Since its inception in 1996, the Wetlands Reserve Program has restored over one million acres of former wetlands to the benefit of waterfowl and wildlife species while providing financial relief to struggling farm families. The program has been so successful, in fact, that for every five farmers that wish to enroll in the WRP, only one is accepted. This clearly shows how popular the program is with farmers and wildlife enthusiasts.

In my home state of Mississippi, the WRP has proven to be extremely popular with private landowners, and for good reason. With commodity prices being as low as they are, the program is a great benefit to Mississippi farmers who could not otherwise afford to stay on their land or pass it on to future generations.

Across the country, thousands of landowners have discovered that the WRP is an attractive alternative to farming high-risk and high-cost crop land and difficult to raising flooding. The WRP provides the necessary, voluntary incentives to restore such areas to wetlands. The landowner, in turn, is free to use his or her WRP incentive payment to refinance debt, upgrade machinery, or to buy additional land that will make their farming operations more profitable.

This additional land enrolled in the program not only benefits farmers, but also wildlife and wildlife habitat. In the Mississippi Delta states, most WRP land is planted in high-quality hardwood trees that flood in the winter and provide critical habitat for waterfowl and other species. In fact, the WRP has become one of the largest and most successful wetland restoration programs ever attempted on private lands.

The program is also restoring waterfowl breeding habitat in states like South Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin to name a few. It is restoring migration habitat across the United States including Illinois, Iowa, Ohio, and New York. Most of all, the WRP is restoring wintering habitat in such diverse states as California's Central Valley and Louisiana.

As the Co-Chairman of the Congressional Sportsmen’s Caucus and a lifelong supporter of Ducks Unlimited, I recognize another wonderful benefit of the Wetlands Reserve Program. Like many states, the Great State of Mississippi honors a proud waterfowl hunting tradition. Every day the WRP helps improve waterfowl populations and enhance wetlands habitat to create new opportunities for sportsmen and women to participate in the time-honored tradition of duck hunting. As the father of five young boys, I am blessed with the opportunity to pass along this tradition frequently. I savor the memories of early morning duck hunts that I had with my father and grandfather as a young boy. These opportunities taught me a deep respect for the outdoors and helped me to develop a deep appreciation for nature and wildlife. These are opportunities and values that I am passing down to my own sons, and providing waterfowl habitat through programs like the WRP help make it all possible.

Mr. Speaker, my legislation authorizes up to $250,000 of marginal farm land to be enrolled in the WRP through 2005. It is exactly the kind of non-regulatory conservation program that landowners want and wildlife need as we begin our entrance into the next century. I urge my colleagues to join with me and the original cosponsors of the Wetlands Reserve Program Enhancement Act to ensure that this program remains a viable option to farmers, wildlife, and the environment.

UPON INTRODUCTION OF PRISON INMATE ACT OF 2001

HON. FRANK R. WOLF
OF VIRGINIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing the Federal Inmate Work Act of 2001, a bill to help reduce crime by providing federal inmates real-world job skills while in prison. This bill would reform Federal Prison Industries so it can do more to rehabilitate our prison population before prisoners are let back out into society. Besides reducing crime through better rehabilitation of our inmate population, this legislation will improve the U.S. economy. It will create jobs by returning industries now operated by the U.S. government directly to the private sector and allowing private companies to compete with FPI for federal contracts.

This legislation reforms Federal Prison Industries in a number of ways. First, it would allow private companies in the United States to use federal inmate labor to produce items that would otherwise be produced by foreign labor. It would phase out the mandatory source requirement for federal agency purchases from Federal Prison Industries and put them under the same authority and standards that govern state prison employment programs. It allows for increased collection for child support and victim restitution. It reduces the cost of incarceration by increasing collections for rooms and board costs. It requires that FPI establish goals for contracts with small, minority or women-owned businesses. It would also allow a convicted felon to use any skill and training received in prison to gain employment after release.

Mr. Speaker, today, there are more than 1.9 million Americans behind bars and the prison population continues to rise at an alarming rate. Approximately a quarter of those prisoners complete their sentences every year and return to society. Most of those former inmates, however, have never had a real job. Within the federal system, there were 145,125 inmates confined at the end of FY 2000. Current projections indicate that the federal inmate population will rise to more than 300,000 by the end of FY 2007.

We just cannot continue to lock up thousands of men and women every year and hope that they will somehow mysteriously re-establish themselves in prison without learning a skill. We cannot continue to allow federal prisons to become finishing schools for crime, where criminals are paroled as experts in their field. This old adage that “idleness is the devil’s workshop” reaffirms what can happen when an inmate’s time is not productively occupied.

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money from prisoners and put it into a general fund without earmarking it for their victim are merely fines. Restitution in the true sense, requires that the offender directly compensate the victim and therefore require the offender to acknowledge their responsibility to the victim.

This legislation reforms FPI in a way that will allow us to do a better job of rehabilitating our rising inmate population and reducing the crime rate of released inmates. At the same time, it will help the U.S. economy and will be a better deal for the U.S. taxpayers. I encourage my colleagues to cosponsor this legislation, and support the FPI's mission to rehabilitate our inmates by providing an opportunity for inmates to gain meaningful employment skills and come out of prison as productive members of society.

GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS OF THE U.S. LEASING INDUSTRY

HON. JIM McCREADY
OF LOUISIANA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mr. McCREADY. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing a bill that would eliminate a provision of the tax code which hinders the global competitiveness of the U.S. leasing industry.

The leasing industry is important to the U.S. role in the global economy. Our manufacturers use leasing as a means to finance exports of their goods, and many have leasing subsidiaries that arrange for such financing. Many U.S. financial companies also arrange lease financing as one of their core services. The activities of these companies support U.S. jobs and investment.

