said the Council of Conservative Citizens is more dangerous than the KKK or neo-Nazis because it has been ''successfully masquerading as a mainstream conservative organization.''

''They're not going to produce a Timothy McVeigh; they are much more interested in genuine political power than in any kind of violence or terrorism,'' Potok said. ''I mean, Timothy McVeigh can kill 168 people, but he is never going to be elected your senator or president or congressman. So, yeah, on a political level they're much more dangerous.''

Indeed, the group claims as dues-paying members dozens of elected officials, from local school boards to state legislatures. It does not, however, claim ex-Klan leader and sometime GOP candidate David Duke, who caused Baum considerable discomfort in November by showing up at a national board meeting in Jackson, Miss.

The group's Web site welcomes visitors to ''join the vast right-wing conspiracy!''—an ironic reference to Hillary Clinton's comment about who was behind the impeachment effort—and offers such publications as a pamphlet revealing ''the ugly truth about Martin Luther King.''

The South Carolina chapters have fought to keep the Confederate battle flag flying over the state capital and criticized The Citadel for not playing ''Dixie'' often enough during functions at the military college.

''Being pro-white is not equal to being anti-black,'' said Rebekah Sutherland, an executive committee member from Aiken who ran for state school superintendent last year. ''It's OK to be white, isn't it? That's what this group is about. It's OK to be white.''

Don MacDermott, a Birmingham, Ala., city councilman and Council of Conservative Citizens member, campaigned with his chapter last year against a proposed 1-cent sales tax that he felt would go to fund ''just a bunch of wish lists for some local bureaucrats.'' He said he wouldn't belong to the organization if he felt it was racist.

''The chapter I belong to is definitely not,'' he said. ''They're just some well-grounded beliefs in conservative values. Most of the group I'm involved with were Ronald Reagan supporters in 1976.''

A.J. Parker, a siding contractor who is director of the group's North Carolina chapter, doesn't like being condemned for the views of a few members.

''Why should I pay for deeds that took place 100 years ago, or even 50 years ago?'' he said during a break from burning brush in front of his Asheville home. ''They've tried to identify us with David Duke and people like that, and anybody who speaks out against affirmative action and quotas and immigration, they're automatically tagged with that dirty brush.''

But critics point to anti-Semitic postings on the group's Web site, and to Informer columns like this from Patterson last fall:

''Western civilization with all its might and glory would never have achieved its greatness without the directing hand of God and the creative genius of the white race. Any effort to destroy the race by a mixture of black blood is an effort to destroy Western civilization itself.''

Baum noted that the Informer has a disclaimer, ''like all newspapers.''

''It was there; we can't lie. We did not endorse it,'' he said. ''Our people don't walk in lock step. Organizing conservatives is like herding cats.''

But Dick Harpootlian, chairman of the South Carolina Democratic Party, offered a different animal analogy: ''Birds of a feather flock together.''

''If David Duke and those kinds of folks are showing up at those meetings, they obviously have some interest in them,'' he said.

''There's a fight for the heart and soul of the Republican Party. Is it the party of Lincoln or the party of extremes? So far, the extreme's winning.''

U.S. Rep. Robert Wexler, D–Fla., is calling on members of Congress to denounce the Council of Conservative Citizens. ''They can hide behind whatever curtain they want to hide, but we know what they are,'' Wexler said in a telephone interview.

Baum said the debate has devolved into a kind of '90s McCarthyism, where guilt by association is the order of the day.

''Really, Trent Lott's involvement wasn't other than what he would do with any larger constituent group,'' Baum said. ''I mean, to us it's sending a signal that any political figure should not meet with conservatives. I mean, they did this with the Christian Coalition; they did it with the pro-life movement. They've tried to demonize them.''

The Council of Conservative Citizens meeting last Saturday in Columbia was supposed to be open. But when members learned an Associated Press reporter planned to attend, the executive board voted to close the partition.

''They're all afraid,'' Mrs. Bell said. ''People are afraid they'll lose their job if their name comes out.''

But Wheeler exhorted the back-room crowd to ''look at our duty. . . .

''The war for the hearts and the minds of the people must be won before the political war can be won.''

DEFENDANTS DENY WOMAN'S CLAIM OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSE DEAL

INDIANOLA, MISS. (AP)—The defendants in a federal racial discrimination lawsuit have asked the U.S. District court to dismiss the case.

The suit, filed by Sunflower County assistant district attorney Felecia Lockhart, claims Community Bank of Indianola and others conspired in 1995 to prevent her from purchasing a home in a predominantly white neighborhood. Lockhart is black.

Defendants include Community Bancshares of Mississippi, which does business as Community Bank of Mississippi; Freddie J. Bagley, the bank's president in Indianola; Thomas Colbert and James T. Mood.

In documents filed this week, the defendants denied any wrongdoing and asked that the lawsuit seeking $1.5 million in damages be dismissed. Lockhart brought the action following an unsuccessful attempt to purchase the house from Mood, an officer at the bank in Indianola, and his wife.

