

in the provisions of title VI, subtitle A of this bill, consistent with the requirements of paragraph 9 of rule XLIV of the Standing Rules of the Senate.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I do not believe that the provisions of title VII of the Advancing America's Priorities Act, S. 3297, constitute a "congressionally directed spending item," as defined by Public Law 110-81, but out of an abundance of caution I certify that neither I nor my immediate family has a pecuniary interest in the provisions of title VII of S. 3297, consistent with the requirements of paragraph 9 of Rule XLIV of the Standing Rules of the Senate.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today to thank the majority leader, Senator REID, for including in S. 3297, the Advancing America's Priorities Act, an important initiative to support the horticulture operations of the Smithsonian Institution. Without this needed support, the Smithsonian Institution would not be able to maintain or continue the same level of horticulture services it currently provides.

I additionally want to thank Senator FEINSTEIN, chair of the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, for her support of this important initiative. I would also like to note the support for this effort of Senators LEAHY and COCHRAN and thank them for their work to preserve the Smithsonian's many valuable contributions.

I do not believe that the provisions of title VII of S. 3297 constitute a "congressionally directed spending item," but out of an abundance of caution I certify that neither I nor my immediate family has a pecuniary interest in the provisions of title VII of S. 3297, consistent with the requirements of paragraph 9 of rule XLIV of the Standing Rules of the Senate.

Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to support this important and needed initiative to support the horticulture operations of the Smithsonian Institution.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUEST— S. 294

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Chair lay before the Senate a message from the House on S. 294, the Passenger Rail Investment Improvement Act; further, that the Senate disagree to the House amendment, agree to the request for a conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses, and the Chair be authorized to authorize conferees on the part of the Senate with a ratio 4 to 3.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. COBURN. I object.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there are a number of individuals who want to speak. I ask consent that the following be the order of the Chair: that Senator BROWN be recognized for 10 minutes, Senator CANTWELL for 1 minute—Senators BROWN and CANTWELL for 1 minute and Senator ENZI for 1 minute. How many minutes is that?

Where I made my mistake is Senator CANTWELL needs 4 minutes. So Senator BROWN, 10 minutes; Senator CANTWELL, 4 minutes; Senator ENZI, 1 minute; Senator CARPER, 1 minute; and then the Senator from Alaska would be given 30 minutes to distribute however she feels appropriate. This is all as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Ohio is recognized.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, would the Presiding Officer let me know when I have 1 minute left, please?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator will be notified.

LIHEAP

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, with gas prices soaring, the effects are being felt all across my State of Ohio. In the last year and a half, I have held 110 roundtables, talking to people in 75 of Ohio's 88 counties, listening to what they are telling me about gas prices and about other challenges: food prices, the cost of energy to heat their homes—all of those. School districts in Appalachia are contemplating going to 4-day school weeks just to cut down on the amount of gas the buses will use. The bicycle police academy in Columbus is being forced to turn applicants away, as community after community is looking to put police on bicycles in order to keep fuel costs down. Police and fire departments across Ohio are struggling to keep community services going while facing crippling gas prices. Our truckers, our farmers, and our businesses are struggling and are often forced to raise the prices of their goods and services.

This price increase is devastating to our poorest populations, who, come winter, will be facing a double whammy: trying to pay for gasoline to get to work and for either natural gas or heating oil to heat their homes. We are deep into this energy crisis, and while Americans are currently most affected at the pump, we cannot forget that winter is around the corner. Fuel prices are still on the rise. We have witnessed a nearly 40 percent rise in heating oil already this year. That means Americans are going to need all the relief they can get this winter.

When pocketbooks are drained to pay heating bills, families are forced too often to make very difficult decisions. It is money families can use to put food on the table, pay for transportation, buy winter coats or other necessities

for their children. That is why we have LIHEAP, which we just voted on and which, on basically a party-line vote, Republicans oppose. The LIHEAP program is geared toward preventing families from facing this heat-or-eat dilemma. But despite its success, current funding levels do not meet its demands. That is why LIHEAP is so crucial. It would assist the elderly, assist moderately low-income families, and other low-income individuals who already experience financial strain as their wages remain stagnant but they have higher gas prices to get to work, higher food prices, and now, when winter comes, higher prices to heat their homes. The lack of funds to invest in solutions with upfront costs and long-term savings keeps too many low-income individuals in poverty.

