

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

By Daniel Raposa\*

## **H.R. 161 Healthy People, Healthy Choices Act of 2005 (Millender-McDonald)**

This bill would let the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) create minority health programs. The bill cites the obesity epidemic and the staggering 61% of American adults who are considered to be overweight. Complicating this scenario is the lack of culturally sensitive healthcare which delves into the intricacies of cultural attitudes and ways of life, particularly toward eating. The result is exacerbated obesity and health problems for minority citizens. The bill also finds that many African-American and Latino individuals are afforded less leisure-time physical activity than whites and so the health issues can be more endemic.

The bill would let CDC conduct outreach and awareness programs to minority populations concerning: nutrition, fitness, dietary supplements, cooking, and other lifestyle issues.

It would allow for grants to nonprofit health organizations serving minority populations. It would also allow grants to community organizations who facilitate healthy food products

## **H.R. 663 Ex-Offenders Voting Rights Act of 2005 (Rangel D-NY)**

This bill secures voting rights of certain qualified ex-offenders who have served their sentences. It defines the right to vote as “the most basic constitutive act of citizenship and regaining the right to vote reintegrates offenders into free society.” Congress has the ultimate say on federal elections and must ensure that state laws comply with the Constitution. Just under 4,000,000 Americans are disenfranchised due to a felony conviction. This disenfranchisement severely affects minorities relative to the populace at large. Particularly, among African-Americans, 13% of males are unable to vote.

The crux of the law states that the right of an individual citizen of the United States, who has committed a criminal offense, to vote for elections for federal office will not be abridged unless that citizen is currently in a correctional institution or is on parole or probation.

## **HCON 234 IH Whereas 8.2 percent of Whites, 11.8 percent of Asians, 22.5 percent of Latinos, and 24.4 percent of blacks lived in poverty in 2003,**

This bill reaffirms the obligation of the U.S. to improve the lives of the now estimate 37,162,000 Americans living in poverty and also the 15.6 million Americans living in extreme poverty. The resolution cites particularly that surveys on food security have revealed that those at greatest risk of being hungry or on the edge of hunger are households headed by blacks or Latinos. It also recognizes that families with children are the largest growing section of the homeless population.

## **S 2504 End Child Poverty Act (Kennedy D-MA)**

The bill aims to eliminate child poverty. It finds that 13,000,000 children in the U.S. live below the poverty line. Most of these children’s parents are working and otherwise leading lives which should produce decent standards of living. This poverty among youth stifles their ability, in turn, to become productive adults: often keeping them back in school and exposing them to myriad health risks such as lead poisoning.

The bill also notes the rise in child poverty since 2000. Child poverty is much higher in the United States than in other developed nations. Particularly, nearly one third of Latino and African-American children live below the poverty line.

Citing Prime Minister Blair’s public commitment to cut poverty by 50% in 10 years, the bill ends it completely by 2020. The initiative has successfully lifted 2,000,000 children out of poverty in Great Britain. The bill sets a national goal of cutting child poverty in half within a decade, and eliminating it as soon as possible. It would also establish a Child Poverty Elimination Trust Fund as a measure to fund Federal programs to achieve that goal.

The bill would also establish a Child Poverty Elimination Board which would have 12 voting appointees, 2 senators and 2 representatives chosen in a bipartisan fashion, and other members to be determined. The board would meet regularly to build upon strategies at meeting the goal of reducing child poverty and also to oversee the Trust Fund.

\* Daniel Raposa is a second-year law student at American University Washington College of Law and staff writer for *The Modern American*.