

advisories has grown to 39, and the number of water bodies affected has increased to 1,675. The problem is getting worse, not better. We are heading down a path where the entire nation could be under a mercury advisory. Do you want to explain to your children and grandchildren that the reason they can't eat the fresh water fish they just caught is because we failed to take action necessary to protect them?

Mr. Speaker, mercury is one of our last remaining unregulated toxins. We must act, and we must act fast. This is not an easy task. We can't see the mercury dispersed through the air and falling to the ground. However, we now know more about mercury than we ever have. We know the solutions to the problem and we have the technology to fix it. We must implement new strategies now. The future of our environment for our children and grandchildren is at stake.

INTRODUCTION OF THE TRAVEL REFORM RULE

HON. LEE H. HAMILTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 7, 1998

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, my colleagues, CHRIS COX, PETER VISCLOSKEY, TOM CAMPBELL and I are introducing today a resolution that would improve accountability in congressional travel and help encourage more travel related to the official business of the House.

Congressional travel, done the right way, can greatly enhance a Member's knowledge of the issues, improving the quality of legislation and congressional oversight. Members of Congress should inspect important government activities at home and abroad, and share the knowledge they gain with their colleagues and the public.

While the 1995 House gift ban curtailed the worst abuses of congressional travel, occasional reports of travel abuse continue. These reports have led the public to view much congressional travel as wasteful or unnecessary, with the detrimental effect of discouraging some important, legitimate trips.

The Travel Reform Rule which we are introducing today aims to strengthen the House's oversight of travel by Members and staff; make all congressional travel records more accessible to the public; and ensure that the information gained through travel is more widely disseminated.

The requirements of Hamilton's resolution would apply to (1) travel that is paid for by official House funds, except for travel to a Member's congressional district; (2) travel with a foreign country paid for by a foreign government; and (3) any other travel related to official duties, including that paid for by private entities.

The Travel Reform Rule, H. Res. XXX, would require more detailed reports: Current House rules require Members and staff to file a report with the Clerk of the House for any committee-funded travel, privately-funded travel, or for foreign government-funded foreign travel.

For privately-funded travel, reports must include the source of funds paying for travel, and an estimate of the cost of transportation,

food, lodging, and other expenses, and a determination that all such expenses are necessary. These reports and the reports on foreign government-funded travel must be filed within 30 days of the end of a trip, though House rules include no penalty for failure to do so.

Committee-funded foreign travel reports must disclose the countries visited, the amount of per diem and transportation furnished, and the total foreign currencies and/or appropriated funds expended. These reports must be filed within 60 days of travel.

The Hamilton resolution would improve and harmonize reporting requirements.

First, the resolution would require for all travel a substantive report to the Clerk of the House on the relation of the travel to the official business of the House, including a detailed itinerary and policy findings and recommendations.

Second, reports on travel funded by a non-profit organization would have to include copies of the organization's reports to the Internal Revenue Service on its contributions and expenditures. This provision is intended to shed light on any shell foundations set up to fund congressional travel.

Third, the resolution requires identification of the funding entity, including: any pertinent information that could be gathered in the case of a private funding source, an estimate of the costs of travel provided by a foreign government, and if transportation is provided by the Department of Defense, the report must include an estimate of the cost of equivalent commercial transportation.

Under the resolution, the Clerk of the House would notify the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct (the Ethics Committee) of any failure to meet these requirements.

Improve public disclosure: The Hamilton resolution would require the Clerk of the House to publish in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD and on the Internet a compilation of travel reports for each calendar quarter, as well as an annual summary of all House travel. Currently, the Clerk is only required to publish reports for government-funded foreign travel, and there is no Internet requirement.

Require advance authorization from Ethics Committee: Travel funded by private sources would require advance authorization from the House Ethics Committee. Currently, there is not prior authorization requirement for Members, and for staff, such travel may be approved by Members without consultation with the Ethics Committee. Prior authorization will take the guess work out of travel, and ensure for the House and the public that all private trips are legitimately related to House business.

Restrict perks: Members and staff would be prohibited from accepting first class airfare, as well as meals and lodging in excess of the federal employee per diem rate, unless previously authorized by the Ethics Committee. Moreover, travel by spouses or family members would be limited to trips where other guests are also permitted to bring their families.

I commend this resolution to my colleagues' attention.

HIGHER EDUCATION AMENDMENTS OF 1998

SPEECH OF

HON. ROBERT T. MATSUI

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 7, 1998

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 6) to extend the authorization of programs under the Higher Education Act of 1965, and for other purposes:

Mr. MATSUI. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in strong support of the student loan interest rate compromise that was passed last night as part of H.R. 6, the Higher Education Amendments. This bill, with strong bipartisan support, offers a sensible solution to the pressing problem of the interest rate change scheduled for July 1, 1998.

There has been a lot of discussion regarding the appropriate interest rate for student loans. The Department of Education insists that lenders can absorb much larger yield cuts to student loan interest rates without any disruption to the student loan program. Yet they are actively seeking to arrange more than \$5 billion in emergency funding in case they are mistaken. Banks and other student lenders vehemently disagree. They have consistently argued that a 0.3 percent reduction in guaranteed loan yields will drive away many lenders, especially small community banks. They also argue that remaining lenders will be discouraged from making loans to high risk borrowers, such as those attending community colleges and trade schools. Yet so far no lender has announced its withdrawal from the loan program.

Suffice it to say, we simply do not know what the impact of the yield cut will be on the guaranteed student loan market. What we do know is that we cannot afford to allow our student loan program to collapse because of this dispute. No one wants to run the risk that any student in their home district will be unable to get their student loans this Fall. But we must act now because the beginning of the Fall award cycle is less than 60 days away. The compromise reached in H.R. 6 corrects the interest rate calculation and ensures that student loans remain available for all students.

For this reason, I find the Administration's veto threat over this interest rate compromise to be somewhat disconcerting. Two years ago, this Congress called for a bipartisan solution to the direct versus guaranteed student loan debate. In the spirit of that decision, we voted overwhelmingly last night in support of this carefully crafted compromise. I urge the Administration to recognize this bipartisan effort and support the interest rate compromise so that we may ensure that no students find their access to financial aid unnecessarily denied.

CONGRATULATIONS TO DARTMOUTH HIGH SCHOOL WINTER PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

HON. JAMES P. MCGOVERN

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 7, 1998

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment today to congratulate the