

COSPONSOR THE MCGOVERN-SMITH BILL ON EAST TIMOR

HON. JAMES P. MCGOVERN

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 13, 2000

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, today I am proud to join with my colleague from New Jersey, Congressman CHRIS SMITH, to introduce the East Timor Repatriation and Security Act.

The crisis in East Timor continues, and the Congress needs to respond. Some 100,000 refugees remain trapped in squalid and threatening conditions inside West Timor. The overwhelming majority of these refugees want to return to their homes in East Timor, but cannot because the camps are under the control of the militias. Militias and elements of the Indonesian army continue cross-border attacks into East Timor. Reconstruction continues to be a slow and laborious task.

Our bill maintains the President's suspension on military cooperation with the Indonesian Armed Forces until the refugees are safely repatriated and military attacks against East Timor are ended. It calls upon the President to help the safe repatriation of the refugees and to help rebuild East Timor. And it salutes the members of the U.S. Armed Forces who have participated in the peacekeeping operation in East Timor.

I urge my colleagues to cosponsor the McGovern-Smith bill on East Timor and submit additional materials into the RECORD.

EAST TIMORESE REFUGEES FACE NEW THREAT

(NEW YORK, March 30, 2000)—Human Rights Watch today called on Indonesian authorities to lift a March 31 deadline on humanitarian aid to East Timorese refugees living in West Timor. The Indonesian government has given the refugees, some 100,000 people until the end of the month to choose whether to go back to East Timor or remain in Indonesia. Indonesia says it will end all delivery of food and other assistance as of March 31.

"Everyone wants a quick resolution of the refugee crisis, but this ultimatum is counterproductive," said Joe Saunders, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "The threatened deadline alone has created panic. If it is implemented, the cutoff will directly endanger the lives of tens of thousands of refugees without solving the underlying problems."

Conditions for many of the refugees are already dire. There have been food shortages, along with health and nutrition problems in many of the camps. Some reports estimate that as many as 500 refugees have died from stomach and respiratory ailments. Refugees also continue to face significant obstacles in deciding whether to return. In some areas, refugees continue to be subjected to intimidation by armed militias and disinformation campaigns. Refugees are told that conditions in East Timor are worse than in the camps, and that the United Nations is acting as a new colonial occupying force. Other refugees opposed independence for East Timor, or come from militia or army families, and fear vigilante justice should they return to East Timor.

Indonesian officials claim, however, that they can no longer afford to feed the refugees, that food aid acts as a magnet and prevents refugees in West Timor from returning home permanently, claiming that after

March 31, the refugees should be the sole responsibility of the international community.

"Given Indonesia's economic woes, the call for international financial support in feeding and caring for the refugees is understandable. We can on donors to make urgently needed assistance available. But an artificial deadline helps no one," said Saunders. "Thousands of refugees are not now in a position to make a free and informed choice about whether to return. A large part of the problem has been Indonesia's failure to create conditions in which refugees can make a genuine choice."

According to aid agencies, the total number of refugees currently in West Timor is just under 100,000. Precise figures are not available because access to the camps and settlements has been limited by harassment and intimidation of humanitarian aid workers by pro-Indonesian militias still dominated in a number of the camps. Many refugees have also been subjected to months of disinformation and, often, intimidation by members of the pro-Indonesian military. Indonesia has recently made some progress in combating the intimidation in the camps, but lack of security and reliable information continue to be imported obstacle to return. Aid workers in West Timor estimate that one-half to two-thirds of the refugees, if given a free choice, would eventually choose to return to East Timor.

"Withdrawal of food aid and other humanitarian assistance should never be used as a means to pressure refugees into returning home prematurely" said Saunders. "Return should be voluntary and based on the first and informed choice of the refugees themselves."

Following the announcement by the United Nations on September 4, 1999 that nearly eighty percent of East Timorese voters had rejected continued rule by Indonesia. East Timor was the site orchestrated mayhem. In the days and weeks following the announcement, an estimated seventy percent of homes and buildings across East Timor were destroyed, more than two-thirds of the population was displaced, and an estimated 250,000 East Timorese fled or were forcibly taken, often at gunpoint, across the border into Indonesian West Timor. To date roughly 150,000 refugees have return to East Timor.

NON-COMMISSIONED AND PETTY OFFICER PAY TABLE EQUITY ACT OF 2000

HON. WALTER B. JONES

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 13, 2000

Mr. JONES of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, today, I am introducing legislation that will provide much needed pay reform for our mid-career non-commissioned officers and petty officers. It is my hope this legislation will accomplish three important steps for the Nation's Armed Forces.

