

To ensure that the implementation of the voter identification requirements in HAVA do not make it harder to vote, the VOTER Act expands the forms of identification that can be used to establish identity for first-time voters who submit their voter registration by mail to include an affidavit executed by the voter attesting to his or her identity, generally subject to penalties for perjury under State law.

The VOTER Act also responds to concerns first raised in the 2000 Presidential election in Florida, and echoed again in the 2004 election, regarding the appearance of impartiality by State election officials who were otherwise active in Federal campaigns. The bill imposes new accountability and transparency requirements on States, beginning in 2007, including a public notice requirement of any changes in State law affecting the administration of elections, such as changes in polling places and actions denying access to polling place observers.

To ensure the independence of the Election Assistance Commission, and the timely issuance of guidance and standards, the bill provides the agency with independent budget authority and the authority to issue mandatory standards to implement the new requirements.

Finally, in recognition of the inherent role of the States in the administration of Federal elections, the VOTER Act provides additional Federal funds for the State requirement grants under HAVA to implement the new requirements.

While Congress accomplished much with the passage of the Help America Vote Act following the debacle of the 2000 Presidential election, 4 years later in the 2004 election, voters faced many of the same barriers to voting that HAVA promised to remove. As Iraqis go to the polls this week, let us assure our own citizens that we have done all we can to ensure that every eligible American voter has an equal opportunity to cast a vote and have that vote counted in Federal elections.

I ask unanimous consent that a brief section-by-section analysis be printed in the RECORD following my remarks.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

S. 17, VOTING OPPORTUNITY AND TECHNOLOGY ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2005

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

- Sec. 1.—Title; Table of Contents.  
Sec. 2.—Findings and Purposes.

SEC. 3.—NATIONAL FEDERAL WRITE-IN ABSENTEE BALLOT.

Sec. 3 creates a National Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (NFWAB) for Federal office to be used in a Federal election by any otherwise eligible voter.

Sec. 3 requires States to accept the NFWAB cast by any person eligible to vote in a Federal election, provided the ballot has been postmarked or signed by the voter before the close of the polls on election day.

Sec. 3 requires the Election Assistance Commission to prescribe a national Federal write-in absentee ballot and prescribe stand-

ards for distributing the ballot, including distribution through the Internet.

Sec. 4.—Voter Verified Ballots.

Sec. 4 requires that all voting systems purchased after January 1, 2009 and used in Federal elections provide an independent means for each voter to verify the ballot before it is cast and counted.

Sec. 4 allows each voter to choose one means of verification from among the following options—(1) paper; (2) audio; (3) pictorial; or (4) an electronic record accessible for voters with disabilities.

Sec. 5.—Requirements for Counting Provisional Ballots.

Sec. 5 requires that a State shall count a provisional ballot for Federal office cast within the State by an otherwise eligible voter, notwithstanding the polling place in which the ballot is cast.

Sec. 6.—Minimum Required Voting Systems and Poll Workers in Polling Places.

Sec. 6 requires that each state shall provide the minimum required number of voting systems and poll workers for each polling place on election day and during early voting, consistent with mandatory standards established by the Election Assistance Commission.

Sec. 7.—Election Day Registration.

Sec. 7 requires that each State shall provide for election day registration in a Federal election for any otherwise eligible individual, using a form established by the Election Assistance Commission, unless the State does not have a voter registration requirement.

Sec. 8.—Integrity of Voter Registration Lists.

Sec. 8 requires that each State provide public notice at least 45 days before a Federal election of all names removed from the voter registration list.

Sec. 9.—Early Voting.

Sec. 9 requires that each State shall establish an early voting program for a minimum of 15 calendar days before a Federal election that provides a uniform voting period each day, except Sunday, for at least 4 hours.

Sec. 10.—Acceleration of Study on Election Day as a Public Holiday.

Sec. 10 requires the Election Assistance Commission to submit within 6 months of enactment of this Act the report on establishing a public election day holiday and uniform poll closing time, and authorizes \$100,000 for fiscal year 2006 for that purpose.

Sec. 11.—Improvements to Voting Systems.

Sec. 11 requires that punch card and central count voting systems conform to the in-person notice of over-votes in Sec. 301 of the Help America Vote Act and to permit a voter to verify and change or correct any errors before the ballot is cast and counted.

Sec. 12.—Voter Registration.

Sec. 12 requires that, by January 1, 2009, the mail registration form be changed to include an affidavit to be signed by the voter attesting to citizenship and age eligibility and requires each State to establish a program to permit voter registration through the Internet.

Sec. 13.—Establishing Voter Identification.

Sec. 13 requires that an individual may meet the identification requirement for voters who register by mail as described in Sec. 303 of the Help America Vote Act by executing a written affidavit attesting to the individual's identity.

