H. R. 928

To amend the Electronic Fund Transfer Act to extend certain consumer protections to international remittance transfers of funds originating in the United States, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 17, 2005

Mr. Gutierrez (for himself, Mr. Frank of Massachusetts, Mrs. Maloney, Mr. Hinojosa, Mr. Meeks of New York, Ms. Solis, Ms. Waters, Mr. Crowley, Mr. Al Green of Texas, Ms. Lee, Mr. Ackerman, and Ms. Wasserman Schultz) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services, and in addition to the Committee on International Relations, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To amend the Electronic Fund Transfer Act to extend certain consumer protections to international remittance transfers of funds originating in the United States, and for other purposes.

- 1 Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
- 2 tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
- 3 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.
- 4 This Act may be cited as the "International Remit-
- 5 tance Consumer Protection Act of 2005".

1 SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

- 2 The Congress finds as follows:
- 3 (1) In 2003, worker remittances from the 4 United States to Latin America reached 5 \$31,000,000,000 and that volume is expected to rise 6 as the region is both the fastest growing remittance
- 7 market in the world and has the highest volume of
- 8 remittances in the world.
- 9 (2) Of the \$31,000,000,000 in remittances to
 10 Latin America, \$14,000,000,000 went to Mexico: an
 11 amount exceeding the country's total revenues from
 12 tourism, and representing more than 2/3 of the value
 13 of petroleum exports and roughly 180 percent of the
 14 amount of agricultural exports.
 - (3) Remittances account for at least 10 percent of the gross domestic product of 6 countries in Latin America: Haiti, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Guyana.
 - (4) The Declaration of Nuevo León from the January 2004 Special Summit of the Americas recognized that ". . . remittances are an important source of capital in many countries of the Hemisphere . . .".
- 24 (5) The Declaration of Nuevo León also com-25 mitted the countries of the Americas to ". . . take 26 concrete actions to promote the establishment, as

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- soon as possible, of necessary conditions, in order to achieve the goal of reducing by at least half the regional average cost of these transfers no later than 2008".
 - (6) Studies have shown that that, on average, around 10 percent of remittances received are saved or invested by the recipients which supports 2 conclusions: That some percentage of recipients are therefore in a position to use remittance money to create new businesses and that financial institutions can also use remittances as the basis of credit for entrepreneurs starting small or micro-enterprises.
 - (7) Since affordable, long-term mortgages are not widely available in many countries of the Western Hemisphere, financial institutions can increase the number of mortgages they provide to poor people in the region by using remittances as the basis for credit.
 - (8) The Multilateral Investment Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank estimates that in February of 2004, the average cost in the United States of sending a remittance to a Latin American country was roughly 8 percent of the amount remitted.

- 1 (9) The Multilateral Investment Fund also esti2 mates that roughly 61 percent of adult foreign-born
 3 Hispanic persons living in the United States, about
 4 10,000,000 people, send remittances to their coun5 tries of origin in Latin America and that the amount
 6 of the average remittance to Latin America ranges
 7 between \$200 and \$300.
 - (10) The Multilateral Investment Fund estimates that the States of California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey each remit more than \$1,000,000,000 annually to Latin America, and will account for \$21,700,000,000, or roughly 70 percent of the \$31,000,000,000 in remittances going to Latin America in 2004.
 - (11) Recent surveys show that nearly 80 percent of individuals sending remittances use international money transfer companies, and fewer than 10 percent use banks and credit unions.
 - (12) Roughly ½ of Latin American immigrants in the United States hold bank accounts, and only 10 percent of the recipients in Latin America of remittances from the United States hold bank accounts.
- 24 (13) Individuals and families without access to 25 the banking system, in the United States and else-

