

INTRODUCING THE EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 16, 2003

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Earned Income Tax Credit Public Awareness Campaign Act.

The Federal Earned Income Tax Credit, or EITC, provides Federal tax deductions for the working poor. In 2001, the Earned Income Tax Credit provided over \$30 billion in tax relief to 18.5 million low-income taxpayers. In fact, the EITC is the second largest program after Medicaid that provides assistance to low-income individuals combating poverty. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey indicates that in 1999 the EITC assisted 4.7 million people, including 2.6 million children of low-income workers, rise above the poverty line.

However, each year, between 15 and 25 percent of those who are eligible to receive the EITC fail to claim their credit, either because they are unaware of it or cannot obtain the assistance they may need to properly complete the appropriate tax return. Lack of education, language barriers, fear or intimidation, limited financial resources, and unawareness of the credit all contribute to low-income families and individuals not taking advantage of this tax relief. This is a disgrace and a clear disservice to America's working poor.

In south Florida, the number of individuals and families not claiming the EITC is staggering. In Miami-Dade County, FL, alone, it is estimated that more than \$200 million worth of the EITC goes unclaimed annually by about 120,000 low-income families living in the County. At the same time, approximately 85,000 eligible families living in Broward County annually do not claim more than 99 million dollars worth of the EITC.

While Broward and Miami-Dade Counties have each committed themselves to educating taxpayers of the EITC and increasing the number of those claiming it, their resources are limited. Many large cities throughout the country are taking similar efforts to increase the number of taxpayers who are eligible to claim the EITC actually claiming the credit, but as is the case with Broward and Miami-Dade Counties, limited man-power and insufficient financial resources are road blocks to expanded outreach and ultimate increases in the number of those claiming the credit.

The Earned Income Tax Credit Public Awareness Campaign Act establishes a national campaign to raise awareness and increase education about the EITC. Housed in the Internal Revenue Service, the campaign will target low-income individuals, students, single parents, limited English speaking individuals, transient workers, and military personnel, all of whom are statistically the most likely to qualify for the EITC. The bill requires that the campaign contain an education component, as well as an awareness program.

Additionally, my bill establishes a national grant program that states can participate in to conduct their own statewide EITC public awareness campaigns. To receive a grant, a state is required to provide matching funds.

The bill authorizes \$15 million annually for the next 10 years to implement the program, and between 25 percent and 50 percent of the funds appropriated are required to be spent on the state grant program.

The IRS has long criticized Americans who claim the EITC but are not actually eligible to receive the credit. The agency's recent announcement to audit nearly 4 million of the 19 million individuals and families who claimed the credit in 2003 is as shocking as it is disturbing.

At a time that Congress continues to cut taxes for the wealthy, it is appropriate for the body to also consider ways to expand outreach and education about this underutilized, but extremely beneficial, tax credit. The EITC, if used properly and to its fullest potential, can be a critical tool in the war against poverty, and my bill does just that.

I ask my colleagues to support this measure, and I urge the leadership to bring it to the floor for consideration swiftly.

HONORING GEORGE EDWIN CHAVEZ

HON. GRACE F. NAPOLITANO

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 16, 2003

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. Mr. Speaker, I rise with great sadness today to honor the life and enormous civic contributions of my dear friend, George Edwin Chavez, who passed away from a heart attack on June 14 at the age of 66. George was a longtime resident of Whittier, California, passionate civic activist and generous friend to many.

Although he never graduated from high school, George Chavez was an inspiration to many by starting several business ventures before forming C.A.S.T. Security, Inc., in 1987, serving as its President and CEO until his death. The company provided location security services to the motion picture industry, and through the company Chavez was instrumental in introducing youth and minorities to opportunities within the motion picture industry. Chavez was the first Hispanic to do security work for the movie industry and hired countless youngsters.

While Mr. Chavez's business successes are certainly impressive, his civic contributions to the community show his true character. He was a founding member of the National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO). He also served as a Field Representative for former Congressman Mathew G. Martinez and worked with the University of Southern California's School of Social Work to increase political involvement and interest among Hispanics.

Health issues and youth development were two of George Chavez's key priorities. He served on the California Board of Medical Quality Assurance and the East Los Angeles Health Task Force. He received special recognition from "Familia Unida Living with Multiple Sclerosis" for his work and contributions to assisting families and individuals living with Multiple Sclerosis. He also served on the boards of the Family School Community Partnership, Salesian Boys and Girls Club and Los Padrinos. Through C.A.S.T. Security, Inc., he also sponsored several youth softball teams.

Mr. Chavez is survived by his four daughters, Mary, Adela, Georgina, and Trisha, eight grandchildren, Richard, George, Natalie, Desiree, Christopher, Adrian, Victor, and Jasmine, and countless friends whose lives were touched by his work and service. My sincerest condolences and prayers to his beloved family and extended family. We will all miss him greatly.

FOR FREEDOM IN SOUTH ASIA

HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 16, 2003

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer somewhat belated congratulations to the Sikh Nation on Vaisakhi Day, the anniversary of the creation of the Khalsa Panth, which occurred in April. This is a very important day in the Sikh calendar, the birthday of the Khalsa Panth.

The Khalsa Panth was created in a spirit of freedom, and this is reflected in their daily prayers in which they pray for the freedom of the Sikh Nation and the well being of all people. This freedom is an essential yearning of the human spirit and all people are entitled to freedom. Yet merely for trying to be free, the Sikhs have been oppressed by the Indian government, which has murdered more than 250,000 of them since 1984.

Against this backdrop, the Sikh Nation declared its independence on October 7, 1987, creating the new country of Khalistan. This was in a Sikh tradition of self-rule. From 1765 to 1849 Sikh ruled Punjab. They ran an inclusive government, with Hindus, Muslims, and others in high positions.

Now their dreams of freedom are being crushed by the force of 500,000 Indian troops while the Indian government tries to set up Hindutva—total Hindu domination of every aspect of the political, social, and cultural life of India, South Asia, and the people living there. One Indian Cabinet member was quoted as saying that everyone who lives in India must either be Hindu or be subservient to Hindus.

The Council of Khalistan, which leads the Sikh Nation's struggle to free its homeland, Khalistan, from Indian oppression, issued an excellent statement calling on Sikhs worldwide to use the occasion of the Sikh Nation's birthday to rededicate themselves to achieving freedom for the Sikhs in a sovereign, independent Khalistan. I would like to join in that call, Mr. Speaker. It is time to bring true freedom and democracy to South Asia. In addition, a free and sovereign Khalistan will be an American ally in the subcontinent.

We should declare our support for freedom for Khalistan and for all the other nations of South Asia that seek their freedom. And we should back this up by stopping aid to India until it learns the ways of democracy and self-determination for all peoples and nations. This is the most effective way that America, the bastion of freedom, can stand up for freedom for the oppressed peoples of South Asia.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to place the Council of Khalistan's open letter on Vaisakhi Day into the RECORD.