Lockhart claims Mood was coerced into breaching the contract to sell the House and that, specifically, ''certain shareholders and/or directors'' of the bank were objecting to the deal.

In seeking dismissal, the defendants said they had dealt with Lockhart at all times in a non-discriminatory manner.

They claim Lockhart wrote a letter to Mood wrongfully accusing him of breach of contract, demanding repairs he could not pay for and demanding he compensate her for more than $2,800 of unspecified expenses in the sale contract.

Defendants also maintain that Mood was warned that ''further steps'' would be taken if he failed to hand over the more than $2,800.

They also said none of Mood's superiors at the bank ''ever said one word to him about attempting to get out of the sale, much less coerced or sought to pressure him.''

STATEMENT ON THE PEACE PROCESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

HON. RICK LAZIO

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 1999

Mr. LAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the ongoing peace process in Northern Ireland. For nearly a year now, we have walked down a path leading toward the permanent resolution of the more than 30 years of acrimony in Northern Ireland. The ''Good Friday Peace Agreement'' was hailed internationally as ''the best chance in a generation for peace,'' and was passed last April with a remarkable 85 percent majority. As is often true with any worthwhile endeavor, the road to our ultimate goal may not always be smooth, nor direct. It is now, however, during this time of uncertainty and difficulty, when progress seems painstakingly slow and obstacles appear overwhelming, that our efforts should be redoubled. We should take heart in the accomplishments of this past year and weigh carefully the actual value of realizing a permanent peace before allowing any one stumbling block to derail this important process.

The recognition given to John Hume, head of the SDLP, and David Trimble, First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly, in receiving the Nobel Peace Prize was a reassuring step toward memorializing the extraordinary achievements made by the proponents of peace. We should not forget, however, the many other people, without whom this process would not have even been possible. Prime Ministers Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair, Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein, British Secretary Mo Mowlam and many others, on both sides of the issue, as well as the Atlantic, were instrumental in propelling the cause of peace in a region weary of constant strife. We should also remember the 3,200 people who have lost their lives during more than three decades of violence; for their memories will serve us well in motivating all people who are concerned, as I am, with enhancing the efforts to bring a lasting tranquility to Ireland. This Tranquility is of special concern to the people of New York, the State for which I hold the honor of representing, as we have one of the largest Irish populations outside of their homeland.

Unfortunately, along with this timely recognition of accomplishment, there must also be the increased vigil of those that would attempt to destroy the peace process that has been so carefully cultivated. We are reminded, yet again, of the cost of not succeeding by the tragedy which occurred just days ago, when Mrs. Rosemary Nelson was brutally murdered by a loyalist paramilitary group. Mrs. Nelson was an important participant in the peace process, an accomplished barrister, and a mother of young children. Her murder was a cowardly act that illustrates so clearly that the time has long passed for these last few violent thugs to heed the demands of the overwhelming majority of their countrymen and lay down their arms, once and for all.

The complexity of the discord in Northern Ireland that has proven so baffling to peace seekers for a generation, will not be solved by the mere signing of one document. It will only be realized by a thorough adherence to and completion of the measures outlined in the

Good Friday Agreement and mandated by the people of Ireland. As the first anniversary of the agreement approaches, all sides have the opportunity, if not the obligation, to make real progress toward its implementation. The paramilitary factions must be demobilized and disbanded immediately if there is to be a genuine and lasting peace. All parties to the process must now rely on the increased dialogue and the new, conciliatory tone of the talks to transform any future disagreements from violent altercations into intelligent debate and then, hopefully, lasting harmony. A harmony that will one day remove the ubiquitous and pernicious words ''The Troubles'' from the vernacular of a generation of Irish, both in their homeland and in America.

LANDOWNERS EQUAL TREATMENT ACT OF 1999

HON. DON YOUNG

OF ALASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 1999

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, today Congressman TAUZIN, Congressman POMBO and I, joined by more than 20 cosponsors, are introducing the Landowners Equal Treatment Act of 1999. The purpose of this bill is to insure that private property owners are compensated when their land must be used by the federal government as habitat for endangered or threatened species. The United States Constitution in the 5th Amendment states ''nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.'' The Supreme Court has said that the right to be compensated for the taking of private property for a public use is a fundamental constitutional right on the same level as the right to free speech and free exercise of religion.

There are some in our country who no longer revere or respect the rights of private property owners. Their view is that using land for wildlife habitat is more important than protecting the right to own and control the use of private property. However, the purpose of our bill of rights is prevent the current whims of the majority from infringing on the rights of each individual in our country to certain liberties and freedoms guaranteed in our constitution. One of the most important of these is the full rights of ownership of private property, which includes the right to use and enjoy the fruits of ownership of property.

Over the last several years, bills have been introduced to insure that property owners are protected by requiring compensation when property is taken, to insure that property owners have the right to bring suit to protect their own property rights, and to make property rights lawsuits less cumbersome. Certainly, landowners can file suit for compensation under the Constitution, but as you know these lawsuits are so expensive, time consuming and difficult, that ordinary citizens lose their land or their right to compensation because they cannot afford these lawsuits. Yet, the Clinton administration, has consistently opposed any and all efforts to protect private property rights.