An increase in LIHEAP funding would also increase the Weatherization Assistance Program, which prevents families from wasting energy while also providing good-paying jobs.

In Marietta, a few weeks ago, I met a crew of four young men who were learning a skill and assisting the elderly. They were paid \$12, \$13 an hour, fixing up homes, weatherizing them, cutting energy bills for the elderly, for low-income elderly residents of Washington County. They were saving on energy for all of us as energy prices keep going up, and they were learning this trade and making a difference for all of us.

Given current energy strains and current financial strains Americans have already experienced, the time for Congress to act on LIHEAP is now, before Americans get left out in the cold.

HOUSING

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I thank the majority leader for bringing the housing bill to the Senate today. It was met in the past by a filibuster, but the good work of Chairman DODD and Ranking Member SHELBY and the majority leader means we finally have housing legislation that will matter to Ohioans and matter to Americans. In Ohio's Morgan County, for instance, a small rural county in southeast Ohio, foreclosures were up 60 percent over last year, and the year, obviously, is only half over. More than 200 families in my State lose their homes every day.

This housing legislation will make a difference in helping people stay in their homes. It will help communities deal with the costs they bear in fixing up abandoned homes, sometimes knocking down those homes because homes that are blighted homes in any community cause the value of homes in the neighborhood owned by people who are paying and keeping up, keeping their houses looking good and paying their mortgages—their homes decline in value because of the foreclosures in their neighborhoods.

This legislation, in addition to all the other things it does, provides help

to communities to fix up those blighted homes, to knock down those that are beyond repair, and provides money—as has been cosponsored, worked on assiduously by the Presiding Officer, the Senator from Pennsylvania—provides money for neighborhood counselors so they can work out these loans and stay in their homes, people who might be delinquent but, if they can get a 30-year fixed mortgage, are able to stay in their homes.

This is particularly good news this week, moving forward on housing legislation to deal with this crucial problem that afflicts so many in our community.

Every day we delayed has meant more families who were not able to refinance their homes through the HOPE for Homeowners program. Every day we spent slogging through procedural hoops meant more communities that were unable to keep up with the flood of foreclosures they are facing. And every day of delay denied help to homebuyers that might help stem the slide that is hurting everyone.

This legislation was adopted in the Banking Committee by a vote of 19 to 2, thanks to the leadership of Senator DODD and Senator SHELBY. It has the support of the overwhelming majority of the Senate.

The bill before us would provide critical relief to homeowners and communities across the country. By no means will it help everyone. Some people just took on too big a mortgage. Even with a reasonable mortgage, they would be unable to pay the home they purchased. Other people have encountered trouble—like job loss or a divorce—that this legislation cannot cure. Still others got caught speculating on endlessly rising prices.

But hundreds of thousands of families could afford to stay in their homes if they had a fair and stable mortgage, one with a reasonable interest rate rather than a predatory one, without hidden strings or traps that make it impossible to pay off.

These are the families that need our help. They may be a minority of the people who face foreclosure in the next two or three years, but their numbers are substantial.

And every home we do save makes this effort worthwhile. Every home we save spares a family from the trauma of foreclosure. It saves their neighbors from the drag that foreclosures have on the price of surrounding homes. And it saves their towns and cities from the increased costs that often stem from abandoned buildings.

Up until this week, President Bush planned to veto this legislation. He argued that cities whose neighborhoods are being hollowed out by foreclosures do not need help from the Federal Government. I strongly disagree.

This legislation contains close to \$4 billion that will be allocated to the States and towns that have been hardest hit by the foreclosure crisis. Ohio is certainly one of these States. By most

measures it is in the top three to five States based on foreclosures, subprime loans, and defaults.