- where in the Americas, pay higher fees, have difficulty conducting financial transactions, and lack the ability to establish credit records or obtain other benefits from financial institutions.
 - (14) The Federal banking agencies (as defined in section 3 of the Federal Deposit Insurance Act) recently agreed to notify financial institutions that the remittances services they offer to consumers can receive consideration in any evaluation under the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 as both a retail service, and as a community development service if remittances serve to increase access to financial services by low- and moderate-income individuals.
 - (15) The Federal banking agencies also agreed that current regulations under the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 provide for a distinction between the mere provision of remittances services by a financial institution and the "responsiveness" of such services to the financial services needs of lowand moderate-income individuals—thereby allowing for the consideration of lower cost remittances services in an evaluation under such Act.
 - (16) The increased participation of regulated financial institutions, such as banks, savings associations, and credit unions, holds the potential for re-

- ducing the costs of remittances while at the same 1 2 offering the opportunity to "bank the 3 unbanked" in Latin American immigrant commu-4 nities in the United States. SEC. 3. TREATMENT OF REMITTANCE TRANSFERS. 6 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Electronic Fund Transfer Act (15 U.S.C. 1693 et seg.) is amended— (1) in section 902(b), by inserting "and remit-8 9 tance" after "electronic fund"; 10 (2) by redesignating sections 918, 919, 920, 11 and 921 as sections 919, 920, 921, and 922, respec-12 tively; and 13 (3) by inserting after section 917 the following: 14 "SEC. 918. REMITTANCE TRANSFERS. 15 "(a) Disclosures Required for Remittance 16 Transfers.— "(1) IN GENERAL.—Each remittance transfer 17 18 provider shall make disclosures to consumers, as 19 specified by this section and augmented by regula-20 tion of the Board.
- "(2) SPECIFIC DISCLOSURES.—In addition to any other disclosures applicable under this title, a remittance transfer provider shall clearly and conspicuously disclose, in writing and in a form that the

1	consumer may keep, to each consumer requesting a
2	remittance transfer—
3	"(A) at the time at which the consumer
4	makes the request, and prior to the consumer
5	making any payment in connection with the
6	transfer—
7	"(i) the total amount of currency that
8	will be required to be tendered by the con-
9	sumer in connection with the remittance
10	transfer;
11	"(ii) the amount of currency that will
12	be sent to the designated recipient of the
13	remittance transfer, using the values of the
14	currency into which the funds will be ex-
15	changed;
16	"(iii) the total remittance transfer
17	cost, identified as the 'Total Cost'; and
18	"(iv) an itemization of the charges in-
19	cluded in clause (iii), as determined nec-
20	essary by the Board; and
21	"(B) at the time at which the consumer
22	makes payment in connection with the remit-
23	tance transfer, if any—
24	"(i) a receipt showing—

1	"(I) the information described in
2	subparagraph (A);
3	"(II) the promised date of deliv-
4	ery;
5	"(III) the name and telephone
6	number or address of the designated
7	recipient; and
8	"(ii) a notice containing—
9	"(I) information about the rights
10	of the consumer under this section to
11	resolve errors; and
12	"(II) appropriate contact infor-
13	mation for the remittance transfer
14	provider and its State licensing au-
15	thority and Federal or State regu-
16	lator, as applicable.
17	"(3) Exemption authority.—The Board
18	may, by rule, and subject to subsection (d)(3), per-
19	mit a remittance transfer provider—
20	"(A) to satisfy the requirements of para-
21	graph (2)(A) orally if the transaction is con-
22	ducted entirely by telephone;
23	"(B) to satisfy the requirements of para-
24	graph (2)(B) by mailing the documents re-
25	quired under such paragraph to the consumer

not later than 1 business day after the date on which the transaction is conducted, if the transaction is conducted entirely by telephone; and

> "(C) to satisfy the requirements of subparagraphs (A) and (B) of paragraph (2) with 1 written disclosure, but only to the extent that the information provided in accordance with paragraph (2)(A) is accurate at the time at which payment is made in connection with the subject remittance transfer.

"(b) Foreign Language Disclosures.—The dislosures required under this section shall be made in English and in the same languages principally used by the remittance transfer provider, or any of its agents, to advertise, solicit, or market, either orally or in writing, at that office, if other than English.

