

SSI EXTENSION FOR ELDERLY AND DISABLED REFUGEES ACT -- (House of Representatives - July 11, 2007)

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Mr. *McDERMOTT*. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2608) to amend section 402 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 to provide, in fiscal years 2008 through 2010, extensions of supplemental security income for refugees, asylees, and certain other humanitarian immigrants, and to amend the Internal Revenue Code to collect unemployment compensation debts resulting from fraud.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2608

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ``SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act''.

SEC. 2. SSI EXTENSIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN IMMIGRANTS.

Section 402(a)(2) of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (8 U.S.C. 1612(a)(2)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

``(M) **SSI EXTENSIONS THROUGH FISCAL YEAR 2010.--**

``(i) **TWO-YEAR EXTENSION.--**

``(I) **IN GENERAL.--**Except as provided in clause (ii), with respect to eligibility for benefits for the specified Federal program described in paragraph (3)(A), the 7-year period described in subparagraph (A) shall be deemed to be a 9-year period during fiscal years 2008 through 2010.

``(II) **ALIENS WHOSE BENEFITS CEASED IN PRIOR FISCAL YEARS.--**

``(aa) **IN GENERAL.--**Beginning on the date of the enactment of the SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act, any qualified alien rendered ineligible for the specified Federal program described in paragraph (3)(A) during fiscal years prior to fiscal year 2008 solely by reason of the termination of the 7-year period described in subparagraph (A) shall be eligible for such program for an additional 2-year period in accordance with this clause, if such alien meets all other eligibility factors under title XVI of the Social Security Act.

``(bb) **PAYMENT OF BENEFITS.--**Benefits paid under item (aa) shall be paid prospectively over the duration of the qualified alien's renewed eligibility.

``(ii) **PENDING NATURALIZATION APPLICATION.--**With respect to eligibility for benefits for the specified program described in paragraph (3) (A), subsection (a)(1) shall

not

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apply during fiscal years 2008 through 2010 to an alien described in one of clauses (i) through (v) of subparagraph (A), if the alien has submitted an application for naturalization that is pending before the Secretary of Homeland Security, and such submission is verified by the Commissioner of Social Security either by receiving a receipt number from the alien for such submitted application or by receiving confirmation from the Secretary of Homeland Security."

SEC. 3. COLLECTION OF UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION DEBTS RESULTING FROM FRAUD.

(a) *In General.*--Section 6402 of the Internal Revenue Code (relating to authority to make credits or refunds) is amended by redesignating subsections (f) through (k) as subsections (g) through (l), respectively, and by inserting after subsection (e) the following new subsection:

``(f) *Collection of Unemployment Compensation Debts Resulting From Fraud.*--

``(1) **IN GENERAL.**--Upon receiving notice from any State that a named person owes a covered unemployment compensation debt to such State, the Secretary shall, under such conditions as may be prescribed by the Secretary--

``(A) reduce the amount of any overpayment payable to such person by the amount of such covered unemployment compensation debt;

``(B) pay the amount by which such overpayment is reduced under subparagraph (A) to such State and notify such State of such person's name, taxpayer identification number, address, and the amount collected; and

``(C) notify the person making such overpayment that the overpayment has been reduced by an amount necessary to satisfy a covered unemployment compensation debt.

If an offset is made pursuant to a joint return, the notice under subparagraph (B) shall include the names, taxpayer identification numbers, and addresses of each person filing such return and the notice under subparagraph (C) shall include information related to the rights of a spouse of a person subject to such an offset.

``(2) **PRIORITIES FOR OFFSET.**--Any overpayment by a person shall be reduced pursuant to this subsection--

``(A) after such overpayment is reduced pursuant to--

``(i) subsection (a) with respect to any liability for any internal revenue tax on the part of the person who made the overpayment;

``(ii) subsection (c) with respect to past-due support; and

``(iii) subsection (d) with respect to any past-due, legally enforceable debt owed to a Federal agency; and

``(B) before such overpayment is credited to the future liability for any Federal internal

revenue tax of such person pursuant to subsection (b).

If the Secretary receives notice from a State or States of more than one debt subject to paragraph (1) or subsection (e) that is owed by a person to such State or States, any overpayment by such person shall be applied against such debts in the order in which such debts accrued.

``(3) **NOTICE; CONSIDERATION OF EVIDENCE.**--No State may take action under this subsection until such State--

``(A) notifies the person owing the covered unemployment compensation debt that the State proposes to take action pursuant to this section;

``(B) provides such person at least 60 days to present evidence that all or part of such liability is not legally enforceable or due to fraud;

``(C) considers any evidence presented by such person and determines that an amount of such debt is legally enforceable and due to fraud; and

``(D) satisfies such other conditions as the Secretary may prescribe to ensure that the determination made under subparagraph (C) is valid and that the State has made reasonable efforts to obtain payment of such covered unemployment compensation debt.

``(4) **COVERED UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION DEBT.**--For purposes of this subsection, the term 'covered unemployment compensation debt' means--

``(A) a past-due debt for erroneous payment of unemployment compensation due to fraud which has become final under the law of a State certified by the Secretary of Labor pursuant to section 3304 and which remains uncollected;

``(B) contributions due to the unemployment fund of a State for which the State has determined the person to be liable due to fraud; and

``(C) any penalties and interest assessed on such debt.

``(5) **REGULATIONS.**--

``(A) **IN GENERAL.**--The Secretary may issue regulations prescribing the time and manner in which States must submit notices of covered unemployment compensation debt and the necessary information that must be contained in or accompany such notices. The regulations may specify the minimum amount of debt to which the reduction procedure established by paragraph (1) may be applied.

``(B) **FEE PAYABLE TO SECRETARY.**--The regulations may require States to pay a fee to the Secretary, which may be deducted from amounts collected, to reimburse the Secretary for the cost of applying such procedure. Any fee paid to the Secretary pursuant to the preceding sentence shall be used to reimburse appropriations which bore all or part of the cost of applying such procedure.

