

We reduce administrative requirements, paperwork, duplicative planning, reporting, and data collection requirements and eliminate bureaucracy throughout the system. At the State level, Governors would pull together representatives of the State legislature, key State agency heads, and leaders from business, local communities, and others to develop a single State plan and performance measurement system for the three block grants and for programs authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act. Governors are also asked to designate work force development areas throughout the State, for the distribution of funds and service delivery under much of the system.

To ensure the involvement of employers in the design and implementation of local systems, the bill requires the establishment of local, employer-led, work force development boards. These boards would provide policy guidance and oversight over local systems, and would be responsible for the establishment of local full-service employment and training delivery systems—easily accessible single points of entry into the employment and training system. Local elected officials would continue to play an important role in the development and implementation of the local system.

Title II of the bill amends JTPA by merging its existing nonschool-based summer employment and year-round programs—resulting in the disadvantaged youth employment and training opportunities block grant. The main focus of reform under this block grant is to increase the focus of these programs on longer term academic and occupational training, rather than short-term employment fixes—requiring that all employment experiences under these programs be tied to academic and occupational learning opportunities. Under the bill, communities may continue to carry out programs such as summer youth employment, if linked to additional learning opportunities. The block grant is designed to result in improved academic and occupational opportunities for disadvantaged youth in the community, as well as completion of high school, or its equivalent, and other positive results such as placement and retention in employment, or continuation into postsecondary education or training. States and localities would also be required to show how the hardest to serve disadvantaged youth are served within their programs.

Title III of the bill would amend the current adult employment and training programs authorized under JTPA by establishing a single delivery system for all adults, that maximizes individual choice in the selection of occupations and training providers. The bill encourages an employment first approach to job training—providing training services to individuals who are unable to obtain initial employment, or employment that will lead to self-sufficiency, through core services and intensive job search assistance. With limited exceptions, training services for adults would be provided through the use of vouchers—referred to as skill grants in the bill—distributed through an easily accessible full-service employment and training delivery system. While a single employment and training system would be established through this block grant, funding for dislocated workers would remain protected. States would continue to be required to use State reserve funds to provide rapid response

assistance—for dislocated workers—and additional assistance to areas that experience substantial worker dislocation. The bulk of funding under the adult training system would be sent to local work force development areas for the establishment of full-service employment and training delivery systems; provision of core or up-front services through the full service system; provision of intensive services; and the provision of training services. Not only will this legislation result in improved services to dislocated workers, but it will also result in enhanced services provided to welfare recipients who must make the transition from welfare to work.

Title V of the bill amends the current Adult Education Act and the National Literacy Act, consolidating numerous categorical programs into a block grant to the States. While this title is maintained as a separate act, adult education and literacy programs share planning and performance provisions with the job training system, pulling adult education and family literacy programs into the broader system. This is particularly important because a large number of under- and unemployed individuals will need to improve their literacy skills before they can participate in job training programs. The legislation requires States to send 85 percent of available funds to a variety of local service providers to be used for adult education programs, English as a second language programs and family literacy programs. All set asides and caps have been removed, allowing States to use the funds to meet the unique literacy needs of their citizens. The bill contains continued authorization for the National Institute for Literacy and for national activities conducted by the Department of Education.

In the area of vocational rehabilitation, the bill amends the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 by extending its authorization through 2000. It also makes some minor substantive changes to the law that promote consumer choice and promote State agency accountability. The amendments would create a limited written plan at the option of the person with a disability. This alternative to the statutorily required individualized written rehabilitation plan, would allow individuals with disabilities who know what they are seeking from the vocational rehabilitation system to obtain it without wasting unnecessary paperwork and time. Other changes include a shift of current State plan requirements to standard and indicators, allowing agencies to focus on definable indicators instead of malleable process monitoring; and a deletion of a number of out-of-date and unnecessary State plan obligations. Finally, the amendments also repeal 25 programs authorized by the act for which Congress has never appropriated funds.

The skills of this Nation's work force are more important today than ever before—both to American workers and to U.S. competitiveness. However our current patchwork of Federal programs is not the answer. The Employment, Training and Literacy Enhancement Act is a first, important step in addressing our long-term work force preparation needs by helping States and local communities to make sense out of our current confusing array of training programs. I thank our distinguished chairman for his insight and leadership on this vital issue, and I thank the ranking Democrat

Member of our Subcommittee, Mr. KILDEE, for his valuable input in development of this legislation. I invite all of my colleagues to join with us in this dramatic effort to overhaul our current employment, training, and literacy programs.

VETERANS COLD WEATHER
INJURY COMPENSATION ACT

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 17, 1997

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, today I have introduced legislation that will assist disabled veterans who were exposed to extremely cold weather conditions for prolonged periods of time while defending our nation during World War II and the Korean war, and more recently while serving in the peace-keeping mission in Bosnia. In fact, Mr. Speaker, veterans of the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir in Korea are recognized as having suffered especially high rates of severe cold injuries.

In many instances, service members did not seek or were unable to obtain medical care after cold injuries because of battlefield conditions, which impeded the ability of veterans to acquire supporting documentation, such as buddy letters, which are often used to support claims to the Veterans Administration. For too long, our Government has failed to recognize the severity of the injuries suffered by these veterans, and this legislation will help to right that wrong.

Mr. Speaker, my bill instructs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to create and maintain a registry of veterans exposed to extremely cold weather for a great length of time. It will use that information to analyze all clinical data obtained by the Department of Veterans Affairs in connection with exams and treatment given to veterans that may help in determining what kind of association there is between the disability and the cold weather. In addition, if a veteran suffers from a cold weather injury after serving in a war or battle that was fought in prolonged, extreme weather circumstances, it would be presumed—for the purpose of disability benefits—that the injury was caused by the severe weather.

Veterans from all over New Jersey, and the Nation, have been requesting that we provide a simplified process of recognizing and identifying this service-connected affliction, which has been ignored for far too long. We have the moral obligation and duty to ensure that our veterans are cared for when injuries and disabilities result from war and service to our country.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Larry St. Laurent, director, and John Dorrity, assistant director, of the Ocean County Veterans Service Bureau, for their hard work and assistance in writing the Veterans Cold Weather Injury Compensation Act.

I would urge all of my colleagues to please consider supporting this bill.