"(c) Remittance Transfer Errors.—

"(1) Error resolution.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—If a remittance transfer provider receives oral or written notice from the consumer within 365 days of the promised date of delivery that an error occurred with respect to a remittance transfer, including that the full amount of the funds to be remitted was not made available to the designated recipient

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1	in the foreign country, the remittance transfer
2	provider shall resolve the error pursuant to this
3	subsection.
4	"(B) Remedies.—Not later than 90 days
5	after the date of receipt of a notice from the
6	consumer pursuant to subparagraph (A), the
7	remittance transfer provider shall, as applicable
8	to the error and as designated by the con-
9	sumer—
10	"(i) refund to the consumer the total
11	amount of funds tendered by the consumer
12	in connection with the remittance transfer
13	which was not properly transmitted;
14	"(ii) make available to the designated
15	recipient, without additional cost to the
16	designated recipient or to the consumer,
17	the amount appropriate to resolve the
18	error;
19	"(iii) provide such other remedy, as
20	determined appropriate by rule of the
21	Board for the protection of consumers; or
22	"(iv) demonstrate to the consumer
23	that there was no error.
24	"(2) Regulations.—The Board shall estab-
25	lish, by regulation, clear and appropriate standards

1	for remittance transfer providers with respect to
2	error resolution relating to remittance transfers, to
3	protect consumers from such errors.
4	"(d) Applicability of Other Provisions of
5	Law.—
6	"(1) Applicability of title 18 and title 31
7	PROVISIONS.—A remittance transfer provider may
8	only provide remittance transfers if such provider is
9	in compliance with the requirements of section 5330
10	of title 31, United States Code, and section 1960 of
11	title 18, United States Code, as applicable.
12	"(2) Applicability of this title.—
13	"(A) Exclusions for certain remit-
14	TANCES.—A remittance transfer that is not an
15	electronic fund transfer, as defined in section
16	903, shall not be subject to any of sections 905
17	through 913.
18	"(B) Full applicability for certain
19	REMITTANCES.—A remittance transfer that is
20	an electronic fund transfer, as defined in sec-
21	tion 903, shall be subject to all provisions of
22	this title that are otherwise applicable to elec-
23	tronic fund transfers under this title.
24	"(3) Rule of Construction.—Nothing in
25	this section shall be construed—

1 "(A) to affect the application to any trans-2 action, to any remittance provider, or to any 3 other person of any of the provisions of sub-4 chapter II of chapter 53 of title 31, United 5 States Code, section 21 of the Federal Deposit 6 Insurance Act, or chapter 2 of title I of Public 7 Law 91–508, or any regulations promulgated 8 thereunder; or

> "(B) to cause any fund transfer that would not otherwise be treated as such under paragraph (2) to be treated as an electronic fund transfer, or as otherwise subject to this title, for the purposes of any of the provisions referred to in subparagraph (A) or any regulation prescribed under such subparagraph.

"(e) Publication of Exchange Rates.—The Secretary of the Treasury shall make available to the public in electronic form, not later than noon on each business day, the dollar exchange rate for all foreign currencies, using any methodology that the Secretary determines appropriate, which may include the methodology used pursuant to section 613(b) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

"(f) Agents and Subsidiaries.—A remittance

transfer provider shall be liable for any violation of this

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- 1 section by any agent or subsidiary of that remittance
- 2 transfer provider.

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- 3 "(g) Definitions.—For purposes of this section, the
- 4 following definitions shall apply:
- "(1) EXCHANGE RATE FEE.—The term 'ex-5 6 change rate fee' means the difference between the 7 total dollar amount transferred, valued at the ex-8 change rate offered by the remittance transfer pro-9 vider, and the total dollar amount transferred, val-10 ued at the exchange rate posted by the Secretary of 11 the Treasury in accordance with subsection (e) on 12 the business day prior to the initiation of the subject 13 remittance transfer.
 - "(2) Remittance transfer' means the electronic (as defined in section 106(2) of the Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act) transfer of funds at the request of a consumer located in any State to a person in another country that is initiated by a remittance transfer provider, whether or not the consumer is an account holder of the remittance transfer provider or whether or not the remittance transfer is also an electronic fund transfer, as defined in section 903.

