

INTRODUCING THE IMPROVING ACCESS TO ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

HON. HOWARD P. "BUCK" McKEON

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 5, 2004

Mr. McKEON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Improving Access to Assistive Technology for Individuals with Disabilities Act. This legislation improves the Assistive Technology Act to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to assistive technology services and equipment throughout their lives. I would like to thank the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BOEHNER), the Chairman of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, for his assistance in bringing this bill to this point.

Since 1988, the federal government has played an important role in helping states develop systems to provide access to assistive technology devices and services for individuals with disabilities. The original intent of this program was to provide seed money for states to establish state-wide systems to help individuals with disabilities. Since then all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the outlying areas have established systems of some design and scope. In the original legislation, we wisely put in a sunset provision that caused us to reexamine the role and scope of the original program.

For the past 2 years, my subcommittee has been investigating this program; we have held a hearing on this important program, visited assistive technology centers, and discussed the benefits and drawbacks of the existing program. We have sought broad input from our friends across the aisle, from the disability community, and from the state programs to gain valuable insight into this program. As we go through the legislative process we will continue to seek input from our friends on the other side of the aisle as well as our friends in the disability community to make this a strong bill.

In the bill we are introducing today, we are shifting the focus of the program to individuals with disabilities. Our goal is to help states get more pieces of assistive technology into the hands of individuals with disabilities. This new focus will expand the reach of the state programs by moving away from support of administrative activities toward emphasizing the importance of getting the technology itself to the individuals with disabilities that need it.

Although we are refocusing the program, we certainly recognize the importance of state flexibility, and our bill maintains that important element of the program. We direct states to focus their efforts of putting technology into the hands of individuals with disabilities.

We ask that States develop alternative financing methods to enhance the ability of individuals with disabilities to access assistive technology devices and services through low interest loans, interest buy-down programs, revolving loan funds, loan guarantee, or other mechanisms of the State's choice.

Additionally, we allow States to choose to develop: Assistive technology device loan programs to support short-term loan programs of assistive technology devices to individuals with disabilities; assistive technology device reutilization programs (i.e., recycling) to use assist-

ive technology devices multiple times with multiple individuals; or assistive technology device demonstration programs to teach people with disabilities about the variety of available assistive technology devices and how to use them.

These are important and necessary activities and I am confident that states will continue to work with stakeholders in their communities to enhance or develop comprehensive programs that will provide tremendous benefit to individuals with disabilities. In fact, we require that states do just that, so we are ensuring that individuals with disabilities will continue to have important input in this program.

I deeply appreciate the importance of assistive technology devices and services for individuals with disabilities. These devices can make a major difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities. Assistive technology can help individuals meet the challenges they face every day, and through the use of assistive technology, an individual with a disability can overcome almost any obstacle he or she faces.

I look forward to working with the members of the Committee, other members of Congress, and other stakeholders as we craft legislation that will build upon and improve previous reforms. These steps to strengthen assistive technology programs will also complement our ongoing effort to ensure that children with disabilities receive a quality education. I urge my colleagues to join me in support of the Improving Access to Assistive Technology for Individuals with Disabilities Act.

TRIBUTE TO EVA GALLAGHER AND THE ONCOLOGY NURSING SOCIETY

HON. JIM RAMSTAD

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 5, 2004

Mr. RAMSTAD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call attention to the important and essential role that oncology nurses play in providing quality cancer care. These nurses are principally involved in the administration and monitoring of chemotherapy and the associated side-effects patients experience. As anyone ever treated for cancer will tell you, oncology nurses are intelligent, well-trained, highly skilled, kind-hearted angels who provide quality clinical, psychosocial and supportive care to patients and their families. In short, they are integral to our nation's cancer care delivery system.

Cancer is a complex, multifaceted and chronic disease, and people with cancer are best served by a multidisciplinary health care team specialized in oncology care, including nurses who are certified in that specialty. This year alone, 1.3 million Americans will hear the words, "You have cancer." In addition, 556,000 will lose their battle with this terrible disease. Every day, oncology nurses see the pain and suffering caused by cancer and understand the physical, emotional, and financial challenges that people with cancer face throughout their diagnosis and treatment. Oncology nurses play a central role in the provision of quality cancer care as they are principally involved in the administration and moni-

toring of chemotherapy and the associated side-effects patients may experience.

Today, more than two-thirds of cancer cases strike people over the age of 65, and the number of cancer cases diagnosed among senior citizens is projected to double by 2030. At the same time, many of the community-based cancer centers are facing significant barriers in hiring the specialized oncology nurses they need to treat cancer patients. It is estimated that there will be a shortage of 1.1 million nurses in the year 2015.

The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) is the largest organization of oncology health professionals in the world, with more than 30,000 registered nurses and other health care professionals. Since 1975, the Oncology Nursing Society has been dedicated to excellence in patient care, teaching, research, administration and education in the field of oncology. The Society's mission is to promote excellence in oncology nursing and quality cancer care. To that end, ONS honors and maintains nursing's historical and essential commitment to advocacy for the public good by providing nurses and healthcare professionals with access to the highest quality educational programs, cancer-care resources, research opportunities and networks for peer support.

On behalf of the people with cancer and their families in Minnesota's 3rd Congressional District, I would like to acknowledge Eva Gallagher for her leadership within the Oncology Nursing Society as a member of the ONS Board of Directors. Through Eva's and ONS' leadership, our nation is charting a course that will help us win the war on cancer.

The ONS has 4 chapters in my home state of Minnesota. Located in the Bloomington, Esko, Hayfield and Milan areas, these chapters serve the oncology nurses in the state and help them continue to provide high quality cancer care to patients and their families in our state.

I commend the Oncology Nursing Society for all of its efforts and leadership over the last 29 years and thank the Society and its members for their ongoing commitment to improving and assuring access to quality cancer care for all cancer patients and their families. I urge my colleagues to support them in their important endeavors.

TRIBUTE TO THE OREGON INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

HON. GREG WALDEN

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 5, 2004

Mr. WALDEN of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share with you and my colleagues my distinct pride in a winning institution in my district, the Oregon Institute of Technology (OIT). Located in Klamath Falls, Oregon, OIT is nationally recognized for its high standards and results-oriented approach to education. The school motto, "First Hired, Highest Paid," is no idle boast. A few years ago I had the honor of serving as commencement speaker during an OIT graduation, and nearly all of the graduates I addressed had been offered high-paying jobs.

Ably led by President Martha Anne Dow, OIT pursues excellence in every aspect of the college experience, from research and technology application to career-oriented instruction and competitive athletics.