``(C) **SUBMISSION OF NOTICES THROUGH SECRETARY OF LABOR.**--The regulations may include a requirement that States submit notices of covered unemployment compensation debt to the Secretary via the Secretary of Labor in accordance with procedures established by the Secretary of Labor. Such procedures may require States to

pay a fee to the Secretary of Labor to reimburse the Secretary of Labor for the costs of applying this subsection. Any such fee shall be established in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury. Any fee paid to the Secretary of Labor may be deducted from amounts collected and shall be used to reimburse the appropriation account which bore all or part of the cost of applying this subsection.

“(6) **ERRONEOUS PAYMENT TO STATE.**--Any State receiving notice from the Secretary that an erroneous payment has been made to such State under paragraph (1) shall pay promptly to the Secretary, in accordance with such regulations as the Secretary may prescribe, an amount equal to the amount of such erroneous payment (without regard to whether any other amounts payable to such State under such paragraph have been paid to such State).”.

(b) Disclosure of Certain Information to States Requesting Refund Offsets for Legally Enforceable State Unemployment Compensation Debt Resulting From Fraud.--

(1) **GENERAL RULE.**--Paragraph (3) of section 6103(a) of such Code is amended by inserting “(10),” after “(6),”.

(2) **DISCLOSURE TO DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND ITS AGENT.**--Paragraph (10) of section 6103(l) of such Code is amended--

(A) by striking “(c), (d), or (e)” each place it appears in the heading and text and inserting “(c), (d), (e), or (f)”,

(B) in subparagraph (A) by inserting “, to officers and employees of the Department of Labor and its agent for purposes of facilitating the exchange of data in connection with a request made under subsection (f)(5) of section 6402,” after “section 6402”, and

(C) in subparagraph (B) by inserting “, and any agents of the Department of Labor,” after “agency” the first place it appears.

(3) **SAFEGUARDS.**--Paragraph (4) of section 6103(p) of such Code is amended--

(A) in the matter preceding subparagraph (A), by striking “(l)(16),” and inserting “(l)(10), (16),”;

(B) in subparagraph (F)(i), by striking “(l)(16),” and inserting “(l)(10), (16),”;

(C) in the matter following subparagraph (F)(iii)--

(i) in each of the first two places it appears, by striking “(l)(16),” and inserting “(l)(10), (16),”;

(ii) by inserting “(10),” after “paragraph (6)(A),”;

(iii) in each of the last two places it appears, by striking “(l)(16)” and inserting “(l)(10) or (16)”.

(c) Expenditures From State Fund.--Section 3304(a)(4) of such Code is amended--

(1) in subparagraph (E), by striking “and” after the semicolon;

(2) in subparagraph (F), by inserting ``and" after the semicolon; and

(3) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

``(G) with respect to amounts of covered unemployment compensation debt (as defined in section 6402(f)(4)) collected under section 6402(f)--

``(i) amounts may be deducted to pay any fees authorized under such section; and

``(ii) the penalties and interest described in section 6402(f)(4)(B) may be transferred to the appropriate State fund into which the State would have deposited such amounts had the person owing the debt paid such amounts directly to the State;"

(d) *Conforming Amendments.*--

(1) Subsection (a) of section 6402 of such Code is amended by striking ``(c), (d), and (e)," and inserting ``(c), (d), (e), and (f)".

(2) Paragraph (2) of section 6402(d) of such Code is amended by striking ``and before such overpayment is reduced pursuant to subsection (e)" and inserting ``and before such overpayment is reduced pursuant to subsections (e) and (f)".

(3) Paragraph (3) of section 6402(e) of such Code is amended in the last sentence by inserting ``or subsection (f)" after ``paragraph (1)".

(4) Subsection (g) of section 6402 of such Code, as redesignated by subsection (a), is amended by striking ``(c), (d), or (e)" and inserting ``(c), (d), (e), or (f)".

(5) Subsection (i) of section 6402 of such Code, as redesignated by subsection (a), is amended by striking ``subsection (c) or (e)" and inserting ``subsection (c), (e), or (f)".

(e) *Effective Date.*--The amendments made by this section shall apply to refunds payable under section 6402 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 on or after the date of enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. *McDermott*) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. *Weller*) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Washington.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. *McDERMOTT*. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include therein extraneous materials on this bill under consideration.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Washington?

There was no objection.

Mr. *McDERMOTT*. Mr. Speaker, refugees come to America fleeing persecution, injustice, torture and even death. During a hearing before the Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, we heard from one of those refugees. His name was K'Keng, and he fought alongside American forces during the Vietnam war. In fact, he was recruited and trained by our Special Forces. After the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam, he was imprisoned for 6 years as a political prisoner, after which he eventually made it to the United States as a refugee.

He tried working, but the wounds he suffered during the war made that difficult. Based on his disability and the fact that he had almost no other source of income, he began receiving Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, benefits. But those benefits were terminated when he reached a 7-year time limit on SSI on refugees. He is now 75, partially blind, and lives on only a few hundred dollars worth of food stamps every month, as well as assistance from his young son.

Nearly 7,000 elderly and disabled refugees have lost their SSI benefits. The Social Security Administration projects another 16,000 will do so over the next few years unless the Congress acts.

As the beacon of freedom around the world, America can do better than this. While it is true that a refugee may continue to receive SSI if he or she becomes a citizen, a series of obstacles make that transition to citizenship difficult within the 7-year limit of SSI benefits.

First, a refugee must live in the United States for at least 5 years before they are eligible to submit an application for citizenship.

[Time: 16:15]

A refugee must then confront a lengthy application process which can take up to 3 to 4 years. Backlogs in processing citizenship applications have been caused by a variety of issues, including protracted background checks put in place after September 11 terrorist attacks. There are other barriers to citizenship, such as the continuing impact of the recent annual cap on the number of asylees who may become legal permanent residents, a status which asylees must maintain for 4 years before they may submit an application for citizenship.

