



Legislative Bulletin.....July 26, 2006

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H.R. 5865—Returned Americans Protection Act (*as amended by the Senate*)

**H.R. 5865—Returned Americans Protection Act—*as amended by the Senate*
(Thomas, R-CA)**

Order of Business: The bill is scheduled to be considered on Wednesday, July 26th, most likely subject to unanimous consent (though still possibly under suspension of the rules). The House passed this bill yesterday by voice vote. Today, the Senate struck the House language, inserted completely new language by unanimous consent, and sent it back to the House. There was a chance that the House would add back one House-bill provision (regarding an HHS Inspector General report on the repatriation from Lebanon), and send it back to the Senate. However, it now appears that the House will simply take up the Senate bill without amendment and seek a non-legislative assurance from HHS regarding the Lebanon oversight.

Summary, as amended: H.R. 5865, as amended by the Senate, would temporarily increase the existing program that helps American citizens repatriate from foreign countries because of illness, destitution, or war (42 U.S.C. 1313). Specifically, the \$1 million cap on the amount of annual assistance under this program would be raised to \$6 million for FY2006. The \$1 million cap would return for FY2007 and thereafter. [The House bill would have terminated the program after FY2007.]

The assistance allowed to Americans under this program in current law (unchanged by this legislation) is: “money payments, medical care, temporary billeting, transportation, and other goods and services necessary for the health or welfare of individuals (including guidance, counseling, and other welfare services) furnished to them within the United States upon their arrival in the United States and for such period after their arrival, not exceeding ninety days [subject to exception], as may be provided in regulations of the [HHS] Secretary.”

The costs of the increased assistance would be offset by allowing food stamp agencies access to the National Directory of New Hires (subject to reimbursement and information security requirements).

[The language that the House was considering adding back to H.R. 5865 would direct the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, not later than March 1, 2007, to report to Congress details on how funds under this assistance

program have been used to repatriate Americans returning from Lebanon on or after July 20, 2006. Most likely, HHS will provide a letter promising to perform this oversight.]

Additional Background: Israel has absorbed rocket and other attacks from Iran-and-Syria-backed Hezbollah in southern Lebanon for years, with the frequency increasing recently. On July 12, 2006, Hezbollah attacked Israel with rockets, crossed the border, kidnapped two Israeli soldiers, and killed eight Israeli soldiers. Israel then launched an operation into Lebanon to rescue the soldiers and push Hezbollah from its border. Hezbollah continues to attack towns across northern Israel with rocket fire. It is this ongoing situation that has forced American citizens, upon the recommendation of the State Department, to evacuate Lebanon. The State Department believes that “most American citizens who wished to depart Lebanon with U.S. government assistance have already departed.”

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/lebanon_update.html

Committee Action: On July 24, 2006, the bill was referred to the Ways & Means Committee, which took no official action on it.

Administration Position: Although no official Statement of Administration Policy is available for this bill, the State Department presumably requested the implementation of this legislation.

Cost to Taxpayers: CBO estimates that the Senate-amended legislation would increase mandatory spending by \$3 million in FY2006, would increase mandatory spending by a net \$1 million over the FY2006-FY2010 period, and would decrease mandatory spending by a net \$5 million over the FY2006-FY2015 period.

Does the Bill Expand the Size and Scope of the Federal Government?: No.

Does the Bill Contain Any New State-Government, Local-Government, or Private-Sector Mandates?: No.

Constitutional Authority: A committee report citing constitutional authority is unavailable.

RSC Staff Contact: Paul S. Teller, paul.teller@mail.house.gov, (202) 226-9718