- 1 "(3) Remittance transfer provider.—The
 2 term 'remittance transfer provider' means any per3 son or financial institution that provides remittance
 4 transfers on behalf of consumers in the normal
 5 course of its business, whether or not the consumer
 6 is an account holder of that person or financial insti7 tution.
- 6 "(4) STATE.—Notwithstanding the definition 9 contained in section 903, the term 'State' means any 10 of the several States, the Commonwealth of Puerto 11 Rico, the District of Columbia, and any territory or 12 possession of the United States.
- 13 "(5) TOTAL REMITTANCE TRANSFER COST.—
 14 The term 'total remittance transfer cost' means the
 15 total cost of a remittance transfer expressed in dol16 lars, including all fees charged by the remittance
 17 transfer provider, including the exchange rate fee.".
- 18 (b) EFFECT ON STATE LAWS.—Section 919 of the 19 Electronic Fund Transfer Act (12 U.S.C. 1693q) is 20 amended—
- 21 (1) in the 1st sentence, by inserting "or remit-22 tance transfers (as defined in section 918)" after 23 "transfers"; and
- 24 (2) in the 2nd sentence, by inserting ", or re-25 mittance transfer providers (as defined in section

1	918), in the case of remittance transfers," after "fi-
2	nancial institutions".
3	SEC. 4. FEDERAL CREDIT UNION ACT AMENDMENT.
4	Paragraph (12) of section 107 of the Federal Credit
5	Union Act (12 U.S.C. 1757(12)) is amended to read as
6	follows:
7	"(12) in accordance with regulations prescribed
8	by the Board—
9	"(A) to provide remittance transfers, as
10	defined in section 918(h) of the Electronic
11	Fund Transfer Act, to persons in the field of
12	membership; and
13	"(B) to cash checks and money orders for
14	persons in the field of membership for a fee;".
15	SEC. 5. AUTOMATED CLEARINGHOUSE SYSTEM.
16	(a) Expansion of System.—The Board of Gov-
17	ernors of the Federal Reserve System shall work with the
18	Federal reserve banks to expand the use of the automated
19	clearinghouse system for remittance transfers to foreign
20	countries, with a focus on countries that receive significant
21	remittance transfers from the United States, based on—
22	(1) the number, volume, and sizes of such
23	transfers;

1	(2) the significance of the volume of such trans-
2	fers, relative to the external financial flows of the re-
3	ceiving country; and
4	(3) the feasibility of such an expansion.
5	(b) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Before the end of the
6	180-day period beginning on the date of the enactment
7	of this Act, and on April 30 biannually thereafter, the
8	Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System shall
9	submit a report to the Committee on Banking, Housing,
10	and Urban Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on
11	Financial Services of the House of Representatives on the
12	status of the automated clearinghouse system and its
13	progress in complying with the requirements of this sec-
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14 15	tion. SEC. 6. EXPANSION OF FINANCIAL INSTITUTION PROVI-
14 15 16 17	tion. SEC. 6. EXPANSION OF FINANCIAL INSTITUTION PROVI- SION OF REMITTANCE TRANSFERS.
14 15 16 17	tion. SEC. 6. EXPANSION OF FINANCIAL INSTITUTION PROVISION OF REMITTANCE TRANSFERS. (a) Provision of Guidelines to Institutions.—
14 15 16 17	tion. SEC. 6. EXPANSION OF FINANCIAL INSTITUTION PROVI- SION OF REMITTANCE TRANSFERS. (a) Provision of Guidelines to Institutions.— Each of the Federal banking agencies (as defined in sec-
14 15 16 17 18	tion. SEC. 6. EXPANSION OF FINANCIAL INSTITUTION PROVISION OF REMITTANCE TRANSFERS. (a) PROVISION OF GUIDELINES TO INSTITUTIONS.— Each of the Federal banking agencies (as defined in section 3 of the Federal Deposit Insurance Act) and the Na-
14 15 16 17 18 19 20	tion. SEC. 6. EXPANSION OF FINANCIAL INSTITUTION PROVI- SION OF REMITTANCE TRANSFERS. (a) PROVISION OF GUIDELINES TO INSTITUTIONS.— Each of the Federal banking agencies (as defined in section 3 of the Federal Deposit Insurance Act) and the National Credit Union Administration shall provide guide-
14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21	sec. 6. Expansion of financial institution provision of Remittance transfers. (a) Provision of Guidelines to Institutions.— Each of the Federal banking agencies (as defined in section 3 of the Federal Deposit Insurance Act) and the National Credit Union Administration shall provide guidelines to financial institutions under the jurisdiction of the