Also, some disabled and elderly refugees encounter difficulties navigating the application process, which includes both an English language and a U.S. civics test.

I'm pleased to say there is bipartisan support for addressing this issue. The last several budget proposals from the Bush administration have called for an extension in SSI benefits for refugees, and there is a bipartisan bill pending in the U.S. Senate.

I would like especially to thank Mr. *Weller*, the ranking member on the Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, for working with me to forge the bipartisan bill we are now considering.

This bill, H.R. 2608, would generally extend SSI benefits for an additional 2 years for disabled and elderly refugees, asylees and other qualified humanitarian immigrants, including those whose benefits have expired in the recent past. Benefits could be extended for an additional period for those awaiting a decision on pending application for citizenship.

These policies would be in effect till 2010.

The legislation completely offsets the cost of the SSI extension for refugees within a provision that will reduce Federal tax refunds to recover unemployment insurance debts due to fraud. The Federal tax refund offset authority already exists to collect unpaid child support, unpaid State taxes and debts owed to the Federal agencies.

The bill simply says that if a State concludes that a worker has fraudulently received unemployment benefits or a business owner has failed to pay UI taxes based on fraud, the State can seek to receive a portion of any Federal tax refund that the individual may be owed. Before pursuing a tax offset, the State would be required to notify the individual and provide them with at least 60 days to contest the amount being recovered.

By catching and reducing fraud in the unemployment insurance system, this provision not only offsets the cost of the SSI extension for refugees, but it also will reduce unemployment taxes on employers. The Joint Committee on Taxation estimates the legislation will cut payroll taxes by \$326 million over the next 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, refugees come to our country fleeing persecution. They reside in our country legally, and those eligible for SSI are disabled, elderly or both. This legislation extends a modest benefit to help them provide for their most basic essentials. The bill will not add one dime to the Federal deficit, and it will even provide a tax cut. Such a combination should ensure broad support for this vital effort to help those most in need.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

This bipartisan legislation that we are considering today, the SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act, increases the amount of time that certain low-income disabled and aged immigrants can continue to receive Supplemental Security Income, SSI benefits, from 7 to 9 years. These are individuals legally allowed in the United States for humanitarian reasons after fleeing persecution and suffering in their own countries. The approximately 28,000 individuals assisted by this legislation include refugees, asylees and Cuban/Haitian entrants from around the world.

To gain access to permanent eligibility for SSI and all other benefits and freedoms afforded to Americans, legal refugees and asylees are eligible to become U.S. citizens through the naturalization process now administered by the Department of Homeland Security. However, as many Members have heard from constituents, this process does not always move forward in a timely manner for a number of reasons.

For instance, a letter I recently received from the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law in Illinois outlines a case in which an elderly Jewish refugee couple from the former Soviet Union working to become citizens encountered problems of lost paperwork and the need to have fingerprints retaken time and time again. A recent Washington Post story noted that as of March of 2007, this spring, nearly 1.3 million individuals were in the Department of Homeland Security citizenship application backlog, and 330,000 cases were in the FBI background check backlog.

Recognizing the likelihood of ongoing issues in the naturalization process, this legislation provides up to one extra year of eligibility, for a total of up to 10 years, for those refugees

and asylees needing more time to complete the naturalization process. This is an important provision as it emphasizes the relative temporary nature of SSI eligibility for newly arrived legal refugees and asylees, while encouraging them to pursue citizenship so that they may fully participate in our Nation's democracy.

As with the other features of this legislation that relate to eligibility for SSI benefits, this provision is effective from fiscal year 2008 through 2010. So a future Congress must reexamine whether these provisions are working as intended, including providing refugees and related individuals who are playing by the rules and applying for citizenship, sufficient time to go through that process without losing access to these important benefits.

These additional SSI benefits are paid for through a provision that will reduce Federal income tax refunds to better recover unemployment benefit overpayments that resulted from fraud. Tax refund offsets already occur for delinquent child support payments and certain other debts owed to the Federal Government, and this simply allows the current process to work in recovering unemployment benefit overpayments.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates this permanent change will more than pay for the additional SSI benefits provided in this bill. This is sound policy and builds on proposals included in recent Bush administration budget proposals.

The Ways and Means Committee, and in particular the Income Security and Family Support Subcommittee, on which I serve as ranking member, has

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long been active in developing legislation to combat fraud and abuse involving unemployment and other benefits. I'm pleased to see we are continuing that effort with this legislation.

For example, in 2004, under the leadership of former chairman Wally Herger, we passed provisions to stop the illegal manipulation of State unemployment taxes. We also allowed State unemployment plans to use information in the National Directory of New Hires to help prevent unemployment benefit overpayments. Today's legislation builds on those efforts, and I am proud to support it.

I would also note that this legislation is supported by a long list of faith-based and other community groups, including many who assist refugees in their efforts to become citizens. That list includes the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, Lutheran Social Services of America, and Catholic Charities USA, among many, many other groups.

I would also note I received a letter of support from the Social Security Administration endorsing this bipartisan bill, and I will include the letters of support in the *Record*.

Finally, I would also like to recognize the efforts of my friend and colleague, Representative *Phil English* of Pennsylvania who, among many others, has worked diligently to see that these sorts of changes occur, including by introducing bills to this same goal and effect.

I encourage all Members to join me in supporting this bipartisan legislation.

June 28, 2007.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE, Representing a diverse cross-section of organizations from across the country, we write to you today to ask that you support H.R. 2608--the "SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act." This bipartisan bill is a critical lifeline to thousands of elderly and disabled refugees who are about to lose, or have already lost, their Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits due to the arbitrary seven-year time limit to which their eligibility is limited.

