

(1) in subsection (a), by striking “, not to exceed \$70,000,000.”;

(2) in subsection (b), by striking “, not to exceed \$15,000,000.”; and

(3) in subsection (c), by striking “, not to exceed \$15,000,000.”.

(b) PERIOD OF AUTHORIZATION.—Section 4(a) of the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act (16 U.S.C. 777c(a)) is amended in the second sentence by striking “2009” and inserting “2019”.

AMENDING FISH AND WILDLIFE ACT OF 1956

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 673, H.R. 2408.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2408) to amend the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 to reauthorize volunteer programs and community partnerships for national wildlife refuges, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. INHOFE. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read a third time and passed; the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table; and that any statements relating to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 2408) was read the third time and passed.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 2004

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the HELP Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 4278, the assistive technology bill, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 4278) to amend the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 to support programs of grants to States to address the assistive technology needs of individuals with disabilities, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, today, I join my colleague, the Senator from Iowa, Mr. HARKINS, and other Members, in seeking final passage of the Assistive Technology Act of 2004.

Senator HARKIN and I were determined to make the reauthorization of this piece of legislation a bipartisan process from the beginning. We have worked closely with the House of Representatives, Departments of Education, Labor, and Commerce, and the Small Business Administration as well as the, business, and research and development communities, the Assistive Technology Act Projects, the Alternative Financing Programs, and the disability community. Together we

have successfully crafted a bipartisan and bicameral bill that we are all proud of. This bill follows the administration's lead, and the goals that President Bush set forth in the New Freedom Initiative. We are confident that the bill will be overwhelmingly supported by the President and increase access to assistive technologies for thousands of individuals with disabilities. I am also submitting several letters of support for the bill, from various groups, for the RECORD.

On February 1, 2001, President Bush announced the New Freedom Initiative—a comprehensive program to promote the full participation of people with disabilities in all areas of society by expanding education and employment opportunities, promoting increased access into daily community life, and increasing access to assistive and universally designed technologies. By the Senate finally naming conferees for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act earlier this month, and by seeking passage of the Assistive Technology Act of 2004 today, we are helping the President fulfill America's promise of “tearing down the barriers to equality that face many of the 54 million Americans with disabilities.”

One quarter of the President's New Freedom Initiative focuses on technology, and the technology objective is comprised of two key components.

The first is to expand Federal investment in assistive technology research and development by increasing the budgets of the Rehabilitative Engineering Research Centers' for assistive technologies, creating a new fund to help bring assistive technologies to market, and better coordinate the Federal effort in prioritizing immediate assistive and universally designed technology needs in the disability community.

The second is to enhance access to assistive technology by reducing costs associated with purchasing assistive technology and funding for low-interest loan programs to purchase assistive technologies.

The Assistive Technology Act of 2004 before us today is designed to strengthen and build upon these two components. Our efforts focus on enhancing access to technology, reducing the costs associated with purchasing such devices, and increasing technical assistance to entities that serve students with disabilities that receive transition services, adults with disabilities maintaining or transitioning to community living and to employers. Specifically, we accomplish these goals by: reducing bureaucracy; fostering private/public sector relationships; and coordinating Federal initiatives.

Current law focuses on system change activities, and providing information and referral services to people with disabilities and their families. Systems change efforts and information and referral services are important, as people are being born with or acquiring disabilities daily. However,

according to several Federal agencies, an individual with a disability may be considered eligible for, and could benefit from, more than 20 Federal programs that directly or indirectly provide assistive technology. Additionally, there are over 25 Federal laws on the financing of assistive technology, all of which impacts local access to such technology.

Considering the number of Federal and State laws that a person has to navigate in order to access services, how long will it take for systems change efforts to remove barriers for accessing assistive technologies for a person with a disability living in Lincoln, NH? Systems change efforts, while worthwhile, do not immediately impact and help a person with a disability obtain assistive technology that he or she may need today. Therefore, this bill modifies the current list of authorized activities by expanding the authority of the State Assistive Technology Act projects to increase the ability of persons with disabilities to experience or obtain assistive technology. Our bill provides the State projects with a tangible set of activities, yet at the same time provides State flexibility to address emerging State needs.

Under this bill, States will provide citizens with access to device loan, reutilization, and financing programs, and equipment demonstration centers by developing such programs, or collaborating with other entities in the State currently operating such programs. In public forums that were held with the disability community, we consistently heard about the abandonment of equipment by persons with disabilities simply because the purchaser did not have an opportunity to try it out or see it demonstrated prior to purchasing the device. The purpose of device loan and reutilization programs, and equipment demonstration centers is to provide individuals with disabilities the opportunity to receive proper assessments and evaluations for assistive technology, test and obtain information about various devices, and borrow devices and equipment before it is purchased. The financing programs provide access to low interest loans allowing an individual to purchase the device for him or herself or a family member, without having to wait for, rely on, or navigate through the red tape created by our bureaucratic Government systems. Each of these new requirements will help make the most of limited public resources in an environment that emphasizes consumer choice in and control of assistive technology services and funding.

Another major theme of this reauthorization is the reduction of costs associated with assistive technologies and to enhance research and development opportunities in this area. In December of 2003, we began meeting with individuals within the disability community, the State Assistive Technology Act projects, large and small