The \$4 billion in this legislation would be used to provide grants to cities and towns across the country to deal with vacant properties—renovating some and tearing down others.

Ironically, years ago many cities in my home State tried to block predatory lending in their communities since the Federal and State governments were standing on the sidelines. They were prevented from doing so.

Many are now taking these lenders to court, to try to get some help in cleaning up the damage from a decade of irresponsible lending. Does the President really think that the mayors of Ohio are going to bail out these very same lenders?

Of course they won't. What they will do is try to reclaim and rebuild their neighborhoods.

In addition to helping Ohio's cities, this legislation will provide vital help to homeowners. The HOPE for Homeowners Act we are adopting will provide hundreds of thousands of families the opportunity to refinance their current, unaffordable loans into a fixed rate loan at an affordable interest rate.

This is a voluntary program. It will only work if lenders are willing to recognize a significant loss on these loans. But I hope it will be in the interest of many lenders to take a partial loss rather than force people needlessly into foreclosure.

This legislation will also modernize the FHA loan program so that homeowners will have a good alternative to the subprime loans that have led to so much trouble for so many.

It will provide some \$15 billion in tax benefits to help families and shore up the housing market. First-time homebuyers will be eligible for a refundable tax credit to help finance the purchase of a home.

People who do not itemize their taxes will be able to claim an additional deduction for property taxes this year.

And housing agencies will be given increased authority to issue tax-exempt bonds to refinance subprime loans, help first-time homebuyers, and build low-income rental housing.

This legislation also provides an additional \$180 million in funds for counseling to help people figure out how to stay in their homes.

This is so important. The changes in mortgage finance have been effective in spreading risks around the globe, but responsibility has followed.

Very rarely these days can you go downtown to your local bank and rework your mortgage. Borrowers are understandably confused and frustrated in their efforts to rework their loans. The nonprofit counseling agencies in Ohio and around the country have performed a vital service in saving home after home.

Finally, this legislation will strengthen the regulation and oversight of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

They play a critical role in our economy. Today they hold or guarantee some \$5 trillion in mortgages. With the weakness in the credit markets, they are providing important liquidity to the housing market.

Treasury Secretary Paulson came before the Banking Committee a week and a half ago and made the case for providing extraordinary power to the executive branch to backstop Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. This legislation provides it to him and his successor for the next 18 months.

I hope the market stabilizes over the months ahead and the regulatory changes we have put in place will ensure that the Treasury Secretary never has to utilize the power given to him. It can only be exercised if taxpayers are first in line to be paid back and the financial consequences of inaction would be worse than intervention.

We don't know what the months ahead will bring, but we do know that we cannot stand by and watch any longer.

I regret that it has taken so long for the Government to act—regulators, State government, and Congress. But at long last we are about to take action, and for that I am grateful.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington State.

HONORING DAVE NIEHAUS

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I know many of my colleagues are here to talk about important issues of the day we are voting on here on the Senate floor. But I rise with a point of pride and personal privilege to talk about a great moment for the Pacific Northwest; that is tomorrow's induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame of Dave Niehaus, our broadcaster.

For 32 years, Dave has been the voice of the Seattle Mariners and he has been broadcasting in that broadcast booth from the team's first game in 1977. Next year will be his 5,000th Mariners game, which in and of itself is an incredible milestone.

I know everybody who is a baseball fan, not only in the Northwest but all throughout the country, knows that when someone has that unique position of calling a baseball game he does breathe life into each inning regardless of the score.

Many people new to the Northwest may not realize that in the late 1990s, up until that period, most of the Mariner games were only on the radio. For a good part of the team's history, let's say our team was struggling.

It took the Mariners 15 seasons to break .500 baseball. But yet the radio ratings were always strong and people kept tuning in, and that is because the voice of Dave Niehaus and his approach to the game kept the fans listening.

Like so many of the 33 broadcasters who are enshrined before him in Cooperstown, he found a way to make each game a treat for the fans to listen to. In 2007, the Seattle Times called him