This bill, introduced by Representatives Jim McDermott (D-7th WA) and Jerry Weller (R-11th IL), Chair and Ranking Member, respectively, of the Ways & Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, will provide a two-year extension of SSI eligibility for elderly and disabled refugees, as well as a provision to cover those who lost benefits prior to enactment of the legislation. The bill will also ensure that refugees who are making efforts to become citizens, but are caught up in the processing backlogs through no fault of their own, are given additional time to naturalize. H.R. 2608 will provide vital relief to thousands of refugees who have already fallen into extreme destitution.

The number of people who are losing their life-sustaining SSI benefits, in large part due to delays in the immigration system beyond their control, is climbing. The Social Security Administration currently projects that 50,000 elderly and disabled refugees will face extreme hardship and destitution by 2012 due to the suspension of their SSI benefits. These individuals fled persecution or torture in countries such as Iran, Russia, Iraq, Vietnam and Somalia, and now are too elderly or disabled to support themselves.

As more and more people begin to reach the end of their seven-year eligibility period, the human impact of this restrictive time limit has become increasingly dire and all the more intolerable. Some will lose health insurance as well, because SSI and Medicaid eligibility are typically linked. Among those who have already lost SSI benefits is a Jewish elderly couple from the former Soviet Union; the husband is deaf and the wife suffers from heart disease. However, this restriction does not affect only the elderly, as illustrated by the case of a 16-year-old Iranian boy with mental retardation, autism, seizures, and severe macrocephaly who lost his SSI benefits and Medicaid health insurance due to the seven-year time limit. These are only but two of the thousands of heartbreaking stories that we will continue to be confronted with unless Congress acts now to lengthen the insufficient eligibility period for this extremely vulnerable population.

The crisis is already upon us. Each and every month, elderly and disabled refugees are losing their lifeline of support. With the exception of West Virginia, no state is left untouched by this arbitrary time limit. Some 4,500 people will lose their SSI benefits in fiscal year 2007 alone. This bill enjoys bipartisan support, builds on similar proposals in recent Bush Administration budgets, and contains a savings provision that will cover the modest cost of the extension. Given the urgency of the situation and the life-threatening consequences that these individuals face, we strongly urge you to support the passage of H.R. 2608 this year. We are hopeful that Congress will act quickly and decisively to prevent the unnecessary hardship that this already-victimized population stands to suffer. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

National

American Academy of HIV; American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging;

American Association of Jews from the Former USSR, Inc; American Association of People with Disabilities; American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; American Friends Service Committee; American Jewish Committee; American Network of Community Options and Resources; American Occupational Therapy Association; Americans for Democratic Action, Inc; Asian American Justice Center; Asian Americans for Equality; Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies (AJFCA); Boat People SOS; Break the Chain Campaign; Campaign for Working Families; Catholic Charities USA; Center for Civil Justice; and Disability Navigators Inc.

EESA-Eastern European Service Agency; Gay Men's Health Crisis; Hispanic Coalition; HIV Medicine Association; HIVictorious, Inc.; Hmong National Development, Inc.; Immigrant and Refugee Rights Program, Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs; Institute for Peace and Justice; Institute for Social and Economic Development (ISED); International AIDS Empowerment; International District Housing Alliance; International Rescue Committee; International Service Center; Jewish Council for Public Affairs; Jubilee Campaign USA Inc; Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Office of the Wheaton Franciscans; Living Room, Inc; Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS); Lutheran Services in America; 9to5, National Association of Working Women.

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd; National Asian Pacific Center on Aging; National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development; National Council of Jewish Women; National Council on Aging; National Immigration Forum; National Immigration Law Center; National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC); National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty; National Priorities Project; National Senior Citizens Law Center; National Women's Law Center; NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby; New Sudan Generation; Northwest Health Law Advocates; Northwest Immigrant Rights Project; Progressive Jewish Alliance; Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism; and RESULTS.

Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law; Sisters of Mercy of the Americas; Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC); The AIDS Institute; The Arc of the United States; The Coalition on Human Needs; The Leadership Conference of Women Religious; The National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum; The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children; The Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring; U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants; Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations; United Cerebral Palsy; United Jewish Communities; United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society; USAction; Wider Opportunities for Women; Women of Reform Judaism; Women of Reform Judaism; World Relief; and YWCA USA.

Local/State/Regional

Alabama: Collat Jewish Family Services--Birmingham, Alabama.

Alaska: Alaska Center for Public Policy; Refugee Assistance & Immigration Services (RAIS)--Alaska

Arizona: Area Agency on Aging, Region One--Phoenix, AZ; Arizona Advocacy Network; Jewish Family & Children's Service--Tucson, Arizona; Pima Council on Aging--Tucson, AZ; Protecting Arizona's Family Coalition; and United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona.

Arkansas: Holy Angels Convent--Arkansas; St. Augustine Catholic Church--North Little Rock, AR; and St. Augustine Center for Children, Inc.--North Little Rock, AR.

California: 9to5 Bay Area; 9to5 Los Angeles; ACLU of Southern California; Asian Law Alliance--San Jose, CA; Asian Law Caucus--Northern California; Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California; Bay Area Immigrant Rights Coalition (BAIRC)--Oakland, CA; Bet Tzedek Legal Services--Los Angeles County; California Church IMPACT; California Immigrant Policy Center; Catholic Charities of Los Angeles, Inc; Center for Gender and Refugee Studies--San Francisco, CA; City of Los Angeles Human Relations Commission--Los Angeles, CA; DisAbleD Student Union at Pacific School of Religion--Berkeley, CA; Ethiopian Community Services, Inc.--California; Fresno Stonewall Democrats--Fresno, CA; Gray Panthers California; HomeBase--San Francisco, CA; International Rescue Committee--San Diego Regional Resettlement Office; and Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties.

Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties; Jewish Family and Children's Services of the East Bay--Berkley, California; Jewish Family Service of San Diego--California; Korean Resouce Center, Los Angeles, CA; L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center--CA; Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc.--Los Angeles; Palo Alto Association of Veterans of World War II, California; Progressive Jewish Alliance--California; Protection and Advocacy, Inc.--Sacramento, CA; Sacramento Mutual Housing Association, CA; San Diego Hunger Coalition--CA; San Francisco Bay Area Darfur Coalition--CA; Service Employees International Union Local 1021--Northern California; SIREN, Services, Immigrant Rights and Education

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Network--San Jose, CA; St. Mary's Center--Oakland, CA.