First, it will provide mid-career enlisted service members an increase in their basic pay that will nearly match the increases given to mid-grade commissioned officers beginning July 1, 2000.

Second, it will work to address the problem of retention of qualified and experienced mid-career enlisted noncommissioned and petty officers that the Armed Forces wants to retain.

Third, in retaining qualified and experienced mid-career enlisted service members, it will help maintain the high-level of personnel readiness enjoyed by the Nation's defense posture.

Last year, this Congress in the Fiscal 2000 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) approved a 4.8 percent pay raise for uniformed services personnel, one of the largest increases in recent history. It also authorized pay reform for certain mid-grade commissioned officers and mid-career enlisted service members effective July 1, 2000. While the pay raise itself is a critical step for our military personnel, the pay adjustment unfortunately will miss its mark in offering equitable reform for mid-grade enlisted noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and petty officers (POs) of the Armed Forces in grades E-5, E-6, and E-7.

Whereas, most mid-grade commissioned officers were to receive a well-deserved pay hike on July 1, 2000, mid-career enlisted NCOs and POs are targeted for minimal increases. The July 1, 2000 pay reform will provide for adjustments in 15 of 33 mid-grade officer pay cells, each of which rated increases greater than 4 percent. On the other hand, of the 33 mid-grade enlisted NCO/PO pay cells, only one (1) will receive a raise of 3.5 percent, two (2) are being offered a 3.1 percent increase, one (1) a 2.5 percent hike, and three (3) at 2.1 percent to 2.3 percent. It doesn't require a mathematician to figure out that the enlisted NCOs and POs will be largely left out of the equation.

Most of the military services are experiencing problems either in recruiting and retention, or both. One of the major issues confronting enlisted NCOs and POs is whether they have enough financial resources to care for their family—particularly when they are deployed. Recent surveys indicate that service members are not happy with the pay they're receiving. Recognizing this problem, the Fleet Reserve Association (FRA), a 75-year-old organization of career Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen, prepared a study that demonstrates the value of basic pay for enlisted NCOs and POs has diminished since the advent of the all-volunteer force (AVF). That study, which was distributed to a number of House and Senate members on both the Armed Services Committees and Defense Subcommittees and to selected defense and military officials, proves the value of basic pay for enlisted NCOs and POs has diminished since the advent of the all-volunteer force.

If Congress doesn't want to face the same problem of the late 1970s having too few enlisted petty officers to get its ships to sea, or experiencing another shortage of enlisted NCOs for the Army's combat forces, Congress must address the retention of qualified and experienced mid-career enlisted service members. This pay reform proposal for E-5's, E-6's and E-7's contained in this legislation will take steps to do just that.

Each E-5 with 8 to 26 years of service would receive a \$31 per month increase in basic pay on July 1, 2000. E-6s, in the same years would each realize a monthly increase of \$49, and E-7s a \$56 raise each month. While I believe all of our military should be paid more, this is an important step in the right direction.

This bill has the full support of the Nation's eight national enlisted military organizations; the Air Force Sergeants Association, the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States, the Fleet Reserve Association, the Naval Enlisted Reserve Association, the Non Commissioned Officers Association, the Retired Enlisted Association, the U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association, and the U.S. Coast Guard Enlisted Association.

These mid-career non-commissioned officers and petty officers are the backbone of our military. I hope that my colleagues will work with me to recognize that fact and to ensure they are provided pay table reform that is both fair and equitable.

DIGITAL DIVIDE ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY ACT (DATA)

HON. JERRY WELLER

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 13, 2000

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join with my colleague, JOHN LEWIS of Georgia, to introduce H.R. 4274, the Digital Divide Access to Technology Act of 2000 (DATA Act). The DATA Act addresses a rather new situation which involves employers providing home computers to their employees.

Over the past couple of months, four major companies—Ford Motor Company, American Airlines, Delta Airlines, and Intel—have announced programs to provide home computers to their employees. The question before us is whether employer-provided home computers should be considered taxable income to the employees.

I believe that the government should not tax these computers and the legislation we are introducing today will ensure that these basic computers do not become a tax liability for the employees.

The DATA Act is a digital divide issue and it represents a powerful partnership between private companies and the government as we work to reduce the so-called digital divide and create new digital opportunities. These home computers will be available to employees and their families for work and personal use. Once in the home, the computers can be used by employees for Internet training, by the children for homework and research, and other family members to balance the family budget and stay in touch with far-away relatives. There are no restrictions on the use of the computers.

