steel, textile, apparel, auto, electronics, and aerospace. No region has escaped the ravages of the crisis.The impact is not only job loss, but also the quality and composition of jobs, and therefore the distribution of income. Despite the recent growth in wages, the typical American worker's real hourly compensation is lower today than it was almost a decade ago—even as productivity grew by 9 percent.

We must address these problems by insisting upon a set of principles that will guide our trade, investment, and development policies at home and in all of the multilateral fora. We will strenuously oppose any new trade or investment agreements that do not reflect these principles, and we will work to remedy the deep flaws in our current policies.

First, excessive volatility in international flows of goods, services, or capital must be controlled. Countries must retain the ability to regulate the flow of speculative capital in order to protect their economies from this volatility.

Second, we must not allow international trade and investment agreements to be tools which businesses use to force down wages and working conditions or weaken unions, here or abroad.

Third, we need to pay more attention to the kind of development we aim to encourage with our trade policy. Our current policies reward lower barriers to trade and investment, and encourage developing countries to dismantle domestic regulation. These policies encourage developing countries to grow by tapping rich export markets abroad, while keeping wages low at home. This focus on export-led growth short-changes developing countries and places undue burden on our market.

As Congress considers trade initiatives this year, and as the Administration prepares to host the World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial in November, they must adhere rigorously to these principles. This requires that:

The U.S. government must radically reorder its priorities, so that our trading partners understand that enforceable worker rights and environmental protection are essential elements in the core of any trade and investment agreements. Unilateral grants of preferential trade benefits must also meet this standard. The African Growth and Opportunity Act and the proposed extension of NAFTA benefits to the Caribbean and Central America fall far short and are unacceptable.

We should strengthen worker rights provisions in existing U.S. trade laws and enforce these provisions more aggressively and unambiguously to signal our trading partners that failure to comply will not be tolerated.

The U.S. government must enforce the agreements it is currently party to, before looking to conclude more deals. China's failure to abide by the 1992 memorandum of understanding and the 1994 market-opening agreement must not go unchallenged, and China's recent jailing of trade unionists is yet more evidence that WTO accession should be denied. Congressional approval should be required for China's accession to the WTO.

Current safeguard provisions in U.S. law are clumsy and ineffective. We must strengthen and streamline Section 201 and the NAFTA safeguards provisions, so that we can respond quickly and effectively when import surges cause injury to domestic industries. Until this can be accomplished, we should be ready to take unilateral action to protect against import surges when necessary.

Immediate steps must be taken to address the flood of under-priced imported steel coming into our market. U.S. workers must not be the victims of international financial collapse.

Fast track—the traditional approach to trade negotiating authority—has been decisively rejected by Congress and the American people. Trade negotiations are increasingly complex, and Congress must have a stronger consultative role. Congressional certification that objectives have been met at each stage must be required before the negotiations can proceed. Both the process of negotiation and the international institutions that implement these agreements need to be more transparent and accessible to non-governmental organizations.

We need to address the problems faced by developing countries more directly, by offering deep debt relief and development funds as part of an overall program of engagement and trade. Trade preferences linked to improved labor rights and environmental standards change the financial incentives for countries seeking market access and increased foreign direct investment; debt relief and aid can help provide the resources necessary to implement higher standards.

The U.S. government needs to address the problems of chronic trade imbalances and offset agreements, whereby U.S. technology and jobs are traded for market access.

But before Congress and the Administration craft fundamentally different trade policies, we must take urgent steps to fix problems in our current trade agreements. NAFTA has been in place for five years now and has been a failure.

We must strengthen the labor rights protections in NAFTA, so that violations of core labor standards come under the same strict dispute settlement provisions as the business-related aspects of the agreement.

We must renegotiate the provisions on cross-border trucking access. It is clear that fundamental safety issues are far from being satisfactorily addressed. The safety of our highways must not be compromised for the sake of compliance with a flawed trade agreement.

The safeguard provisions in NAFTA have proven ineffective in the cases of auto and apparel imports, which have surged unacceptably since NAFTA's implementation in 1994. These provisions must be corrected. We must insist on an equitable sharing of automotive production among the three North American countries, so that all three countries can benefit from growth in the North American market, as well as sharing in its downturns. And we must ensure that the investment provisions of NAFTA, which grant new powers to corporations in their disputes with governments, are fixed and not used as a model for any future agreements.

In addition to fixing trade policy, we have to make sure that our policies toward investment, development, taxation, and the international financial institutions support economically rational, humane, and worker-friendly rules of competition. We must change the rules of the international economy, not so we can have more trade, but so we can build a better world, for working families here and abroad.