St. Paul's Episcopal Church--San Rafael, CA; The International Institute of the Bay Area--CA; The Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring--Southern California District; and Western Center on Law and Poverty--Los Angeles & Sacramento, CA.

Colorado: 9to5 Colorado; Coloradans For Immigrant Rights, a project of the American Friends Service Committee; Colorado Progressive Coalition; RESULTS of Aurora, Colorado; Rocky Mountain Survivors Center--Denver, CO.

Connecticut: Catholic Charities, Diocese of Norwich, Inc--CT; Collaborative Center for Justice, Inc.--Hartford, CT; Connecticut Citizen Action Group; Connecticut Legal Services; International Institute of CT, Inc.--Bridgeport, CT; Jewish Family Services--Danbury, CT; People of Faith CT--West Hartford, CT; and Regional Network of Programs Inc./Prospect House--Bridgeport, CT.

Florida: Catholic Charities Legal Services--Archdiocese of Miami, Inc.; Catholic Charities of Central Florida; Center for Independent Living of South Florida, Inc--Miami--Dade County, Florida; Florida Alliance Pro--Legalization; Florida Consumer Action Network; Florida Fiscal Policy Project--Miami, Florida; Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center; Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc--FL; Hispanic American Council, Florida Alliance Pro--Legalization; Jewish Family Service Inc. of Broward County--Plantation, Florida; Jewish Federation of South Palm Beach County--FL; Legal Aid Society of the Orange County Bar Association, Orlando, Florida; Refugee Immigration Project, Jacksonville (FL) Area Legal Aid; St. Johns County Legal Aid--St. Augustine, FL; The Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County, Inc; and Youth Co--Op, Inc--Florida.

Georgia: Atlanta 9to5; Georgia Rural Urban Summit--Decatur, GA; Good Shepherd Services of Atlanta; Gwinnett Ministries Network--Gwinnett County, Georgia; Refugee Family Services--Stone Mountain, Georgia; and Women Watch Afrika, Inc, Decatur, GA.

Hawaii: Na Loio--Immigrant Rights and Public Interest Legal Center--Honolulu, Hawaii.

Idaho: Agency for New Americans--Boise, Idaho; Idaho Office for Refugees; and United Vision for Idaho.

Illinois: Citizen Action/Illinois; Commission on Religion & Race--Naperville IL; Grace United Methodist Church--Naperville IL; Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights (Midwest region); Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society Chicago; Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights; Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago; Korean American Resource & Cultural Center, Chicago, IL; Project IRENE--Illinois; and Protestants for the Common Good, Chicago, IL.

Indiana: CICOA Aging & In--Home Solutions, Indianapolis, IN.

Iowa: Iowa Citizen Action Network.

Kentucky: College Democrats of America--Morehead State University Chapter; Jewish Family & Vocational Service (Louisville, Kentucky); and The Community Relations Council of the Jewish Community Federation of Louisville.

Louisiana: LA Harm Reduction Coalition--Louisiana.

Maine: Catholic Charities Maine Refugee & Immigration Services--Portland, ME; Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project, Portland, Maine; Legal Services for the Elderly--Scarborough, Maine; Maine Equal Justice Partners; Maine People's Alliance; Oganizationg to Win Economic Rights--Portland, Maine; The Jewish Federation of Greater Portland; Waterville Area Bridges for Peace and Justice--Waterville and surrounding communities.

Maryland: Jewish Family Services--Baltimore, Maryland; Maryland Association of Jews from the Former USSR; Maryland Vietnamese Mutual Association Progressive Maryland; Public Justice Center--Baltimore MD; and The Senior Connection of Montgomery County--Silver Spring, MD.

Massachusetts: Community Legal Services and Counseling Center in Cambridge, MA; Disability Law Center, Inc.--Boston, MA; First Congregational Church of Reading--Reading, MA; International Rescue Committee Boston Office; JALSA--the Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action--Boston; Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly--Boston, MA; Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston; Medical-Legal Partnership for Children Boston Medical Center; Strongest Link AIDS Services--Essex County, MA; and The Massachusetts Association of Jewish Federations.

Michigan: ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services--Dearborn; Jewish Family Service--Detroit, Michigan; Jewish Family Services--Ann Arbor, Michigan; Michigan Citizen Action; Oakland County Welfare Rights Organization--Pontiac, MI; and The IHM Justice, Peace and Sustainability Office, Michigan.

Minnesota: Jewish Community Action, St. Paul, MN; Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota;

Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance; National Council of Jewish Women--Minnetonka, MN; and Vietnamese Social Services of Minnesota.

Missouri: Bi-Lingual International Assistant Services--St. Louis, MO; Catholic Charities Archdiocese of St. Louis; Jewish Vocational Service/Center for New Americans--Kansas City, MO; Missouri Association for Social Welfare; Missouri Budget Project--St. Louis, MO; Missouri Progressive Vote Coalition; Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and Associates--Missouri; and St. Louis Jewish Community Relations Council--St. Louis, MO.

Montana: Montana People's Action.

New Hampshire: New Hampshire Citizens Alliance.

New Jersey: Community FoodBank of New Jersey; Congregation Brothers of Israel--Long Branch, New Jersey; International Institute of New Jersey; Jewish Federation of Monmouth County--NJ; Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry in New Jersey; Migration and Refugee Services of the Diocese of Trenton--Trenton, NJ; New Jersey Citizen Action; Temple Shalom--Aberdeen, NJ; The Human Concerns/Social Justice Committee of St. Anselm's Church--Wayside, NJ; The Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey; The Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring, New Jersey Region; and UJA Federation of Northern New Jersey.

