

who insure loans through the FHA from dealing with the referral companies. However, just 10 days after the announcement of HUD's directive, a Federal judge here in Washington set the directive aside awaiting further hearing. While some of the mortgage originators have indicated that they have stopped dealing with the estate planning firms by their own initiative, many of us in the Senate want better safeguards.

Senate bill 562 ensures that the practice of charging exorbitant fees in the reverse mortgage program are halted by doing two things. One, the bill requires that all fees and costs associated with the reverse mortgage program be disclosed to the homeowner. Two, the bill gives authority to the Secretary of HUD to ensure that the homeowner does not pay any unnecessary or excessive costs for obtaining the mortgage. This would include any costs of estate planning, financial advice, or other related services. S. 562 does not set prices or products in the reverse mortgage program, it only acts as a safeguard from excessive costs.

I am proud to say that my State is home to the largest servicer of the FHA reverse mortgage. Wendover Funding, a Greensboro based mortgage banker, is the Nation's largest wholesale lender and administrator of these loans. Wendover currently services more than 11,500 reverse mortgages, representing approximately 60 percent of the market. Of these, Wendover has funded more than 400 loans to seniors in North Carolina.

Many believe that FHA's involvement provided much-needed consumer protection to the reverse-mortgage industry. Lenders who make FHA-backed loans have to abide by strict rules on rates and set-up fees and can't charge any hidden fees to make extra money. Unfortunately, some of the estate planning companies who refer the borrowers to the FHA lenders have not had the same restrictions put upon them.

The several unscrupulous companies that have scammed thousands of unnecessary and exorbitant fees from elderly citizens have forced this Congress to act. The protections placed in S. 562 will ensure that senior citizens are no longer taken advantage of when they are looking at this new source of income. Our grandparents, as they face longer years of needed income and want to stay in their homes, will be able to do so and still be protected.

Thank you Mr. President. I urge my colleagues support.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I rise today to express my strong support for the Senior Citizen Home Equity Protection Act introduced by Senator D'AMATO, and to thank Chairman D'AMATO for moving so quickly in response to the needs of the Department of Housing and Urban Development in efforts to crack down on the exploitation of our vulnerable low-income senior citizens.

The Senior Citizen Home Equity Protection Act will assure that a home-

owner pursuing a HUD home equity conversion mortgage, or reverse mortgage, is not charged unnecessary or excessive costs for obtaining that mortgage. The median age of reverse mortgage applicants is 76 years. Most of these borrowers are very low-income, Social Security dependents, typically seeking additional funds for basic needs and medical expenses. Information on the program and the application process is provided by HUD free of charge. Yet, some businesses have been convincing seniors of services and counseling required before reverse mortgages can be secured. Many of these middlemen charge up to 10 percent for services that seniors do not realize are unnecessary.

S. 462 clarifies HUD's authority to appropriately restrict unnecessary or excessive costs related to the origination of a reverse mortgage. I believe it necessary to grant this regulatory authority to end fraudulent business activity so that legitimate business interests can be protected and the loan program can remain a viable alternative for seniors to turn to in the financial marketplace.

My State of South Dakota recently remedied State law to allow for participation in HUD's reverse mortgage program, at the urging of the South Dakota AARP and the South Dakota Bankers Association. While we have been fortunate not to have felt the impact of these deceitful businesses in South Dakota, I am a strong supporter of this legislation to prevent the spread to my State, now that seniors can pursue these reverse mortgages.

Senator D'AMATO worked closely with HUD Secretary Cuomo to ensure that seniors can be protected while the viability of the loan program remains intact, and I urge my colleagues to support the Senior Citizen Home Equity Protection Act.

Mr. D'AMATO. Mr. President, I know of no one else in the majority who seeks to speak to this issue. We would yield back all of our time.

Mr. DODD. On behalf, Mr. President, of Senator SARBANES of this side, we yield back this time as well.

Mr. D'AMATO. Mr. President, I move to reconsider the vote by which the bill was passed.

Mr. DODD. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate, under a previous order, will proceed to morning business with Senators permitted to speak for 5 minutes each, with the following exceptions: Senator SMITH of Oregon for 30 minutes, Senator DORGAN for 30 minutes, Senator DASCHLE, or his designee, for 30 minutes, and Senator WELLSTONE for 10 minutes.

Mr. D'AMATO addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York is recognized.