Sec. 13 requires the Election Assistance Commission to develop standards for verifying voter identification information required for registration (the driver's license number or last four digits of the social security number), as described in Sec. 303 of the Help America Vote Act.

Sec. 14.—Impartial Administration of Elections.

Sec. 14 requires that each State will issue a public notice of changes in State election law since the most recent election.

Sec. 14 requires that each State will allow uniform, nondiscriminatory access to observe a Federal election at any polling place to party challengers, voting and civil rights organizations, and nonpartisan domestic and international observers.

Sec. 15.—Strengthening the Election Assistance Commission.

Sec. 15 requires the Election Assistance Commission to provide budget estimates and requests to the Congress, the House Administration Committee, and the Senate Rules and Administration Committee when it submits such estimates and requests to the President or Office of Management and Budget; the section provides rule-making authority for the Election Assistance Commission with respect to subtitle C of this Act; the section requires that the Director of the National Institutes of Standards and Technology provide the Commission with technical support.

Sec. 15 authorizes \$23 million for the operational costs of the Election Assistance Commission for fiscal year 2006, with \$3 million earmarked for the National Institute of Standards and Technology for technical support, and such sums as necessary for the succeeding fiscal years.

Sec. 16.—Authorization of Appropriations.

Sec. 16 authorizes \$2 billion for fiscal year 2006 and such sums as necessary thereafter for requirements grants to States under title II of the Help America Vote Act to implement the additional requirements.

Sec. 17.—Effective Date.

Sec. 17 requires that the amendments made by this Act take effect on January 1, 2007, except as provided otherwise to take effect on January 1, 2009.

SERVICE OF THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS ANTHONY J. PRINCIPI

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I am pleased to honor Secretary Principi for his diligent and effective tenure as the Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Secretary Principi has served our Nation during a historic time, and has done an impressive job with one of the most challenging positions in the government. I am proud to have worked with him.

When I travel around the State of Texas, I am reminded of the work Secretary Principi has done on behalf of veterans. He was always available to discuss the needs of Texas veterans and provided an open dialogue to our communities. I am particularly grateful for the time he spent with me touring VA facilities in Texas to learn what was important to our veterans. Over the years, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the veterans it serves have been severely challenged by the skyrocketing costs of healthcare and the surging demand for services from an aging veteran population. Throughout his time at the Department, Secretary Principi worked to ensure healthcare accessibility was a priority. Across the country, the VA has opened 194 community clinics and 87 percent of the veteran population now lives within 30 minutes of a VA medical facility. Additionally, under Secretary Principi's leadership, the Department reduced the number of veterans waiting more than 6 months for primary care and cut in

half the wait time for an appointment. These important accomplishments have improved the healthcare for our service men and women.

Secretary Principi also understood the importance of further investigating the causes of Gulf War Illness. He kept his promise to attend a meeting in Texas with Dr. Robert Haley, a world renowned researcher on the issue of Gulf War Illness. After meeting with Dr. Haley, Secretary Principi recognized the need for a study on this illness, which ultimately led to the dedication of \$60 million over the next 4 years for research. We cannot thank him enough for his leadership and attention to this important issue.

I thank Secretary Principi for his tireless service to the veterans of Texas and throughout the United States. He and his work will not be forgotten by a grateful Nation.

#### COMMON SENSE REGULATION OF FIFTY CALIBER SNIPER RIFLES

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, the CBS news program "60 Minutes" recently aired a segment regarding the dangers that .50 caliber sniper rifles pose to the security of our Nation. In previous Congresses, I have cosponsored legislation to enact common sense regulation of these dangerous weapons. Unfortunately, the Congress has thus far failed to act. I am hopeful that the 109th Congress will address this issue for the safety of all Americans.

The .50 caliber sniper rifle is a favorite weapon of militaries around the world and is also among the most powerful weapons legally available to private individuals in the United States. According to a report released by the Violence Policy Center last year, a .50 caliber sniper rifle is capable of accurately hitting a target over 1,500 yards away, and the ammunition available for the rifle includes armor-piercing, incendiary, and explosive bullets. The report also cites the U.S. Army's manual on urban combat, which states that .50 caliber sniper rifles are designed to attack bulk fuel tanks and other high-value targets from a distance using "their ability to break through all but the thickest shielding material."

The previously mentioned "60 Minutes" program highlighted various threats that military style .50 caliber sniper rifles pose to civilians. One serious threat reported on the program is the vulnerability of commercial aircraft to terrorists with .50 caliber sniper rifles. This threat was previously addressed in a 1999 report by the minority staff of the House Government Reform Committee, which noted that the thumb-sized bullets fired by .50 caliber rifles can easily punch through aircraft fuselages, fuel tanks, and engines. Police Commissioner Ray Kelly of New York City referred to these potential threats by saying, "Clearly, with the range that it has, and the impact capability that it has, it would put an airliner or an airplane at risk if it hit that plane."