New Mexico: Community Action New Mexico; Domestic Unity--New Mexico; Empowering Our Communities in New Mexico--Bernalillo, NM; New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty--Albuquerque, NM; New Mexico PACE; Open Hands--Sante Fe, NM; and State of New Mexico's Human Services Department.

New York: Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture--New York, NY; Bukharian Jewish Center, New York; Cathedral Emergency Services--Syracuse, NY; Center for Independence of the Disabled--New York; Citizen Action of New York; Claire Heureuse Community Center, Inc--New York; Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies, Inc--New York; Community Healthcare Network--New York City; Community HIV AIDS Mobilization Project--CHAMP, New York; Disabled in Action of Greater Syracuse, New York; Empire Justice Center, New York; Episcopal Migration Ministries--NYC; Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies--New York City; JBFCS, Manhattan North Community Counseling Center; Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services--New York, NY; Jewish Community Council of the Rockaway Peninsula--Far Rockaway, NY; Jewish Family Services of NENY (Albany, New York); Legal Services for the Elderly, Disabled or Disadvantaged of Western New York, Inc.; Metro New York Health Care For All Campaign; Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty--NY; New York Association on Independent Living, Inc.; New York City Department for the Aging; New York Disaster Interfaith Services; New York Immigration Coalition; Society of Jesus, New York Province--Albany, NY; Syracuse Habitat for Humanity, Inc.--NY; The Central Queens YM& YWHA, Forest Hills, New York; The International Institute of Buffalo, NY; The Rockland Immigration Coalition--NY; UJA-Federation of New York; U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants Albany Field Office--NY; West Side Campaign Against Hunger--New York; YKASEC--Empowering the Korean American Community, Flushing, NY.

North Carolina: Episcopal Migration Ministries--eastern North Carolina; and North Carolina Refugee Health Coordinator.

North Dakota: NDPeople.org--North Dakota.

Ohio: Catholic Charities Health and Human Services of the Diocese of Cleveland; Greater Dayton Vietnamese Association--Greater Dayton, Ohio area; Jewish Family Service Association of Cleveland; Jewish Family Service of Toledo, Inc.--Toledo, Ohio; Jewish Family Services--Columbus, Ohio; Jewish Family Services--Youngstown, Ohio; Jewish Federation of Greater Dayton Jewish Community Relations Council--Dayton, Ohio; Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry--Cleveland, Ohio; Ohio Jewish Communities; and Refugee & Immigration Services--Columbus, OH.

Oklahoma: YWCA Multicultural Center--Tulsa, OK.

Oregon: Asian Pacific American Community Support and Service Association (APACSA)--Portland, OR; Community Action Directors of Oregon (CADO); Disability Navigators Inc--Oregon; Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization (IRCO)--Portland, Oregon; Interfaith Action for Justice--Bend, Oregon; Klamath Lake Community Action Services--Klamath Falls, OR; Oregon Action; Peaceful Place--Oregon; The Advocacy Coalition for Seniors and People with Disabilities--OR; and The Human Services Coalition of Oregon.

Pennsylvania: HIAS and Council Migration Service of Philadelphia; JCCs of Greater Philadelphia (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); JEVS Human Services--Philadelphia; JEVS Social Services (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); Jewish Family and Children's Services (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); Jewish Family Service of Greater Wilkes-Barre (Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania); Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); Maternity Care Coalition--Philadelphia, PA; Mount St. Joseph--St. Elizabeth, PA; National Council of Jewish Women--PA; New World Association--Philadelphia, PA; Pennsylvania Refugee Resettlement Program; St. Johns Lutheran Church--Lewistown, PA; and YWCA Philadelphia.

Rhode Island: National Association of Social Workers--Rhode Island Chapter; and Rhode Island Ocean State Action.

South Carolina: Columbia Jewish Federation/Jewish Family Service--Columbia, SC; and Jewish Family Service (Columbia, South Carolina).

South Dakota: Systematic Theology and Christian Heritage--Sioux Falls, SD.

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Tennessee: Jewish Family Service of Nashville and Middle Tennessee; and Tennessee Citizen Action.

Texas: Catholic Charities Diocese of Ft. Worth, Inc.; Jewish Family and Children's Service (San Antonio, Texas); Jewish Family Service (Houston, Texas); REFUGIO DEL RIO GRANDE, Inc.--San Benito, TX; South Texas Food Bank; and Texas Conference United Methodist Church Board of Church & Society.

Utah: Jewish Family Service of Salt Lake; Learning Loft--Salt Lake Valley, Utah; Utah Community Action Partnership Association; and Utah Housing Coalition.

Vermont: Central Vermont Community Action Council; Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program; and VT Affordable Housing Coalition.

Virginia: Bay Aging--Urbanna, VA; Center for Multicultural Services--Falls Church, VA;

Disabled Action Committee--Virginia; Potomac Legal Aid Society--Virginia; Rappahannock Area Agency on Aging, Inc.--Fredericksburg, VA; and Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School for Christian Education--Richmond, VA.

Washington: Asian Counseling & Referral Service--Seattle, WA; Catholic Community Services of Western Washington; Jewish Family Service of Seattle (Seattle, Washington); Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle (Seattle, Washington); Solid Ground--Seattle, WA; South Sound Outreach Services--Tacoma, Washington; Washington Community Action Network; and Washington Senior Citizens' Lobby--Olympia, WA.

Washington, DC: Whitman-Walker Clinic--Washington, DC.

West Virginia: West Virginia Citizen Action Group.

Wisconsin: 9to5 Poverty Network Initiative (Wisconsin); Citizen Action of Wisconsin; Milwaukee Association of Russian-speaking Jews; Milwaukee Jewish Council for Community Relations; UMOs, Inc--Milwaukee, WI; and Wisconsin Jewish Conference.

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SARGENT SHRIVER NATIONAL

CENTER ON POVERTY LAW,

Chicago, IL, June 19, 2007.

Re: HR 2608, The SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act.

Hon. Jerry Weller,
Cannon HOB,
Washington, DC.

