by supporting the Women's Business Center Amendment appropriation.

The Women's Business Centers offer women the tools necessary to launch businesses by providing resources and assistance with the development of a new business. This includes developing a business plan, conducting market research, developing a marketing strategy, and identifying financial services. The centers also offer practical advice and support for new business owners.

Access to this information is essential to success in small business. The Women's Business Centers provide a valuable service to aspiring entrepreneurs.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

ASSISTING SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY BENEFICIARIES IN THEIR RETURN TO WORK: THE WORK INCENTIVES IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1999

HON. ROBERT T. MATSUI

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 18, 1999

Mr. MATSUI. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join my colleagues in the introduction of "The Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999." This legislation is designed to help Social Security Disability Insurance and SSI beneficiaries participate more fully in our nation's economy. It provides new opportunities and new incentives for people with disabilities to return to the work force.

The Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 enjoys widespread support. It has gathered bipartisan sponsorship in the House and has already been approved by a bipartisan majority in the Senate Finance Committee.

Many, many beneficiaries urgently want to return to work and to make the most of their talents and abilities, but they are simply unable to do so for a variety of reasons. For instance, while people with disabilities possess the clear desire to work, they often require vocational rehabilitation, job training, or some

other form of assistance in order to find a job and to hold that job over the long run. This bill would create incentives for providers of services to offer necessary assistance and to stay involved with the individual to assure as he adjusts to the work force.

At a hearing before the Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee last week, the General Accounting Office reported that the single most important barrier to work for people with disabilities is the fear of loss of medical coverage. People with disabilities are discouraged from securing employment, as they lose not only their SSDI or SSI benefits but also their medical coverage if they are successful in returning to work.

This legislation would extend medical coverage for people with disabilities who wish to return to work. The bill that the House passed last year by an overwhelmingly bipartisan margin—the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Act—made admirable progress in this regard. But I believe we can, and should, do more. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Commerce Committee to remove this barrier to work.

Rather than maintain the current barriers to work, we should strive to facilitate the transition back to the workforce for people with disabilities. Rather than penalize people with disabilities once they do return to work, we should ensure that they do not have to bear the costly burden of health insurance before they are able to do so. The Work Incentives Improvement Act accomplishes both those goals.

The Act would provide disability beneficiaries with a "Ticket to Work," which could be presented to either a private vocational rehabilitation provider or to a State vocational rehabilitation agency in exchange for services such as physical therapy or job training. The "Ticket to Work" would afford SSDI and SSI beneficiaries a much greater choice of providers and would thus enable them to match their particular needs with the capacities of private entities or public agencies more readily. Moreover, the Ticket program would spur providers, both public and private, to offer the most effective services possible, since, under the Ticket program, providers share in the savings to government that arise when a SSDI or SSI beneficiary returns to the workforce and no longer receives benefit payments.

The Work Incentives Improvement Act would also help to remove the most formidable obstacle that people with disabilities face in returning to work—the loss of their health care coverage. Last year's House-passed bill would have extended Medicare coverage for an additional two years beyond current law for individuals who leave the disability rolls to return to work. The Work Incentives Improvement Act that I am introducing today would build upon the foundation laid last year in a number of ways. First, it would extend Medicare coverage to 10 years for disability beneficiaries who return to work. Second, it would allow states to offer a Medicaid buy-in to people with disabilities whose incomes would make them ineligible for SSI.

Taken together, these provisions offer people with disabilities the support and the incentives they need as they strive to return to work. Consequently, I hope Members of both

parties will join me and the other sponsors of the Work Incentives Improvement Act in enacting this innovative legislation this year and in helping to improve the lives of people with disabilities, people who want to work and who want to contribute, even more than they already do, to a brighter future for all Americans.

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA BUDGET AUTONOMY ACT OF 1999 AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA LEGISLATIVE AUTONOMY ACT OF 1999

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 18, 1999

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, today I introduce the District of Columbia Legislative Autonomy Act of 1999 and the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act of 1999, continuing a series of bills that I will introduce this session to ensure a process of transition to democracy and self-government for the residents of the District of Columbia. The first provision of the first bill in my D.C. Democracy Now series, the District of Columbia Democracy 2000 Act (D.C. Democracy 2000), has already been passed and signed by the President as Public Law 106-1—the first law of the 106th Congress. This provision repeals the Faircloth attachment and returns power to the Mayor and City Council.

The Revitalization Act passed in 1997 eliminated the city's traditional, stagnant federal payment and replaced it with federal assumption of escalating state costs including prisons, courts and Medicaid, as well as federally created pension liability. Federal funding of these state costs involve the jurisdiction of other appropriations subcommittees, not the D.C. appropriations subcommittee. Yet, it is the D.C. subcommittee that must appropriate the District's own locally-raised revenue derived from its own taxpayers before that money can be used by the District government. My bill corrects an untenable position whereby a national legislature appropriates the entire budget of a local city jurisdiction. The District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act would allow the District government to pass its own budget without congressional approval.

Congress has put in place two safeguards that duplicate the function of the appropriation subcommittees—the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority (Financial Authority). Today, however, the District has demonstrated that it is capable of exercising prudent authority over its own budget without help from any source except the CFO. In FY 1997, the District ran a surplus of \$186 million. Last year, the District's surplus totaled \$444 million, and the city government is scheduled to continue to run balanced budgets and surpluses into the future.

Budget autonomy will also help the District government and the Financial Authority to reform budgetary procedures by: (1) streamlining the District's needlessly lengthy and expensive budget process in keeping with the