So the easy availability of the .50 caliber sniper rifle poses a danger to airline safety, as well as our overall security. Last September, California became the first and so far only State in the country to ban the manufacture, sale, distribution, or importation of .50 caliber sniper rifles. Unfortunately, there are few Federal regulations to protect the rest of the Nation from these dangerous weapons. Buyers need only be 18 years old, rather than the 21 years of age required for handgun purchases. And there is no minimum age requirement for possession of a .50 caliber weapon and no regulation on second hand sales.

In an interview which became part of the "60 minutes" report, the inventor and current manufacturer of the .50 caliber sniper rifle, Ronnie Barrett, described his product as "a high-end adult recreational toy." When asked how he came up with the idea for the rifle, Mr. Barrett replied, "I was just a 26 year-old kid, and didn't know any better."

Mr. President, we should know better. The time has come to classify these weapons in the same common sense manner that we classify other weapons of war, including machine guns. The 109th Congress should follow California's good example and pass reasonable legislation that changes the way .50 caliber guns are regulated.

#### GLOBAL TSUNAMI DETECTION SYSTEM.

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I would like to comment today on S. 50, the Tsunami Preparedness Act of 2005, a timely and much-needed bill in the aftermath of the devastating tsunami in the Indian Ocean. The world has learned valuable lessons in the past month about human suffering and loss, as well as generosity and good fortune in the face of impossible odds. We have also learned a great deal about the generation of tsunamis, the need to instrument the ocean, and the need to assist in the development of a warning and civil defense system for vulnerable nations around the world.

I joined my colleagues Senators DAN INOUE and TED SEVENS, the ranking member and chair, respectively, of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, as an original cosponsor of S. 50, the Tsunami Preparedness Act of 2005, which was introduced on Monday, January 24, 2005. The bill would authorize, expand, and improve our domestic tsunami warning system. Equally importantly, it would authorize the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA, to provide technical assistance and advice to appropriate international entities in developing a global tsunami warning system comprised of regional warning networks, modeled on the Tsunami Warning System of the Pacific. We must share our expertise and experience with other tsunami-prone nations around the world.

My conviction is based on personal experience. In Hawaii, tsunamis have accounted for more lost lives than all other natural disasters. In the 20th century, an estimated 221 people were killed by tsunamis. Most of these deaths occurred on the island of Hawaii during the tsunamis of 1946 and 1960, two of the largest tsunamis to strike in the Pacific. I am hopeful that our experiences in Hawaii and the expertise of NOAA's two National Weather Service Tsunami Warning Centers located in Palmer, AK, and the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Ewa Beach, HA, can help other nations around the world prepare for potential undersea earthquakes that result in these tragic disasters.

One of the worst natural disasters in Hawaii's history took place April 1, 1946 when a magnitude 7.1 earthquake in the Aleutian Islands triggered a destructive, Pacific-wide tsunami that killed 159 people: 96 in Hilo, 15 on Kauai, 14 on Maui and nine on Oahu. There was no warning in Hawaii, as the Tsunami Warning System had not been established at that time. The town of Hilo was "pounded" by a series of 6 to 7 waves, one after the other. The waterfront and all the buildings facing Hilo Bay were completely destroyed. The tsunami flooded the downtown area of Hilo causing more than \$26 million in damages. The photos that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers took afterwards showed scenes similar to the ones we've seen in the past month in Thailand and Indonesia—everything was leveled and destroyed. The character of downtown Hilo was changed forever. Tragically, we lost a number of young children, students, killed by the tsunami in Laupahoehoe, a small community north and west of Hilo where the waves struck the school and destroyed a hospital. As a result, in 1949 the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center was established, which later became the headquarters of the International Pacific Warning System.

This bill would authorize several programs in NOAA that we have depended on since 1949. It would deploy a greater number of buoys throughout the Pacific and it would expand the research on tsunamis and their detection to ensure a more reliable and better instrumented system for the Pacific, including Alaska, the West Coast of the U.S. and Pacific islands nations who are members of the group. It would expand the domestic system to the Atlantic and Caribbean where tsunamis are infrequent but not impossible.

I would like to close with an appeal to my colleagues to consider the types of aid that the U.S. can provide to Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, and Thailand. We must not overlook the science and technology of tsunamis and tsunami detection. The detection, warnings, planning, and public education are perhaps the most important types of assistance we can provide, because they are preventive and represent the little that we can do to save lives in dealing