1	(2) the availability of agency services to remit-
2	tance transfer providers; and
3	(3) specific options for financial institutions to
4	use to take advantage of automated clearing sys-
5	tems, including the FedACH International Services
6	offered by the Board of Governors of the Federal
7	Reserve System and the Federal reserve banks, to
8	transmit remittances at low cost.
9	(b) Content of Guidelines.—Guidelines provided
10	to financial institutions under this section shall include—
11	(1) information as to the methods of providing
12	remittance transfer services;
13	(2) the potential economic opportunities in pro-
14	viding low-cost remittance transfers; and
15	(3) the potential value to financial institutions
16	of broadening their financial bases to include per-
17	sons that use remittance transfers.
18	(c) Assistance to Financial Literacy Commis-
19	SION.—The Secretary of the Treasury and each agency
20	referred to in subsection (a) shall, as part of their duties
21	as members of the Financial Literacy and Education Com-
22	mission, assist that Commission in improving the financial
23	literacy and education of consumers who send remittances.
24	(d) Multimedia Campaign.—The Secretary of the
25	Treasury shall, as part of the national public service multi-

- 1 media campaign established under section 518(a) of the
- 2 Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003, un-
- 3 dertake a multilingual multimedia campaign to inform
- 4 populations that are remittance users of the low-cost op-
- 5 tions for remittance transfers available to them, such as
- 6 services provided by depository institutions and credit
- 7 unions.
- 8 SEC. 7. AID ASSISTANCE TO INCREASE CAPITAL AND
- 9 LOWER REMITTANCE TRANSFER COSTS.
- 10 (a) In General.—Part I of the Foreign Assistance
- 11 Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2151 et seq.) is amended by add-
- 12 ing at the end the following:
- 13 "CHAPTER 13—SOCIAL INVESTMENT AND
- 14 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOR THE
- 15 **AMERICAS**
- 16 "SEC. 499H. FACILITATING FLOWS OF PERSONAL REMIT-
- 17 TANCES.
- 18 "(a) IN GENERAL.—The President, acting through
- 19 the Administrator of the United States Agency for Inter-
- 20 national Development, shall provide assistance to leverage
- 21 personal remittances and reduce the cost of remittances
- 22 sent to Latin America and the Caribbean by—
- "(1) increasing access to financial institutions
- for the poor and working with local financial institu-

- tions to reduce fees and other costs associated with
 sending or receiving remittances;
- "(2) working with local financial institutions to develop programs whereby personal remittances could be used as the basis of credit for mortgages and loans for small business, microenterprises, housing, and other enterprises; and
- 8 "(3) providing matching funds for United 9 States' private entities that send remittances for de-10 velopment projects in Latin America and the Carib-11 bean.
- 12 "(b) Implementation.—The United States Agency
- 13 for International Development shall follow the best prac-
- 14 tices of the Inter-American Development Bank and other
- 15 appropriate organizations when designing and imple-
- 16 menting programs that leverage personal remittances and
- 17 reduce the cost of remittances sent to Latin America and
- 18 the Caribbean.".
- 19 (b) GAO STUDY REGARDING THE EFFECTIVENESS
- 20 and Success of Pilot Projects Implemented by
- 21 THE UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DE-
- 22 VELOPMENT.—
- 23 (1) Study.—The Comptroller General of the
- United States shall conduct a study on the effective-
- 25 ness and success of the pilot projects that have been

