

RURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION
EXTENSION ACT

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I support efforts to provide permanent enhanced conservation tax incentives for family farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who make charitable contributions of land for conservation purposes. As a cosponsor of the Rural Heritage Conservation Extension Act, S. 526, I am a strong supporter of these valuable tools for protecting significant natural and historic resources on privately owned lands.

These incentives expired at the end of 2013 and are among the so-called extenders—tax provisions that are routinely extended each time they expire. Making these provisions permanent would benefit wildlife, enhance hunting, fishing and shooting access, and keep working lands functioning and intact.

Specifically, the Rural Heritage Conservation Extension Act would permanently increase the allowable deduction for charitable contributions of property for conservation purposes. The maximum deduction for individuals would increase from 30 percent to 50 percent of adjusted gross income, AGI. Farmers and ranchers would be allowed a maximum deduction of up to 100 percent of AGI. The bill would also allow any unused deduction to be carried forward for up to 15 years to help donors receive the full benefit of their contribution.

When this incentive was in place, it supported donations of conservation easements in my home State of Maine. In 2012, a landowner donated a conservation easement on a 20-acre property in Machiasport, which is home to centuries-old cultural artifacts, including petroglyphs. In addition to being a spiritual site for Maine's Passamaquoddy tribe, this property allows people to explore the State's precolonial history and provides access for local fishermen to utilize valuable clam flats.

Another success story is from 2013 in Harpswell, where a landowner donated a conservation easement on a 44-acre island property in the heart of Casco Bay. The easement provides public access to a scenic peninsula where visitors can picnic, boat, and kayak. Due to this generous donation, Casco Bay is experiencing increased recreational use while also protecting critical habitats for many species of wildlife including shorebirds, herons, and bald eagles.

Continuing the enhanced conservation tax incentives would assist in the conservation of thousands of additional acres and provide a whole host of community benefits—protecting historical features, securing economic opportunities, enhancing recreational access, and preserving valuable wildlife habitat—in 2014 and beyond.

I urge my colleagues to support this important bill.

65TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VOICE
OF AMERICA'S UKRAINIAN SERVICE

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, for 65 years the Voice of America Ukrainian Service has been a vital source of comprehensive and unbiased information for the Ukrainian people.

During the Cold War, VOA's uncensored, truthful reporting of the news was a beacon of freedom for Ukrainians dominated by Soviet rule. Through VOA and broadcasts by other media outlets such as Radio Liberty, information-starved Ukrainians not only learned about life in the United States and the outside world but also about developments within Ukraine itself.

From VOA, Ukrainians discovered government-sponsored human rights violations taking place throughout the Soviet Union. They became aware of the many courageous Ukrainian human rights activists, including members of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, who languished in Soviet prisons for daring to call upon the Soviet Government to abide by its Helsinki Final Act commitments. And when disaster struck at Chernobyl, Ukrainians looked to VOA to provide the objective information that the Soviet Government stubbornly refused to share.

Since Ukraine regained its independence in 1991, VOA's Ukrainian Service has been able to reach more Ukrainian citizens than ever before. Its daily news program "Chas-Time" is seen nightly on Ukraine's respected Channel 5, and its reporting is often featured on other major Ukrainian television channels.

VOA's audience has exploded in the year since the Maidan Revolution for Dignity and Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and aggression in the south-east.

Thanks to its focus on developments in the United States and U.S.-Ukrainian relations, VOA's Ukrainian Service has been instrumental in bringing home to millions of Ukrainians U.S. policy, as well as the perspectives and activities of the Executive Branch, Congress, and NGOs with respect to Ukraine.

Ukraine confronts profound external and internal challenges in its quest for an independent, democratic, European future. As Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, I commend the ongoing and accelerating role of VOA's Ukrainian service, especially during this historic time.

TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY
NOMINEES

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, the Tennessee Valley Authority, or TVA, is a multibillion-a-year utility—one of the largest in the Nation. It plays a critical role in our economic development efforts in Tennessee by providing low-cost, reliable power that is essential to attracting, retaining, and growing jobs.

Strong, independent leadership at TVA is a priority for all Tennesseans, and the Senate is scheduled to vote tomorrow morning on two nominees to serve on the TVA board.

TVA board members' sole focus should be ensuring ratepayers throughout the Tennessee Valley have affordable, reliable power, and they must be free to operate the entity without undue influence from outside individuals.

While I respect the two nominees currently being considered, I have grown increasingly concerned by the nomination process and the potential influence—or perception of influence—that an outside investor who has proposed a multibillion-dollar project to TVA has had on this process. I have shared those concerns with the White House and the majority leader through several conversations.

I was particularly disappointed the majority leader announced he was moving forward with votes despite being aware of these issues—making it the first time TVA nominations have been confirmed by a rollcall vote since 1987.

While I still believe the selection of TVA board members and their confirmations deserve a closer look moving forward, today I received copies of letters from Virginia T. Lodge and Ronald A. Walter that address the concerns regarding the potential influence of an outside individual who has business dealings with TVA.

I ask unanimous consent that the full text of both letters be printed in the RECORD.

The nominees' forthright letters and their decision to recuse themselves helps ensure that there is no appearance of a lack of impartiality, and I plan to support both of their nominations.

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

DECEMBER 8, 2014.

Mr. RALPH E. RODGERS,
*Executive Vice President and General Counsel,
Designated Agency Ethics Official,
Tennessee Valley Authority, Knoxville, Tennessee.*

DEAR MR. RODGERS: This supplements my July 30, 2014, letter to you describing steps that I will take to avoid any actual or apparent conflict of interest, consistent with 5 C.F.R. §2635.502, in the event I am confirmed to serve on the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

While I have neither made nor been asked to make any commitments on any projects involving TVA, during the pendency of my nomination I have had contact and discussions with Franklin Haney, with whom I am acquainted, and persons associated with him. I am aware that Mr. Haney has had business dealings with TVA in the past and has made significant business proposals to TVA that may extend into the future. In order to avoid even the appearance of a lack of impartiality, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter in which Mr. Haney or any person on his behalf is a party or represents a party, or in which Mr. Haney, or his family, would have a direct or indirect financial interest.

Sincerely,

VIRGINIA T. LODGE.