Dear Rep. Weller: I write to thank you for the compassionate leadership you have shown in being a chief cosponsor of HR 2608. This legislation provides relief to elderly and disabled residents of our nation who, having already endured great suffering, hardship and persecution in their native lands, are now, through no fault of their own, faced with destitution.

I have been working on this issue for several years, ever since the plight of these elderly and disabled refugees came to light in stories like those of Iosif and Polina Katz, Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union in their late 60s who fled the Nazi invasion and lived through iron-fisted Soviet rule. ("Older refugees on verge of losing Federal benefits," Chicago Tribune, page A1, Dec. 27, 2003). The Katzes needed to become U.S. citizens by July 1, 2004 or they would be terminated from SSI. Iosif, whose green card had been delayed for years after immigration officials lost his application, had no chance of meeting this deadline. His wife Polina, whose fingerprints had to be retaken three times, was also representative of the types of government delays over which these vulnerable residents of our nation have no control.

Thanks again for your leadership, Rep. Weller, and please let me know if we can be of any assistance in your efforts to address this compelling situation.

Sincerely,

Dan Lesser,
Senior Attorney.

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SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION,

Washington DC, July 10, 2007.

Hon. *Jim McCrery*,
House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

Dear Mr. McCrery: I am writing to provide the Social Security Administration's (SSA) views on H.R. 2608, the SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act.

SSA fully supports an extension of the time period in which refugees, asylees, and certain other humanitarian categories of noncitizens may remain eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) while seeking U.S. citizenship. The current time limit is 7 years, and some aged, blind and disabled individuals have been unable to obtain U.S. citizenship within this time period. The Administration recognizes the daunting challenges refugees have faced in fleeing tyranny, the adjustments they must make in their resettlement, and their need for additional help in their quest for U.S. citizenship.

Section 2 of H.R. 2608 would amend the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 to permit a 9-year period for SSI eligibility, provide retroactive eligibility for refugees and asylees who previously became ineligible after 7 years, and exempt the general SSI prohibition for refugees and asylees with pending naturalization applications. These changes would be in effect from 2008-2010. This provision is similar to the Administration's proposal for an extension to 8 years that was in the President's budget in FY 2005, FY 2006, FY 2007 and FY 2008. One difference between H.R. 2608 and the Administration's proposal is that the retroactive effect of H.R. 2608 could require SSA to reinstate SSI payments for individuals who have been off of the rolls for many years. While this represents a new workload, we would like to work with Congress to address the administrative burden inherent with such an effort, with the overall goal of assisting aged, blind, and disabled individuals in becoming U.S. citizens.

A similar letter has been sent to the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Astrue,
Commissioner.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. *McDERMOTT*. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. *Becerra*).

Mr. *BECERRA*. Mr. Speaker, I want to join in this bipartisan effort to try to move forward legislation which is not only important but precious to many people in this country who are keen to be American citizens.

H.R. 2608, the SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act, is something that won't affect most Americans because most of us don't have to worry about this. But if you are a Russian Jew who was escaping persecution in the former Soviet Union, if you're one of the minority populations in Somalia that escaped the persecution going on there, or if you're a former Yugoslav who was trying to leave the devastation that was occurring in the former Yugoslavian countries that now have become part of the Balkans and the war that we saw in the Balkans, or if you're an Iraqi Kurd who is trying to escape the ill effects of what was going on during the Saddam Hussein era, then perhaps you'd understand why this is so important, because these are individuals who, because of the good graces of the American people, have an opportunity to start a life here, even at their late stage in life, and have an opportunity to recognize and appreciate our freedoms.

But for too many of these refugees, that might all come to an end if we don't come to their rescue, because they did not expect that, all of a sudden, because of the massive waiting line there is for people who are applying for citizenship, legal immigrants who are applying for citizenship, that all of a sudden their cut off of SSI benefits would imperil their ability to pay their rent. Or they didn't expect that, all of a sudden, because of the fact that the paperwork was more difficult than they thought to fill out, or the fee was more expensive than they could afford to pay to be able to become U.S. citizens, that all of a sudden they run out of time with their SSI benefits.

This bipartisan legislation strikes the right chord. It says, we recognize that you came to this country fleeing persecution, fleeing threats of death, and you're elderly or disabled, or perhaps both, and we need to do something to try to show you that we meant what we said when we were taking you in as refugees.

I think this is legislation that really brings us together, not as Democrats or Republicans, not as urban Members or rural Members, but it brings us together as Americans who recognize there are many people around the world who still look at America as the beacon for the rest of the world. And I hope that what we are able to do here, at no taxpayer expense, no taxpayer expense, is to continue to show the rest of the world that we do extend a hand to those who are facing persecution.

So I want to applaud Chairman *McDermott* and Ranking Member *Weller* for their great work in putting together a bipartisan bill that should receive the unanimous support of this House.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to my friend and colleague from Pennsylvania (Mr. *English*), a member of the House Ways and Means Committee and someone who has led on this issue as a member of the Ways and Means Committee.

Mr. ENGLISH of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 2608, the SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act; and I was particularly pleased to cosponsor this legislation. And I hope that all of my colleagues will join me in supporting it.

Mr. Speaker, the United States has been a welcoming Nation to individuals and families fleeing oppression and tyranny in their own country. Repeatedly we've opened our doors to refugees

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from places like Nazi Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union, Cuba, China and Vietnam. And more

recently, we've taken in dissidents from African dictatorships, Islamic theocracies, the Balkans, Latin America's strongmen, and nations suffering from near total anarchy. We've not discriminated at any time according to race, religion or politics. We have simply asked refugees to demonstrate that they would face violence or oppression at home for any of these reasons, and then made them welcome here in a new home. This is an important part of the American tradition.

