

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

THE TICKET TO WORK AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY ACT OF 1998

HON. JIM BUNNING

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 11, 1998

Mr. BUNNING. Mr. Speaker, today, on behalf of myself and BARBARA KENNELLY, I am introducing the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Act of 1998. This legislation helps Social Security and Supplemental Security Income disability recipients return to a life of economic security and self-sufficiency.

Social Security programs are vital to all Americans. The disability program is particularly important because it protects workers and their families against severe financial hardship that occurs when workers sustain severe illnesses or disabling conditions that prevent them from working.

Due to advances in medicine, technology, and the field of rehabilitation, there are people who, despite serious disabilities, want to work and who could work if they were provided the kind of rehabilitation services they need. The disability program is like a big black hole—once people fall into the program they never seem to make their way out. In fact, less than 1 percent of disabled recipients ever leave the rolls because of work.

Our legislation is very simple. We remove many of the barriers that prevent individuals with disabilities from climbing out of that hole.

The consumer—the recipient with a disability—is number one. They choose the services they want from the providers they want. Generally, the provider of those services is paid for outcomes and long-term results. The payment process is designed to ensure that as many providers as possible are available to serve the consumer.

One of the primary obstacles facing disabled recipients who attempt to leave the Social Security rolls to work is the fear of losing health care. To help alleviate that fear, our bill will extend Medicare coverage for 2 additional years. This means that recipients would have Medicare coverage for a total of 6 years from the time they first make an attempt to work.

Due to the nature of their disability, many individuals incur extraordinary costs in trying to get a job and maintaining that job. This legislation creates a tax credit of 50 percent of impairment-related work expenses up to \$10,000 per year.

To better help consumers transition into work, the bill includes a requirement that SSA test a gradual offset of SSDI cash benefits by reducing monthly benefits \$1 for every \$2 in earnings over a determined level.

Through this legislation we are asking the Social Security Administration to become more than just a disability program administrator, we want them to be an ability program administrator. The Commissioner benefits from the counsel of an advisory panel, made up of consumers, providers, and employer representatives. And the program will be gradually

phased in, closely monitored, and thoroughly evaluated over time.

I am excited about the possibilities this bill creates for individuals with disabilities. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in supporting this effort.

SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY: THE TICKET TO WORK AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY ACT OF 1998

HON. BARBARA B. KENNELLY

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 11, 1998

Mrs. KENNELLY of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I am today introducing, along with Rep. JIM BUNNING, bipartisan legislation to assist people with disabilities in returning to work. The Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Act will help to open the door to employment for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries.

Many of these beneficiaries would like to return to employment but find too many obstacles standing between them and a job. These obstacles often include the need for vocational rehabilitation, job training, and other assistance in finding and retaining a job. In addition, beneficiaries face the disincentives to work brought on by the loss of disability benefits and health care coverage. All of these stand in the way of a person who wants to leave the Social Security disability system for work.

Rep. BUNNING and I have worked on a bipartisan approach to reducing these disincentives. The legislation would afford beneficiaries three important bridges to employment. First, the legislation would provide SSDI and SSI beneficiaries a much greater choice of vocational rehabilitation providers, who help train and find jobs for individuals with disabilities. The bill would offer to disabled beneficiaries a ticket to work which could be presented to either a private vocational rehabilitation provider of the beneficiary's choice or a State vocational rehabilitation agency.

The bill would allow a beneficiary to choose the provider which best suits his or her needs and is most likely to assist that individual effectively in returning to work. Providers would be paid under an incentive system that would permit them to share in the savings to the government when the individual returns to work and is no longer receiving disability benefits.

Second, the bill addresses the principle fear facing disabled beneficiaries—the loss of health insurance coverage. The bill would offer Medicare coverage for at least 6 years for those individuals who leave the rolls to return to work. This is a 2-year extension over current law.

Finally, the legislation would make work pay. It would convert the current income tax deduction for the cost of work expenses related to one's impairment into a credit. The credit would be 50 percent of impairment-related ex-

penses up to \$10,000 in expenses. This would have the effect of permitting those who do not itemize to take into account the extraordinary work expenses, such as specialized computers or personal assistants, resulting from their disability. This is intended to cushion the blow of lost disability benefits and level the employment playing field between those people with disabilities and those without.

Leaving the disability rolls is no easy task. It is my hope that this bill will help to build a bridge to employment for people with disabilities. Every person who returns to work means one more person with a brighter future, and it means lower cost to the government. I hope our colleagues will join us in the bipartisan effort.

FCC'S ROLE IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT OF 1996

HON. JOHN L. MICA

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 11, 1998

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, one of the intended outcomes of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was that telecommunications services would be universally available at reasonable and affordable prices. To ensure that would happen, the Act provided for all telecommunications carriers to contribute to a universal fund subsidy. The FCC's attempts to implement this portion of the bill have been at best ineffective. Until the FCC begins to seriously take steps to ensure support of rural and residential service, we cannot consider this part of the job finished.

Another responsibility of the FCC, as set forth in the Telecommunications Act, was to implement a program assisting schools, libraries and health care facilities in entering the information age. However, Congress did not intend for this to be a tax and grant program. The entire issue of how the FCC is implementing this program is now being considered by Congressional committees. I am concerned that the FCC did not adequately consider the negative impact on the consumer or Congressional intent before implementing this program.

The FCC must understand that their role is not to rewrite the Act, but to implement the Act as it was written.

HONORING MATT CONWAY

HON. RODNEY P. FRELINGHUYSEN

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 11, 1998

Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring a remarkable young man to your attention and to the attention of my colleagues in the House of Representatives.

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