Enacted in 1984, the depreciation rules governing tax-exempt use property (referred to as the "Pickle rules") operate to place U.S. companies at a competitive disadvantage in overseas markets because of the adverse impact of the Pickle rules on cost recovery. U.S. lessors are unable in many cases to offer U.S.-manufactured equipment to overseas customers on terms that are competitive with those offered by their foreign competitors.

Many European countries, for example, provide far more favorable depreciation rules for home-country lessors leasing equipment manufactured in the home country.

There is no compelling tax policy rationale for maintaining the Pickle rules as they apply to export leases. The Pickle rules were enacted in part to address situations where the economic benefit of accelerated depreciation and the investment tax credit were indirectly transferred to foreign entities not subject to U.S. tax through reduced rentals under a lease. That rationale no longer applies. The investment tax credit was repealed in 1986, and property used outside the United States generally is no longer eligible for accelerated depreciation. The present-law requirement that property leased to foreign entities or persons be depreciated over 125 percent of the lease term simply operates as an impediment to U.S. participation in global leasing markets.

The global leasing markets have expanded dramatically since 1984. The competitive pressures on U.S. businesses from their foreign counterparts have increased dramatically. Repealing the Pickle rules as they apply to U.S. exports will strengthen the competitiveness of the U.S. leasing industry and promote U.S. jobs and investment.

I am pleased my friend and colleague from California, Mr. MATSUI, is introducing similar legislation and look forward to working with him and others to unshackle the leasing industry from these outdated constraints.

WOMEN'S OBSTETRICIAN AND GYNECOLOGIST MEDICAL ACCESS NOW ACT

HON. SUSAN DAVIS
OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing the Women's Obstetrician and Gynecologist Medical Access Now Act, the WOMAN Act. This bill will ensure that every woman has direct access to her ob-gyn. When I served in the California Assembly, I heard from many women that they were being denied access or had to jump through numerous bureaucratic hoops to see their ob-gyn. Statistics show that if there are too many barriers between a woman and her doctor, she is much less likely to get the medical care she needs. This is simply unacceptable. A woman should not need a permission slip to see her doctor. Ob-gyns provide basic, critical health care for women. Women have different medical needs than men, and ob-gyns often have the most appropriate medical education and experience to address a woman's health care needs.

It is not hard to see what a difference direct ob-gyn access makes in women's health care. Imagine a working woman in San Diego who has a urgent medical problem that requires an appointment with her ob-gyn. She works forty-five hours a week and has limited sick and vacation time. On Monday she calls from work to make an appointment with her primary care physician. If she is lucky, she gets an appointment for Tuesday morning and takes time off to go see her doctor. Her doctor agrees she should be seen by her ob-gyn and gives her a referral. Tuesday afternoon she returns to work and calls her ob-gyn. The doctor is in surgery on Wednesday, but they offer her an appointment on Friday morning. On Friday she takes another morning off work and finally gets the care she needs. This unnecessary referral process has resulted in her taking an extra day off work and delayed her proper medical care by 5 days. The patient, employee, primary care physician, and health plan provider would have saved money and time if the patient had been able to go directly to her ob-gyn.

A recent American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists/Priceton survey of ob-gyns showed that 60% of all ob-gyns in managed care reported that their patients are either limited or barred from seeing their ob-gyns without first getting permission from another physician. Nearly 75% also reported that their patients have to return to their primary care physician for permission before they can see their ob-gyn for necessary follow-up care. Equally astounding is that 28% of the ob-gyns surveyed reported that even pregnant women must first receive another physician's permission before seeing an ob-gyn.

After meeting with women, obstetricians and gynecologists, health plans, and providers in the State of California, I wrote a state law that gives women direct access to their ob-gyn. That law was a good first step; however, it still does not cover over 4.3 million Californians enrolled in self-insured, federally regulated health plans. Clearly, this problem is not unique to California. There are still eight states that do not guarantee a woman direct access to her ob-gyn. Equally important to remember is that even if a woman lives in a state with direct access protections, like California, she may not be able to see her ob-gyn without a referral if she is covered by a federally regulated ERISA health plan. This means that one in three insured families are not protected by state direct access to ob-gyn laws. The time has come to make direct access to an ob-gyn a national standard.

I urge you, Mr. Speaker, and all of my colleagues to pass this critical legislation quickly into law.

FAIRNESS AND EQUITY FOR SPOUSES OF FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICERS

HON. JAMES P. MORAN
OF VIRGINIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation to correct an inequity that affects a number of spouses of Foreign Service Officers in my district and throughout the nation who served in part-time, intermittent, or temporary positions (PITs) in American embassies and missions from 1989 to 1998.

Although countless Foreign Service spouses have given up their own careers to follow officers overseas, many of them hope to continue government service, whether assigned to an embassy or here in Washington. In fact, hundreds have gone to work for the Department of State as civil service employees while their spouses were serving domestically. When the time has come for Foreign Service family members to check their retirement status, many are shocked to hear that the years they worked overseas will not count for retirement purposes.

PIT employees are excluded from receiving credit in the Federal Employees Retirement System because of the generally non-permanent nature of their employment. However, Foreign Service spouses who worked as PITs had no choice over the type of work they performed. These individuals had to take PIT positions because these jobs were the only ones available to them while living abroad. They had no choice between part-time, temporary government work and full-time, permanent work. Even those who worked full-time were still classified as PITs.

The exceptional nature of their situation is reflected in the Department of State's reclassifying this group of workers in 1998 as falling