

enactment and signature into law by the President.

In June of this year, I introduced H.R. 4603, the Assistive and Universally Designed Technology Improvement Act for Individuals with Disabilities. H.R. 4603 was also introduced in the Senate as S. 2173, offered by my distinguished Senate colleague from Missouri, Mr. Bond. I am very pleased that S. 2432 incorporates a number of provisions from my bill, H.R. 4603.

Mr. Speaker, my Technology Subcommittee has held two hearings, and two exhibitions, in this Congress on the need to promote greater access to technology for people with disabilities. The testimony from the hearings demonstrated that clear need.

As a result of the hearings, the Technology Subcommittee was impressed with the need for a greater emphasis to develop assistive technologies. Yet, the area of assistive technology is greatly overlooked by the Federal Government and the private sector.

While the importance of assistive technologies spans age and disability classifications, assistive technologies still do not maintain the recognition in the Federal Government necessary to provide important assistance for research and development programs or to individuals with disabilities. The private sector generally lacks adequate incentives to produce assistive technologies and end-users lack adequate resources to acquire assistive technology.

It is also believed that there are insufficient links between federally funded assistive technology research and development programs and the private sector entities responsible for translating research and development into significant new products in the marketplace for end-users. Accordingly, new partnerships—involving the public and private sectors—must be formed to aid Americans with physical disabilities improve their quality of life and provide a means for acquiring a job to become self-sufficient.

The Assistive Technology Act of 1998 legislates a number of recommendations made in my Technology Subcommittee hearings. We heard of the need to promote greater interest in assistive technologies, to enhance investment opportunities by the Federal Government, as well as public and private entities, in addressing the unmet technology needs of individuals with disabilities, and to allow for increased methods by which individuals with disabilities could purchase assistive technologies. This bill would do just that.

The Act builds on the success of the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities (known commonly as the "Tech Act" or as Public Law 100-407) that we enacted back in 1988. The Tech Act supports all 50 States in providing for the technology needs of our nation's 49 million disabled citizens, focuses the Federal investment in technology that could benefit individuals with disabilities, and supports micro-loan programs to provide assistance to individuals who desire to purchase assistive devices or services.

Title I of the Assistive Technology Act authorizes funding for a number of grant programs for five years, from fiscal years 1999 through 2004, extending the Tech Act after its sunset this year. Under the Act, States will be able to continue the successful programs of technology assistance that has served the disabled community well for the past decade.

In the 10 years since the enactment of the Tech Act, every State has established programs that promote assistive technologies to individuals with disabilities. For example, a very successful partnership has been established with my home state of Maryland to help people with disabilities access assistive technology services and devices.

Additionally, the Assistive Technology Act will help States establish and strengthen systems to inform people with disabilities in determining their best technology options. While there has been a great deal of progress in the creation of new assistive technologies, information about these devices is difficult to find and inconsistent. The Act would authorize the development of a national, on-line resource and distance learning center for people with disabilities. The Act also offers an on-line website to inform the disabled community of newly created assistive technology devices.

Mr. Speaker, assistive technologies are being used to increase, maintain, and improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. By encouraging the development of assistive technologies, we are offering people with disabilities the abilities they all seek—the ability to successfully compete in the modern workplace and the ability for independence in the home. I urge my colleagues to support this important bill and I will work towards enactment of this worthy legislation.

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MEDICARE HOME HEALTH AND  
VETERANS HEALTH CARE IM-  
PROVEMENT ACT OF 1998

SPEECH OF

**HON. JOE BARTON**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, October 9, 1998*

Mr. BARTON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my support for legislation passed by the House of Representatives on October 9, 1998, H.R. 4567, "The Medicare Home Health Care Interim Payment System Refinement Act," as it was amended by the Commerce Committee. This legislation will remedy some of the problems the home health agencies in my state and district are facing with the interim payment system passed in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997.

The state of Texas is a unique state in more ways than one. We have a very large and ever-growing population. We also have a very high number of "new" home health agencies, meaning agencies established after October 1, 1994. According to the September 1998 General Accounting Office report to Congress on Home Health Agency Closures, Medicare-certified home health agencies in Texas grew from 961 agencies in 1994 to 1,949 agencies in 1997. According to that same report, 134 agencies have closed recently, leaving the state with 1,758 agencies as of August 1, 1998, still more, many more agencies than existed in the state in 1994. As you can see, Texas, as opposed to a state like New Hampshire which has only 46 home health agencies, has been affected greatly by the interim payment system.

One issue I have been very involved with as the Chairman of the House Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations is the problem of fraud and abuse in the Medi-

care and its effect on the continued solvency of the program. One of the changes made in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 was to move Medicare home health care reimbursement to a prospective payment system (PPS). Since there were impediments to going to a PPS immediately, an interim payment system (IPS) was established for reimbursement to home health care agencies. As stated above, the IPS has caused problems for many agencies, especially newer agencies. The problems with the IPS and the fact that HCFA recently announced that they will not meet the original October 1, 1999 date set for the PPS to be enacted required Congressional action to straighten out some of the problems with the IPS.

There are obviously some bad actors in home health care, but there are many more good ones. I do not believe it was the Congress' intention for good operators to be punished by regulations that are too punitive. The honest providers who want to provide quality care should not be penalized.

The legislation considered by the House makes a move in the right direction. I commend the principals involved, Ways and Means Chairman BILL ARCHER and Health Subcommittee Chairman BILL THOMAS, as well as Commerce Chairman TOM BLILEY and Health Subcommittee Chairman MICHAEL BILIRAKIS, on achieving some legislative relief for the home health agencies in my state as well as across the country.

I do not believe that I am alone in the sentiment that we will be revisiting the home health care issue in the 106th Congress for there are additional issues yet to be considered. I do support this home health package and its contribution towards a workable, efficient, and common sense solution for home health care agencies across this country.

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INTERNATIONAL ANTI-BRIBERY  
AND FAIR COMPETITION ACT OF  
1998

SPEECH OF

**HON. BENJAMIN A. GILMAN**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, October 9, 1998*

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4353, "The International Anti-Bribery and Fair Competition Act" and ask permission to revise and extend my remarks.

This legislation provides the underlying authorities for the implementation of the Anti-Bribery Convention of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development which criminalizes the bribery of foreign public officials.

I would like to compliment the principal sponsor of this legislation, the gentleman from Virginia, Chairman BLILEY, for his leadership in this issue and for his assistance and cooperation in including reporting provisions that ensure that the administration carefully monitors the implementation of this OECD Convention, that it be updated and amended to include other officials, including political parties, party officials or candidates, and that nongovernmental groups such as Transparency International have a role in the review process.

Mr. Speaker, since the Foreign Corrupt Practices was adopted in 1977, the U.S. was