Finally, it is important to remember that the United States has the right to withdraw from trade agreements to which it is a party. The U.S. government should undertake an aggressive review of existing trade agreements to determine whether they adequately protect U.S. interests or whether the U.S. should exercise its withdrawal rights.

WOMEN'S BUSINESS CENTER AMENDMENTS ACT OF 1999

SPEECH OF

HON. SHEILA JACKSON-LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 16, 1999

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 774, the Women's Business Center Amendments Act. This bill increases the authorization for the Women's Business Center Program from $8 million to $11 million in FY 2000.

I support this bill because the Women's Business Centers are instrumental in assisting women with developing and expanding their own businesses. The Centers provide comprehensive training, counseling and information to help women succeed in business.

Women are starting new businesses at twice the rate of men and own almost 40 percent or 8 million of all small businesses in the United States. Women of color own nearly one in eight of the 8 million women-owned businesses or 1,067,000 businesses.

Women start businesses for a variety of reasons. With the recent spate of corporate downsizing in large companies and the various changes in the marketplace, small businesses are becoming a vital part of the economic stability of the country.

Women often start businesses because they want flexibility in raising their children, they want to escape gender discrimination on the job, they hit the glass ceiling, and many desire to fulfill a dream of becoming an entrepreneur. We should encourage this current trend of women-owned businesses by supporting the Women's Business Center Amendment appropriation.

The Women's Business Centers offer women the tools necessary to launch businesses by providing resources and assistance with the development of a new business. This includes developing a business plan, conducting market research, developing a marketing strategy, and identifying financial services. The centers also offer practical advice and support for new business owners.

Access to this information is essential to success in small business. The Women's Business Centers provide a valuable service to aspiring entrepreneurs.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

ASSISTING SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY BENEFICIARIES IN THEIR RETURN TO WORK: THE WORK INCENTIVES IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1999

HON. ROBERT T. MATSUI

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 18, 1999

Mr. MATSUI. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join my colleagues in the introduction of ''The Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999.'' This legislation is designed to help Social Security Disability Insurance and SSI beneficiaries participate more fully in our nation's economy. It provides new opportunities and new incentives for people with disabilities to return to the work force.

The Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 enjoys widespread support. It has gathered bipartisan sponsorship in the House and has already been approved by a bipartisan majority in the Senate Finance Committee.

Many, many beneficiaries urgently want to return to work and to make the most of their talents and abilities, but they are simply unable to do so for a variety of reasons. For instance, while people with disabilities possess the clear desire to work, they often require vocational rehabilitation, job training, or some other form of assistance in order to find a job and to hold that job over the long run. This bill would create incentives for providers of services to offer necessary assistance and to stay involved with the individual to assure as he adjusts to the work force.

At a hearing before the Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee last week, the General Accounting Office reported that the single most important barrier to work for people with disabilities is the fear of loss of medical coverage. People with disabilities are discouraged from securing employment, as they lose not only their SSDI or SSI benefits but also their medical coverage if they are successful in returning to work.

This legislation would extend medical coverage for people with disabilities who wish to return to work. The bill that the House passed last year by an overwhelmingly bipartisan margin—the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Act—made admirable progress in this regard. But I believe we can, and should, do more. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Commerce Committee to remove this barrier to work.

Rather than maintain the current barriers to work, we should strive to facilitate the transition back to the workforce for people with disabilities. Rather than penalize people with disabilities once they do return to work, we should ensure that they do not have to bear the costly burden of health insurance before they are able to do so. The Work Incentives Improvement Act accomplishes both those goals.

The Act would provide disability beneficiaries with a ''Ticket to Work,'' which could be presented to either a private vocational rehabilitation provider or to a State vocational rehabilitation agency in exchange for services such as physical therapy or job training. The ''Ticket to Work'' would afford SSDI and SSI beneficiaries a much greater choice of providers and would thus enable them to match their particular needs with the capacities of private entities or public agencies more readily. Moreover, the Ticket program would spur providers, both public and private, to offer the most effective services possible, since, under the Ticket program, providers share in the savings to government that arise when a SSDI or SSI beneficiary returns to the workforce and no longer receives benefit payments.

The Work Incentives Improvement Act would also help to remove the most formidable obstacle that people with disabilities face in returning to work—the loss of their health care coverage. Last year's House-passed bill would have extended Medicare coverage for an additional two years beyond current law for individuals who leave the disability rolls to return to work. The Work Incentives Improvement Act that I am introducing today would build upon the foundation laid last year in a number of ways. First, it would extend Medicare coverage to 10 years for disability beneficiaries who return to work. Second, it would allow states to offer a Medicaid buy-in to people with disabilities whose incomes would make them ineligible for SSI.