For tax purposes, the DATA Act treats the Internet access and first \$1,260 of the value of a computer and peripheral equipment (e.g., monitors, printers and keyboards), including software, and Internet access as a fringe benefit, not subject to income tax. For the program to qualify, employers have to provide computers to substantially all employees working in the United States and employees can receive only one computer within a 36 month time period.

If the employer offers a program allowing employees to purchase an upgraded "or deluxe" model computer, the first \$1,260 in value is still non-taxable, employees can pay for the

deluxe version if they choose. Additionally, if employees are required to pay a monthly co-payment for the computer, such as the \$5 monthly responsibility of Ford employees, this payment does not factor into the value of the computer. Let me give you an example of how this works.

The 350,000 employees at Ford Motor Company will soon receive a home computer which costs \$24.95 per month over 36 months, for a total of \$898. The employees pay \$5 per month, or \$180 over 3 years, for the computer. Ford pays \$19.95 per month for each employee, or almost \$720 over 3 years. The \$720 paid by Ford for the computers falls far below the \$1,260 exclusion provided by this legislation. This program is available to all employees working for Ford. This includes everyone from the janitor, to the union worker, to the managers, and the Vice Presidents.

Mr. Speaker, these companies are likely to be only the first of many companies to provide home computers to their employees. I strongly believe this is an important way we, as policymakers, can work with corporations to help put more computers into the hands of American families and children. This legislation will help us close the digital divide and provide digital opportunities to hundreds of thousands of families currently without this equipment which is rapidly becoming a necessity for survival in the 21st century economy.

I look forward to working with these and other employers to continue developing this legislation to make it easier for these computers to be taken home by employees. I also look forward to working with the House Leadership, Chairman ARCHER, my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, as well as the Administration to ensure that this powerful mechanism available to close the digital divide is fully utilized.

RECOGNIZING THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP OF THE ASPEN SKI COMPANY

HON. DIANA DeGETTE

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 13, 2000

Mr. DeGETTE. Mr. Speaker, today I recognize the Aspen Skiing Company as a leader in environmental responsibility.

This is certainly not the first commendation the Aspen Skiing Company has received. In 1999 alone, the company became the first back to back winner of the Golden Eagle Award for Overall Environmental Excellence in the ski industry. It was the first skiing company and only U.S. business to receive the prestigious British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Environmental Award. Additionally, the Aspen Skiing Company was recognized by the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation for its outstanding environmental educational programs.

As the award judges for the Golden Eagle Award noted, "Aspen Skiing Company's programs show a wide-range and detailed commitment to an ecological perspective in every area of their business." I whole-heartedly agree that the Aspen Skiing Company has,

"without peer, established itself as an industry leader in environmentalism."

But Aspen is not resting on its laurels. The Skiing Company continues to develop innovative environmental programs and partnerships to protect the forests in which it resides and its commitment to the local community. The Aspen Skiing Company has entered into a cooperative with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment to develop a pollution prevention based environmental management strategy that focuses on energy and waste conservation, and solid waste reduction to be used as a model for the skiing industry. It has developed a Natural Resource Management Plan to ensure vegetative diversity and wildlife protection on its mountains. The Aspen Skiing Company founded the Environment Foundation, a nonprofit, employee-funded and directed foundation which awarded more than \$120,000 to 34 diverse local environmental groups since its inception, and continues to protect local habitat, ecosystems, and biodiversity.

Aspen Skiing Company continues to be a leader in environmentally sensitive development, not only within the ski industry, but all industry. Aspen's efforts to reduce the impact it has on the land, and conserve habitat and resources are exemplified by two of its recent projects, the Sundeck Restaurant and the Cirque Lift.

The Sundeck Restaurant, at the top of the mountain is on tract to be a fully certified "green building." The effort began with the deconstruction, rather than demolition of the old building, enabling materials to be salvaged and reused. The new building will utilize the latest "green" technology, including energy efficient windows, low toxicity paints, and recycled and recyclable materials.

When the Aspen Skiing Company decided to construct a new lift above tree line, it recognized the sensitivity of this ecosystem and proceeded accordingly. The construction of the Cirque Lift was completed without bulldozers or mechanized ground equipment. The heavy items for the lift, such as the lift poles and concrete, were airlifted by helicopter while all other supplies were carried up on foot, an astounding task at high elevation that speaks volumes to the company's commitment to protecting this delicate ecosystem. The lift itself continues that commitment, as it is the State of Colorado's first wind powered ski lift.

Aspen Skiing Company has also shown leadership in the public realm advocating for the protection of public lands and open spaces, which are so important to Colorado's wildlife and the quality of life for all Americans.

I have no doubt that the Aspen Skiing Company will continue to be a leader in efforts to protect the environment. I applaud their accomplishments.