slip to see her doctor. Ob-gyns provide basic, critical health care for women. Women have different medical needs than men, and ob-gyns often have the most appropriate medical education and experience to address a woman's health care needs.

It is not hard to see what a difference direct ob-gyn access makes in women's health care. Imagine a working woman in San Diego who has a urgent medical problem that requires an ob-gyn visit. She works forty-five hours a week and has limited sick and vacation time. On Monday she calls from work to make an appointment with her primary care physician. If she is lucky, she gets an appointment for Tuesday morning and takes time off to go see her doctor. Her doctor agrees she should be seen by her ob-gyn and gives her a referral. Tuesday afternoon she returns to work and calls her ob-gyn. The doctor is in surgery on Wednesday, but they offer her an appointment on Friday morning. On Friday she takes another morning off work and finally gets the care she needs. This unnecessary referral process has resulted in her taking an extra morning off work and delayed her proper medical care by 5 days. The patient, employee, primary care physician, and health plan provider would have saved money and time if the patient had been able to go directly to her ob-gyn.

A recent American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists/Princeton survey of ob-gyns showed that 60% of all ob-gyns in managed care reported that their patients are either limited or barred from seeing their ob-gyns without first getting permission from another physician. Nearly 75% also reported that their patients have to return to their primary care physician for permission before they can see their ob-gyn for necessary follow-up care. Equally astounding is that 28% of the ob-gyns surveyed reported that even pregnant women must first receive another physician's permission before seeing an ob-gyn.

After meeting with women, obstetricians and gynecologists, health plans, and providers in the State of California, I wrote a state law that gives women direct access to their ob-gyn. That law was a good first step; however, it still does not cover over 4.3 million Californians enrolled in self-insured, federally regulated health plans. Clearly, this problem is not unique to California. There are still eight states that do not guarantee a woman direct access to her ob-gyn. Equally important to remember is that even if a woman lives in a state with direct access protections, like California, she may not be able to see her ob-gyn without a referral if she is covered by a federally regulated ERISA health plan. This means that one in three insured families are not protected by state direct access to ob-gyn laws. The time has come to make direct access to an ob-gyn a national standard.

I urge you, Mr. Speaker, and all of my colleagues to pass this critical legislation quickly into law.

FAIRNESS AND EQUITY FOR SPOUSES OF FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICERS

HON. JAMES P. MORAN

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation to correct an inequity that affects a number of spouses of Foreign Service Officers in my district and throughout the nation who served in part-time, intermittent, or temporary positions (PITs) in American embassies and missions from 1989 to 1998.

Although countless Foreign Service spouses have given up their own careers to follow officers overseas, many of them hope to continue government service, whether assigned to an embassy or here in Washington. In fact, hundreds have gone to work for the Department of State as civil service employees while their spouses were serving domestically. When the time has come for Foreign Service family members to check their retirement status, many are shocked to hear that the years they worked overseas will not count for retirement purposes.

PIT employees are excluded from receiving credit in the Federal Employees Retirement System because of the generally non-permanent nature of their employment. However, Foreign Service spouses who worked as PITs had no choice over the type of work they performed. These individuals had to take PIT positions because these jobs were the only ones available to them while living abroad. They had no choice between part-time, temporary government work and full-time, permanent work. Even those who worked full-time were still classified as PITs.

The exceptional nature of their situation is reflected in the Department of State's reclassifying this group of workers in 1998 as falling under the new Family Member Appointment. This position allows them to begin accruing retirement credit. However, these individuals are not allowed to pay back into the FERS for time worked in PIT positions, As a result, many Foreign Service spouses who worked as a PIT between 1989 and 1998 have lost up to nine or ten years of retirement credit.

Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of grave consequence to many Americans who devoted their most productive years to public service abroad. Foreign Service Officers and their spouses live lives that often put them in physical danger and cause great emotional distress. One constituent recounted being taken hostage with her husband by terrorists in Peru; while she was released early, she did not know if her husband was alive, injured, or dead.

It is simply unfair that these individuals, who have lived and worked under incredibly stressful conditions and who had no choice as to the type of work they performed, are not able to buy back the retirement credit they earned. As I indicated, some of my constituents have lost up to nine years of retirement credit because this provision has not been corrected. I urge my colleagues to join me in cosponsoring this important legislation.

THE AMERICAN WETLAND RESTORATION ACT

HON. WALTER B. JONES

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mr. JONES of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to announce the introduction of the ''American Wetland Restoration Act.''

This legislation builds upon the wetlands mitigation banking legislation I introduced in the last 3 Congresses and also the 1995 Federal Guidance issued by the Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

My Congressional district in eastern North Carolina includes most of the coast and four major river basins. More than 60% of my district could be classified as wetlands. My constituents are directly impacted by wetlands and the countless regulations that protect them. I have been contacted by farmers, business owners, state and local officials, land owners and even the military for advice and guidance in order to reach a balance between protecting these valuable resources while improving water quality but also providing for strong economic development.

On almost a daily basis, we are reminded of the critical role wetlands play in our ecosystems, specifically in maintaining water quality.

Wetlands mitigation banking is a concept readily embraced by regulators, developers and environmentalists. This balanced approach recognizes the need to protect our wetland resources while ensuring property owners their rights to have reasonable use of their properties.

Federal legislation is not only warranted, it is vital. While mitigation banking is occurring, it is limited because the authorizing agencies have little or no statutory guidance. Also, investors and venture capitalists are hesitant to invest the money needed to restore wetlands without legal certainty. One of the great benefits of private mitigation banking is that the monitoring of one large tract of wetland requires fewer resources than monitoring thousands of tiny, unsuccessful mitigation projects.

But, before a single credit is ever issued and before a wetlands mitigation banker can ever earn a dime, they must acquire land, develop a comprehensive restoration plan and establish a cash endowment for the long-term maintenance of the bank. This daunting challenge is magnified when you recall that there is no current statutory authority!

These mitigation banks give economic value to wetlands, potentially providing billions of dollars to restoring wetlands in sensitive watersheds. Unlike other mitigation projects, mitigation banks are complete ecosystems. So instead of only trying to protect the remaining wetlands, mitigation banking will actually increase wetlands acreage!

My legislation sets a simple but lofty goal: No net loss of wetlands. Specifically, the legislation requires

(1) That mitigation banks meet rigorous financial standards to assure wetlands are restored and preserved over the long term;

(2) That there is an ample opportunity for meaningful public participation;

(3) That banks must have a credible long-term operation and maintenance plan;