However, the Clinton administration has vigorously sought compensation for impacts on government lands when other public agencies must make use of them. This bill guarantees that private landowners, who enjoy the protections of the Bill of Rights, receive equal treatment with government agencies, which do not have the protections of the Bill of Rights.

On February 4, 1999 I chaired a hearing on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. During the course of that hearing, we learned of a Federal Aviation Admininstration statute and regulation, that allowed the Fish and Wildlife Service to receive ''compensation'' for the lost ''use'' of refuge lands due to off-site impacts from aircraft overflights. The law requires the Secretary of Transportation to avoid or minimize impacts on public lands when approving construction of federal transportation projects. The Clinton administration is interpreting this law and rule to require that the Transportation Department first avoid impacts, then minimize impacts and if that can't be done to compensate for the impacts. This resulted in the Fish and Wildlife Service receiving an agreement for compensation of more than $26 million to be paid from revenues of the local airport through charges on airport users.

The way that the Fish and Wildlife Service and the FAA interpret whether they are ''using'' public lands that requires the payment of compensation is through a definition of ''constructive use''. According to the FAA ''A 'constructive use' can occur when proximity effects, such as noise, adversely affect the normal activity or aesthetic value of an eligible Section 4(f) property—even though there may be no direct physical effect involving construction of transportation facilities.

A ''constructive use'' can occur where there is no physical presence or invasion of the property, but where the landowner's use is so limited by the imposition of the use by the public for habitat, that for all practical purposes the landowner can no longer use his own lands. Examples of this have occurred on an all too frequent basis. Our committee has heard testimony that the federal government has prevented homebuilders from constructing on their property because it is habitat for marsh rabbits, mice and rats. Farmers have been prevented from farming because of the presence of rats and fairy shrimp. Ranchers are being told to halt cattle grazing because of the presence of rare plants or birds. Schools have been halted due to the use of local lands because it is habitat for pygmy owls. And private timber owners are being told to put timber lands off limits to further uses because of the presence of owls, marbled murrelets, and salmon.

The Clinton administration would argue that it is not a taking of property if only a small part of the property is put aside for habitat because the landowner still has other property they can use. However, in the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, the airport noise only affected a small part of the property and yet the full compensation was paid for the impact on the portion of the property that was affected. Landowners ought to receive the same treatment and the same right to be compensated for the use of their property whether it affects the entire parcel or only a portion of the parcel.

The bill that we introduce today will insure that private property owners are compensated on the same basis as the Fish and Wildlife Service. It only deals with the requirement of the Endangered Species Act that habitat of species be protected, even when that habitat is someone's private property. It would require the same sequencing as is currently applied to public lands—first avoid using private property for public use, if that is not possible, then minimize the impacts and if that is not possible mitigate through compensation. The bill defines what a public use is in the same manner that the FAA has defined it to include a ''constructive use''. It then lists the types of actions under the ESA that would be within the definition of use or constructive use. These are actions that result in the land being used as habitat by the government to the detriment of the property owner. The landowner would be compensated for any portion of land taken.

The fact is that this bill will help not only private property owners but also our nation's endangered plants and animals. The right way to protect endangered species is through cooperative and voluntary efforts of private property owners. Most private property owners are delighted to provide a home to the nation's wildlife when the rights of the private property owner are respected. However, when the federal government forces landowners through coercion or threats of prosecution to set aside valuable land for nonuse because it is habitat, landowners will have no incentive to protect habitat for wildlife. Protecting private property rights is the right thing to do for people and wildlife.

HISTORIC HOMEOWNERSHIP ASSISTANCE ACT

HON. E. CLAY SHAW, JR.

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 1999

Mr. SHAW. Mr. Speaker, all across America, in the small towns and great cities of this country, our heritage as a nation—the physical evidence of our past—is at risk. In virtually every corner of this land, homes in which grandparents and parents grew up, communities and neighborhoods that nurtured vibrant families, schools that were good places to learn and churches and synagogues that were filled on days of prayer, have suffered the ravages of abandonment and decay.

In the decade from 1980 to 1990, Chicago lost 41,000 housing units through abandonment, Philadelphia 10,000, and St. Louis 7,000. The story in our older small communities has been the same, and the trend continues. It is important to understand that it is not just the buildings we are losing. It is the sense of our past, the vitality of our communities and the shared values of those precious places.

We need not stand hopelessly by as passive witnesses to the loss of these irreplaceable historic resources. We can act, and to that end I am introducing today with a bipartisan group of my colleagues the Historic Homeownership Assistance Act.

This legislation is almost identical to legislation introduced in the 105th Congress as H.R. 1134. It is patterned after the existing Historic Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit. That legislation has been enormously successful in stimulating private investment in the rehabilitation of buildings of historic importance all across the country. Through its use we have been able to save and re-use a rich and diverse array of historic buildings: landmarks