

in establishing the program, which was to ensure that Native American veterans enjoy the same access to VA home loan benefits as other veterans, especially when one considers the fact that refinancing is authorized under other VA loan programs.

This bill will correct this inequity and, hopefully, encourage other Native Americans to utilize the direct loan program.

It is important to point out that VA will not incur additional costs if this refinancing option is adopted, since the agency will be permitted to charge an administrative refinancing fee. In fact, it is possible that the refinancing provision will save the department money as well, by allowing veterans to lower their mortgage payments and thus reduce the likelihood of default.

#### CENTERS FOR MINORITY AND WOMEN VETERANS

Mr. President, S. 1711 also contains improvements to the Centers for Minority and Women Veterans as well as the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans that were enacted as part of Public Law 103-446. These provisions are derived from S. 749, legislation I introduced with Senator ROCKEFELLER last year.

Among other initiatives, Public Law 103-446 established within VA a Center for Minority Veterans, a Center for Women Veterans, and an Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans. These provisions were adopted in order to ensure that VA appropriately addresses the special needs and concerns of veterans who are women or members of minority groups. S. 1711 makes the following modifications to these initiatives:

First, it allows the directors of the Center for Minority Veterans and the Center for Women Veterans to have either career or noncareer status. Under the legislation adopted 2 years ago, both directors are required to be non-career appointees. I believe the Secretary should have the discretion to appoint either career or noncareer individuals to these jobs. This bill restores that option so that the Secretary will have the flexibility to appoint directors with career status so as to be able to consider the widest possible field of qualified candidates.

Second, it adds an additional function to the list of statutory functions of the Center for Minority Veterans. Specifically, the legislation requires the center to advise the Secretary of the effectiveness of VA's efforts to include minority groups in clinical research and on the particular health conditions affecting the health of minority group members. This provision is consistent with the goals set forth in section 492B of the Public Health Service Act. The Center for Women Veterans is already mandated by law to carry out a similar function with respect to the health of women veterans.

Third, it explicitly requires that the Center for Minority Veterans provides support and administrative services to the Advisory Committee on Minority

Veterans. This provision is consistent with the traditional agency role of providing professional and technical support to advisory entities. Again, this provision parallels existing law requiring that the Center for Women Veterans provide support to the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.

Fourth, it defines the minority veterans for whom the Center for Minority Veterans has responsibility. The law establishing the Center neglected to provide such a definition. This bill defines minority veterans as individuals who are Asian American, Black, Hispanic, Native American—including American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian—and Pacific-Islander American. This definition is identical to the definition included in current law with respect to the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans.

Fifth, the legislation extends the termination date of the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans an additional 2 years, from December 31, 1997, to December 31, 1999. This provision is necessary because delays in establishing the Advisory Committee have reduced its potential working life to significantly less than the three years authorized by Congress. Extending the life of the Advisory Committee to December 1999 is not unreasonable, given that all other statutory VA advisory boards, including the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans, the Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War, and the Advisory Committee on Prosthetics and Special-Disabilities Programs, are authorized permanently. In fact, I hope that Congress will in the future consider an initiative to authorize the Advisory Committee on a permanent basis.

Finally, S. 1711 contains a provision that gives the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans and the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the respective activities of the Center for Minority Veterans and the Center for Women Veterans. Insofar as the Advisory Committees were established to oversee all of the activities of the Department of Veterans Affairs with respect to minorities and women, they necessarily should be tasked with overseeing the work of the very offices that are chiefly responsible for ensuring that the special needs of minority and female veterans are accommodated by VA.

Mr. President, I am deeply grateful to Senator SIMPSON and Senator ROCKEFELLER for including the home loan and minority provisions in the pending measure. I also wish to thank their respective Committee staffs, including Bill Tuerk and Tom Harvey for the majority and Bill Brew and Jim Gottlieb for the minority, for working so hard on a bipartisan basis to help me develop and refine these initiatives. Together, our efforts will significantly improve access by minority and women veterans to VA benefits and services.

Thank you, Mr. President. I urge swift passage of this important measure.●

#### TENNESSEE ALLOYS CO.

● Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize and pay tribute to Tennessee Alloys Co. of Bridgeport, AL, for their remarkable health and safety record. On April 19, 1996, the Tennessee Alloys Co. plant reached the 4-year mark without a single lost time accident. During this time period, the plant worked a total of 678,585 hours. Mr. President, this is an outstanding accomplishment.

Tennessee Alloys Co. is a producer of ferroalloys, and employs nearly 80 people. It is a joint venture of Applied Industrial Materials Corp., the managing partner, and Allegheny Ludlum Corp. Specifically, Tennessee Alloys Co. manufactures 50 percent ferrosilicon, 75 percent ferrosilicon, and high purity ferrosilicon. These products are a critical element used in the production of iron castings and steel and have special application in high performance generators, transformers, and motors.

Bridgeport plant manager Jerry Rich and his management team deserve special recognition on this occasion, as do the Tennessee Alloys Co.'s other hard working employees. Tennessee Alloys Co. sets a fine example by demonstrating the importance of high productivity balanced with concern for the health and safety of employees. This balance is not possible without the total commitment of both employees and management who take great pride in their work and their company. I would therefore like to recognize Tennessee Alloys Co. for its outstanding health and safety record and wish them continued success in the future.●

#### ACCELERATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF AIDS DRUG

● Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise today in appreciation of the leadership of Senator ROTH, chairman of the Finance Committee, and Senator MOYNIHAN, who brought to the Senate and secured passage of miscellaneous tariff legislation. The legislation takes a number of important steps and deserves our support.

I am particularly pleased Senator ROTH and Senator MOYNIHAN were able to incorporate S. 2021, a bill I introduced earlier this year which would reduce tariffs for certain chemicals used in a new AIDS drug that has shown encouraging test results. Upon approval, the Finance Committee bill will take an important step to reduce tariffs for these chemicals, which are not available in the United States.

We must do everything we can to find a cure for HIV/AIDS. However, until we have a cure for this urgent health priority, we need to find effective treatments and put them in the hands of people with needs. This provision will accelerate the manufacturing and final