Taken together, these provisions offer people with disabilities the support and the incentives they need as they strive to return to work. Consequently, I hope Members of both parties will join me and the other sponsors of the Work Incentives Improvement Act in enacting this innovative legislation this year and in helping to improve the lives of people with disabilities, people who want to work and who want to contribute, even more than they already do, to a brighter future for all Americans.

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA BUDGET AUTONOMY ACT OF 1999 AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA LEGISLATIVE AUTONOMY ACT OF 1999

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 18, 1999

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, today I introduce the District of Columbia Legislative Autonomy Act of 1999 and the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act of 1999, continuing a series of bills that I will introduce this session to ensure a process of transition to democracy and self-government for the residents of the District of Columbia. The first provision of the first bill in my D.C. Democracy Now series, the District of Columbia Democracy 2000 Act (D.C. Democracy 2000), has already been passed and signed by the President as Public Law 106–1—the first law of the 106th Congress. This provision repeals the Faircloth attachment and returns power to the Mayor and City Council.

The Revitalization Act passed in 1997 eliminated the city's traditional, stagnant federal payment and replaced it with federal assumption of escalating state costs including prisons, courts and Medicaid, as well as federally created pension liability. Federal funding of these state costs involve the jurisdiction of other appropriations subcommittees, not the D.C. appropriations subcommittee. Yet, it is the D.C. subcommittee that must appropriate the District's own locally-raised revenue derived from its own taxpayers before that money can be used by the District government. My bill corrects an untenable position whereby a national legislature appropriates the entire budget of a local city jurisdiction. The District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act would allow the District government to pass its own budget without congressional approval.

Congress has put in place two safeguards that duplicate the function of the appropriation subcommittees—the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority (Financial Authority). Today, however, the District has demonstrated that it is capable of exercising prudent authority over its own budget without help from any source except the CFO. In FY 1997, the District ran a surplus of $186 million. Last year, the District's surplus totaled $444 million, and the city government is scheduled to continue to run balanced budgets and surpluses into the future.

Budget autonomy will also help the District government and the Financial Authority to reform budgetary procedures by: (1) streamlining the District's needlessly lengthy and expensive budget process in keeping with the congressional intent of the Financial Authority Act to reform and simplify D.C. government procedures, and (2) facilitating more accurate budgetary forecasting.

This bill would return the city's budget process to the simple approach passed by the Senate during the 1973 consideration of the Home Rule Act. The Senate version provided a simple procedure for enacting the city's budget into law. Under this procedure, the Mayor would submit a balanced budget for review by the City Council with only the federal payment subjected to congressional approval. Under the Constitution's District clause, of course, the Congress would retain the authority to intervene at any point in the process in any case, so nothing of the prerogatives and authority of the Congress over the District would be lost ultimately. A conference compromise, however, vitiated this approach treating the D.C. government as a full agency (hence the 1996 very harmful shutdown of the D.C. government for a full week when the federal government was shut down). The Home Rule Act of 1973, as passed, requires the Mayor to submit a balanced budget for review by the City Council and then subsequently to Congress as part of the President's annual budget as if a jurisdiction of 540,000 residents were an agency of the Federal Government.

The D.C. budget process takes much longer compared to six months for comparable jurisdictions. The necessity for a Financial Authority significantly extended an already uniquely lengthy budget process. Even without the addition of the Authority, the current budget process requires the city to navigate its way through a complex bureaucratic morass imposed upon it by the Congress. Under the current process, the Mayor is required to submit a financial plan and budget to the City Council and the Authority. The Authority reviews the Mayor's budget and determines whether it is approved or rejected. Following this determination, the Mayor and the City Council (which also holds hearings on the budget) each have two opportunities to gain Authority approval of the financial plan and budget. The Authority provides recommendations throughout this process. If the Authority does not approve the Council's financial plan and budget on second review, it forwards the Council's revised financial plan and budget (containing the Authority's recommendations to bring the plan and budget into compliance) to the District government and to the President. If the Authority does approve the budget, that budget is then sent to the President without recommendations. The proposed District budget is then included in the federal budget, which the President forwards to Congress for consideration. The D.C. subcommittees in both the House and Senate review the budget and present a Chairman's mark for consideration. Following markup and passage by both Houses, the D.C. appropriations bill is sent to the President for his signature. Throughout this process the bill is not only subject to considerations of fiscal soundness but individual political considerations.