Unfortunately, refugees often arrive in this country with severe health problems or advanced age. Many of them have spent time in prison or in re-education camps. Some, like the Hmong tribesmen who testified before our subcommittee, have shed their own blood in defense of American values or foreign policy and have been severely punished by their own governments for doing so. Often these health problems leave refugees with limited job prospects or ability to gain the skills necessary to compete for employment. This is particularly true of elderly refugees who may have difficulty learning English.

As the chairman and ranking member have explained at length, under current law, these refugees lose their eligibility for SSI benefits, which is often their primary source of income, after they've lived in the United States for 7 years, unless they become citizens. Unfortunately, between the now infamous bureaucracy at the State Department, the difficulties of learning English, and a cap on green cards for refugees, many of these individuals are unable, through no fault of their own, to complete the immigration process in the required 7 years.

Mr. Speaker, we did not welcome these refugees to our shores only to see them starve in our streets, nor should we impose the burden of their support on local governments or private sector nonprofit organizations.

[Time: 16:30]

I am extremely proud that many of these individuals have chosen to make their new homes in northwestern Pennsylvania, particularly my hometown of Erie, Pennsylvania, which enjoys a national reputation for welcoming refugees. But our local communities have very limited resources with which to assist large numbers of low-income refugees.

H.R. 2608 wisely recognizes the Federal nature of our obligation to help these people build a new life. It is compassionate yet responsible legislation, and I urge all of my colleagues to join me in a ``yes" vote.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, once again, I want to thank Mr. *Weller*.

Mr. Speaker, I will include in the *Record* documents relating to this legislation, including a letter from the Commissioner of Social Security articulating the need for this bill and an estimate from the Congressional Budget Office, which highlights the fact that this bill is completely paid for. In fact, it actually reduces the deficit by nearly \$50 million.

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION,

Washington, DC, July 10, 2007.

Hon. **CHARLES B. RANGEL**,

*Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: I am writing to provide the Social Security Administration's (SSA) views on H.R. 2608, the SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act.

SSA fully supports an extension of the time period in which refugees, asylees, and certain other humanitarian categories of noncitizens may remain eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) while seeking U.S. citizenship. The current time limit is 7 years, and some aged, blind, and disabled individuals have been unable to obtain U.S. citizenship within this time period. The Administration recognizes the daunting challenges refugees have faced in fleeing tyranny, the adjustments they must make in their resettlement, and their need for additional help in their quest for U.S. citizenship.

Section 2 of H.R. 2608 would amend the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 to permit a 9-year period for SSI eligibility, provide retroactive eligibility for refugees and asylees who previously became ineligible after 7 years, and exempt the general SSI prohibition for refugees and asylees with pending naturalization applications. These changes would be in effect from 2008-2010. This provision is similar to the Administration's proposal for an extension to 8 years that was in the President's budget in FY 2005, FY 2006, FY 2007 and FY 2008. One difference between H.R. 2608 and the Administration's proposal is that the retroactive effect of H.R. 2608 could require SSA to reinstate SSI payments for individuals who have been off of the rolls for many years. While this represents a new workload, we would like to work with Congress to address the administrative burden inherent with such an effort, with the overall goal of assisting aged, blind, and disabled individuals in becoming U.S. citizens.

A similar letter has been sent to Representative McCrery.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Astrue,
Commissioner.

H.R. 2608--SSI EXTENSION FOR ELDERLY AND DISABLED REFUGEES ACT
(By fiscal year, in millions of dollars)

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	5-year	10-year
SSI	47	50	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	133	133
Medicaid	8	9	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	24
Unemployment comp.	0	-57	-57	-58	-58	-59	-60	-60	-61	-61	-230	-531
Total change in outlays	55	2	-14	-58	-58	-59	-60	-60	-61	-61	-73	-374
Change in revenues	0	0	-7	-20	-35	-45	-51	-55	-56	-57	-62	-326
Net budgetary effect	55	2	-7	-38	-23	-14	-9	-5	-5	-4	-11	-48

Notes: Assumes enactment at the end of FY 2007. SSI and Medicaid outlays and revenues estimated by CBO; Unemployment Compensation outlays estimated by JCT. Components may not sum to totals because of rounding. Does not include administrative costs, which are discretionary.

- [Begin Insert]

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of assisting immigrants who Congress invited to live in the United States because they were being persecuted in their home countries.

Refugees arrive in this country with little more than the clothes on their backs. They often have no family in the United States. For those immigrants who are elderly or have disabilities and cannot work, their sole source of income is often the meager benefits--typically around \$600 per month--provided by the SSI program.

Under draconian provisions of 1996's so-called ``Welfare Reform'' law, refugees and asylees can only receive SSI benefits for a maximum of 7 years. To date, this law has caused more than 12,000 elderly and disabled humanitarian immigrants to lose their benefits and face hunger and homelessness. The Social Security Administration has estimated that an additional 40,000 individuals will be terminated from assistance in the next 10 years if the law is not changed. Leaving immigrants, who have suffered so much and come to the United States in search of protection, destitute with no means of support is unconscionable.

Current law assumes that refugees and asylees can complete the lengthy and expensive citizenship process within 7 years and continue receiving benefits. For most refugees there is a mandatory 5-year waiting period before they can even apply for citizenship. With application backlogs that regularly near 1 million, becoming naturalized within 7 years is a longshot at best. Acquiring the skills needed to pass the citizenship test, such as English language proficiency, may be impossible for immigrants with severe disabilities.

The SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act (H.R. 2608) takes the common sense and compassionate approach of temporarily extending the time limit by 2 years. This will provide relief to thousands of individuals facing the loss of their sole source of support.

While this bill is the best we can do given the present fiscal environment, we should move toward completely removing the time limits. Doing so would bring us into compliance with International Conventions requiring nations to accord lawful refugees the same access to public benefits that they allow their own citizens. In addition, it would build on our Nation's tradition of opening our borders to immigrants escaping persecution and suffering.

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I urge my colleagues to support this important bill, but I hope everyone recognizes that this bill only represents a partial fix.

- [End Insert]

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDermott) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2608.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

END

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