

The National Tropical Botanical Garden is a national resource for education and career development. Over four decades, it has developed a full spectrum of educational offerings that provide opportunities for the next generation of scientists. Over 5,000 school-aged children are educated each year in conservation principles and practices. The Horticultural Internship Program trains undergraduates in horticulture, botany, and conservation.

In addition, the National Tropical Botanical Garden is a national resource for medical research. Its researchers have developed and hold patents on a potential anti-HIV drug called Prostratin that is currently going through clinical trials and are also working to find the cause for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases. Once a year, it holds a course accredited by the American Medical Association that provides 16 credits to medical professionals in herbal remedies derived from plants. By enacting this provision into law, I am hopeful that the National Tropical Botanical Garden will be able to continue with its important work for years to come.

The Paleontological Resources Preservation Act, title VI, subtitle D, helps protect and preserve the Nation's important fossil resources that are found on Federal lands for the benefit of our citizens. As a matter of clarification, this bill covers only paleontological remains on Federal lands and in no way affects archaeological or cultural resources under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 or the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

The provision to preserve paleontological resources, in its original and amended form, never intended to undermine the current practice of casual collecting that is being enjoyed on Federal lands. Notwithstanding the educational benefits and the major fossil discoveries made by amateur collectors and curio hunters, this title addresses the increasing problem of intentional fossil theft on Federal lands. Vertebrate fossils are rare and important natural resources that have become increasingly endangered due to an increase in the illegal collection of fossil specimens for commercial sale. Recognizing that there was no unified policy regarding the treatment of fossils by Federal land management agencies, I worked to include this provision in the act to help protect and conserve fossil specimen, a valuable scientific resource. This act will provide uniformity to the patchwork of statutes and regulations that previously existed. Further, it will create a comprehensive national policy for preserving and managing fossils and other artifacts found on Federal land, and will prevent future illegal trade.

Title VI, subtitle E, the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Land Exchange, addresses the needs of a rural and indigenous Alaska Native community. This subtitle allows developing a road

that would provide dependable and safe year-round access for the residents of King Cove in Alaska to the nearby Cold Bay Airport. I believe that the 800 residents of King Cove, most of which are native Aleut, have an absolute right to a reliable means of transport that is accessible under all weather conditions. This provision will help address many of the community's safety, health, and medical concerns. The United States has a responsibility to its indigenous people, and I am proud this provision will enable this community and appropriate State and Federal stakeholders to move forward on this initiative.

Passage of this act was an extensive, challenging, but ultimately fulfilling journey, and I am pleased with today's enactment of the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 into law. I am confident this act will promote and strengthen opportunities to preserve Hawaii's and the Nation's environmental and cultural heritage. This landmark Act will serve as a stable foundation for us to continue to build upon.

#### HOUSING AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACT

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought recognition to discuss S. 253, a bill introduced by Senator JOHNNY ISAKSON to expand the home buyer tax credit. I support this legislation and have asked to be added as a cosponsor.

A robust home buyer tax credit will spur consumer demand and help to stop the fall in home values, which continues to affect millions of Americans. This decline is destroying the savings and net worth of Americans, whose homes are their most valuable asset. Many now have mortgages that exceed the value of their homes.

The Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 created a tax credit for first-time home buyers of \$7,500 through June of 2009. However, taxpayers were required to repay the tax credit in equal installments over 15 years, which greatly reduced its effectiveness. The 2009 Stimulus bill waived the repayment requirement for purchases made in 2009, increased the value of the credit to \$8,000, and extended eligibility for purchases made through November of 2009.

Further improvements are necessary, in my judgement, to bring about a recovery in the housing market that will ultimately contribute to the turnaround of the broader economy. First, S. 253 would increase the value of the credit to 10 percent of the home price capped at 3.5 percent of Federal Housing Administration loan limits. These limits are geographically dependent and would yield a credit ranging between approximately \$10,000 and \$22,000.

Second, S. 253 would make the home buyer tax credit available to any individual who purchases a home, not just first-time home buyers. Doing so would

stimulate demand for the entire range of homes on the market.

Finally, S. 253 would increase the income eligibility threshold to individuals earning up to \$125,000, or \$250,000 in the case of a joint return. Currently, the credit is reduced for individuals with modified adjusted gross income, AGI, of more than \$75,000—\$150,000 for joint filers—and is zero for those individuals with modified AGI in excess of \$95,000—\$170,000 for joint filers. Again, doing so would stimulate demand for the entire range of homes on the market.

The need for a robust home buyer tax credit is clear. According to the National Association of Realtors, pending home sales hit a record low in January 2009. The pending home sales index, which measures the number of sales contracts signed each month, fell 7.7 percent to 80.4, the lowest mark since 2001 when tracking began.

At the same time, the housing affordability index rose 13.6 percentage points to a record high of 166.8. A value of 100 means that a family with the country's median income has exactly enough income to qualify for a mortgage on a median-priced existing single-family home. The higher the index, the better housing affordability is for buyers.

These two figures, taken together, demonstrate that a robust home buyer tax credit is needed to spur demand from Americans that are hesitant to buy homes for fear that prices will not stabilize.

#### IDAHOANS SPEAK OUT ON HIGH ENERGY PRICES

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, in mid-June, I asked Idahoans to share with me how high energy prices are affecting their lives, and they responded by the hundreds. The stories, numbering well over 1,200, are heartbreaking and touching. While energy prices have dropped in recent weeks, the concerns expressed remain very relevant. To respect the efforts of those who took the opportunity to share their thoughts, I am submitting every e-mail sent to me through an address set up specifically for this purpose to the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. This is not an issue that will be easily resolved, but it is one that deserves immediate and serious attention, and Idahoans deserve to be heard. Their stories not only detail their struggles to meet everyday expenses, but also have suggestions and recommendations as to what Congress can do now to tackle this problem and find solutions that last beyond today. I ask unanimous consent to have today's letters printed in the RECORD.

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

The rising cost of fuel along with the slowdown of the housing industry has had a big effect on my family. My husband is a residential contractor who builds homes all over the valley. There are days when he spends