INTRODUCTION OF THE ''WHATEVER IT TAKES TO REBUILD ACT OF 2008''

HON. CAROLYN B. MALONEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2008

Mrs. MALONEY of New York. Madam Speaker, today I am reintroducing the ''Whatever It Takes to Rebuild Act of 2008''.

A disaster can leave the tax base of an affected community eroded, necessitating Federal assistance to pay for essential services. These essential services, including police, fire, and school personnel, are even more critical in the wake of a disaster. To aid communities, Congress created the Community Disaster Loan Program. While this program has worked with great success, there are two significant issues that need to be fixed. The first issue is that this assistance is delivered in the form of a loan and the second is that any loan is limited to $5 million. Providing this aid as a loan can further delay the recovery of a local community and the $5 million cap does not allow for adequate assistance for medium or large communities.

The ''Whatever It Takes to Rebuild Act'' would repeal the requirement that disaster affected communities repay the assistance they receive under the Community Disaster Loan Program. This legislation would permanently repeal the $5 million cap on these loans, would make states eligible for this assistance, repeal the cap that limits loans to 25 percent of a municipality's operating expenses, and would provide this assistance as grants when a disaster has been declared an ''Incident of National Significance'' under the National Response plan. All of these provisions are aimed at giving the federal government the tools and flexibility we need to fully respond following a disaster.

This program was used most recently immediately following Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. While it was able to provide significant benefits, repayment requirements have raised significant hurdles for many recipient communities. In the wake of a disaster, the government should give American communities the financial assistance they need to get back on their feet with no strings attached. That is why I am reintroducing the ''Whatever It Takes to Rebuild Act.''

INTRODUCTION OF TARGET PRACTICE AND MARKSMANSHIP TRAINING SUPPORT ACT

HON. MARK UDALL

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2008

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Madam Speaker, today I am introducing a bill to facilitate the establishment of additional or expanded training ranges in certain States.

The bill, entitled the ''Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Support Act,'' addresses a problem faced by many sportsmen and sportswomen and others in Colorado and some other States where population growth—and resulting public-safety concerns—has forced the Forest Service and other Federal land-managing agencies to bar target shooting on some parts of their lands where that activity was previously allowed.

The result has been a serious reduction in the number of appropriate places for target shooting that are readily accessible, which unfortunately means that in some cases such shooting occurs in places that are not suitable for that purpose and where that activity can endanger public safety.

My new bill would respond to this problem by revising the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act—often called the Pittman-Robertson Act—to give certain States temporary authority to use more of the Federal funds provided under that law for the establishment of new public target ranges or the enlargement or improvement of existing public target ranges. This authority would continue for ten fiscal years.

It would also make some other changes to that same law in order to help qualifying States work toward that goal.

The bill would apply to States where there has been at least a 2 percent growth in population since the most recent decennial census and where there has been a reduction in the acreage of Federal lands open to use for target practice and marksmanship training.

Also, to allay concerns by Federal land managers about potential liability related to allowing Federal land areas to be used for target practice and marksmanship training, the bill includes provisions to make clear that—(1) such a decision will be considered a discretionary function for purposes of the Federal Torts Claim Act; and (2) any potential liability of the United States for damages related to any activity at a public target range wholly or partially funded by the Federal government will be subject to the limits specified in the Federal Torts Claim Act.

And, finally, the bill includes a section expressing the sense of Congress that the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management should cooperate with State and local authorities and other entities to carry out environmental remediation or other actions needed to allow target practice and marksmanship training to continue on lands managed by those Federal agencies.

Madam Speaker, this bill will not increase Federal spending and it does not require any State to use any of the funds it receives under the Pittman-Robertson funds for any new purpose. But it would provide eligible States additional flexibility regarding the use of those funds if they decide to use more of those funds for establishment of new public target ranges or improvement or expansion of existing ranges. For the benefit of our colleagues, here is an outline of the bill's provisions:

OUTLINE OF TARGET PRACTICE AND MARKSMANSHIP TRAINING SUPPORT ACT

This proposed bill would address both the funding and liability issues to make it easier for State wildlife departments to work with Federal land agencies on establishing and improving safe and convenient target practice and marksmanship training facilities.

WHAT THE PROPOSED BILL WOULD DO

Provides additional funding flexibility to states: The bill would amend the Pittman-Robertson Act to allow eligible States to increase the extent to which eligible States could use Federal funds they receive under that law to establish new, expanded, or improved shooting ranges (including acquisition of lands for that purpose).

—Eligible States would be those that have experienced at least 2 percent population growth since 2000 and have seen a reduction of the extent to which target practice and marksmanship training can take place on Federal lands within their borders.

—Eligible States could apply for up to 90 percent of the cost of acquiring land for and/or construction of new, expanded, or improved facilities (current law caps Federal share at 75 percent) and could retain the funds until expended (current law requires funds unused in the year received to be refunded to the Federal government).

—In addition, the bill would temporarily allow eligible States to use up to 10 percent of the Pittman-Robertson funds provided for wildlife management and conservation for acquiring land for and/or construction of new, expanded, or improved shooting ranges and to assist in cleanup or other steps needed to allow Federal lands to be used for target practice or marksmanship training. This provision would expire after 10 fiscal years.

Addresses liability concerns: The bill makes it clear that shooting ranges on Federal lands do not expose the Federal land agency to liability for injuries that may occur at these facilities.

Encourages Cooperation: The bill states sense of Congress that Federal land managers should cooperate with States, local government, and other entities in doing what's needed to permit Federal lands to remain available for public target practice and marksmanship training.

WHAT THE PROPOSED BILL WOULD NOT DO

Impose a mandate on States: The bill would provide an opportunity for eligible States to receive additional funds for specific purposes, but does not require any funds to be spent for those purposes.

Raise any Taxes: The bill would broaden the uses for Pittman-Robertson funds can be used, but does not increase the excise taxes from which such funds are derived.

MILITARY BATTLES WITH HIGH ENERGY PRICES

HON. JOE WILSON

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2008

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Madam Speaker, as Americans struggle with high gas prices our military is also facing skyrocketing energy costs. The vehicles needed to transport our military and take the fight to our enemies require extraordinary amounts of fuel.

This is a startling example of how rising energy prices directly affect our national security. It is another example of why Democrats must not adjourn for their five-week vacation without addressing this issue.

Between 1997 and 2007, ten years, military fuel costs grew from $3 billion to $11.4 billion, which is a 380 percent increase. Meanwhile, consumption of fuel by the military grew only 26 percent.

We need, and the American people are demanding, a comprehensive strategy that creates more American-made energy by drilling for oil and natural gas, building new refineries, investing in renewable energy, and promoting conservation. House Democrats should take a