- 1 implemented by the United States Agency for Inter-
- 2 national Development's missions in Mexico, El Sal-
- 3 vador, and Jamaica, and through the United States
- 4 Agency for International Development's Global De-
- 5 velopment Alliance.
- 6 (2) Report.—Before the end of the 1-year pe-
- 7 riod beginning on the date of the enactment of this
- 8 Act, the Comptroller General shall submit a report
- 9 to the Congress on the findings and conclusions re-
- sulting from the study conducted under paragraph
- 11 (1), together with such recommendations for legisla-
- tive or administrative action as the Comptroller Gen-
- eral may determine to be appropriate.
- 14 SEC. 8. INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK ASSIST-
- 15 ANCE TO FACILITATE FLOWS OF PERSONAL
- 16 REMITTANCES.
- 17 The Inter-American Development Bank Act (22
- 18 U.S.C. 283—283z–10) is amended by adding at the end
- 19 the following new section:
- 20 "SEC. 39. FACILITATING FLOWS OF PERSONAL REMIT-
- 21 TANCES.
- 22 "The Secretary of the Treasury shall instruct the
- 23 United States Executive Director at the Bank to use the
- 24 voice, vote, and influence of the United States to urge the
- 25 Bank to provide assistance to—

- 1 "(1) increasing access to financial institutions 2 for the poor and working with local financial institu-3 tions to reduce fees and other costs associated with sending or receiving remittances; "(2) working with local financial institutions to develop programs whereby personal remittances 6 7 could be used as the basis of credit for mortgages 8 and loans for small business, microenterprises, hous-9 ing, and other enterprises; and
- "(3) providing matching funds for United States' private entities that send remittances for development projects in Latin America and the Caribbean.".

14 SEC. 9. STUDY AND REPORT ON REMITTANCES.

- 15 (a) STUDY.—The Comptroller General of the United 16 States shall conduct a study and analysis of the remit-17 tance transfer system, including an analysis of its impact 18 on consumers.
- 19 (b) Areas of Consideration.—The study con-20 ducted under this section shall include, to the extent that 21 information is available—
- 22 (1) an estimate of the total amount, in dollars, 23 transmitted from individuals in the United States to 24 other countries, including per country data, histor-

1	ical data, and any available projections concerning
2	future remittance levels;
3	(2) a comparison of the amount of remittance
4	funds, in total and per country, to the amount of
5	foreign trade, bilateral assistance, and multi-develop-
6	ment bank programs involving each of the subject
7	countries;
8	(3) an analysis of the methods used to remit
9	the funds, with estimates of the amounts remitted
10	through each method and descriptive statistics for
11	each method, such as market share, median trans-
12	action size, and cost per transaction, including
13	through—
14	(A) depository institutions;
15	(B) postal money orders and other money
16	orders;
17	(C) automatic teller machines;
18	(D) wire transfer services; and
19	(E) personal delivery services;
20	(4) an analysis of advantages and disadvan-
21	tages of each remitting method listed in subpara-
22	graphs (A) through (E) of paragraph (3);
23	(5) an analysis of the types and specificity of
24	disclosures made by various types of remittance

- transaction providers to consumers who send remittances; and
- 3 (6) if reliable data are unavailable, rec-4 ommendations concerning options for the Congress 5 to consider to improve the state of information on 6 remittances from the United States.
- 7 (c) Report to Congress.—Before the end of the
- 8 1-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of
- 9 this Act, the Comptroller General shall submit a report
- 10 to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Af-
- 11 fairs of the Senate and the Committee on Financial Serv-
- 12 ices of the House of Representatives on the results of the
- 13 study conducted under this section.

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