BREAST CANCER RESEARCH

Mr. D'AMATO. Mr. President, let me speak, if I might, to an issue of critical national importance—an issue that has plagued the people of the State of New York, most particularly those in Long Island. I am talking about Nassau and Suffolk County, the communities of Long Island. A major county is described legally as a county that has more than 250,000 women, for the purposes of compiling these statistics. And they are dreadful statistics because we are talking about the incidence of breast cancer. Long Island has had an unenviable position of being ranked No. 1 in the incidence rates of breast cancer in years gone by.

It is incredible. As a result, the National Institutes of Health has undertaken a very comprehensive study, one of the first of its kind, which says we will look to see what environmental factors may be contributing to these high rates of breast cancer. They are undertaking that study. Some \$5 million has been allocated. Mr. President, that \$5 million is not enough, even though it is among the most sophisticated studies being undertaken.

Recently, some very real questions have arisen as it relates to what impact there may be as it relates to radioactive materials, radio nuclides, and other materials that may have gained entry into the groundwater system, or that may, as a result of being dispersed in the air, some of these radioactive materials out in Brookhaven, Long Island. What impact has this had, if any?

Indeed, it seems to me, if we were to spend \$5 million, that is not an inconsequential sum. But one of the most comprehensive studies undertaken—this is a study that will take over 5 years; not to complete this study, addressing all concerns, as it relates to the high rate of breast cancer on Long Island, would be wrong. The scientific community will not have completed its chore. And part of that is to be able to say to the public we have examined the situation.

Brookhaven National Lab—and it seems we may have an additional responsibility—has been run under the aegis of the Department of Energy. May I say here and now that it has been run abysmally as it relates to the impact of its operation on the community.

Over the years, there has been a litany of abuses of burying of waste materials, hazardous waste, of creating almost a dump site of indifference to the operation of this lab where, indeed, the water tables have been impacted and have actually had radioactive materials—tritium—discharged; and the reports of leaks, and the reports of these discharges have been systematically withheld from the public. The lab has operated with an indifference to public health—"The public be damned" attitude. I commend the Assistant Secretary for Energy, who has come in to look at what can be done to straighten this fiasco out. The scientists have

been more concerned with the success of their project than they have in terms of what the operational impact is. You would think some of the world's leading scientists would know that to even pose a threat to contaminate the drinking water, the drinking supply system, is just unconscionable. Yet they have been there with total indifference.

So I mention this because there is a real reason why that study should be expanded. The NIH has done an outstanding job with the funds available. They have not had sufficient funds.

That is why it was last Wednesday I spoke to Senator STEVENS, chairman of the Appropriations Committee. We are going to be undertaking a supplemental appropriations on this floor.

By gosh, let me tell you when we have disasters, we should take care of them. This is a disaster. We should see to it that there are the necessary funds. Not only on Long Island, but we have another facility in Seneca, NY. It is a small community with an incredibly high incidence of breast cancer.

Why do I mention Seneca? There is very direct Government responsibility because we operated a huge storage depot there for all kinds of materials, such as atomic, et cetera. Some of them are still classified and are stored there. It has one of the highest rates of breast cancer in the Nation. They should be included. The people of that community should have a comprehensive study.

I have requested of Senator STEVENS consideration that we increase the NIH funding. We are not talking hundreds of millions. But we are asking, and I have asked him. Hopefully they will include some \$15 million so that Long Island's study can be brought to a successful conclusion so that they can monitor the operation as it relates to whether radioactive materials have had any impact on the groundwater and in the incidence of breast cancer and to the health of Long Island.

So whether it be Seneca, or whether it be my colleagues who seek funding from other parts of the country, California, New Jersey, or wherever it might be, the State of Florida, where people would come and say, "We want to know. Are there environmental factors that are contributing to the higher rates?" We should be doing this.

I want to commend Senator STEVENS for his looking at this. I hope that we will all be supportive.

So it is not a question of us appropriating money just so that we can do this for Long Island. I am concerned about that, and Seneca in upstate New York, but, indeed, the people of this Nation.

I can't think of a better allocation of resources than to use this to ascertain with definitiveness with the best science available so the communities can raise their children with a piece of mind that there are hazards that can be avoided and are identified.

I just leave you with one chilling statistic as it relates to the 3 million peo-

ple who live in Nassau County and Suffolk County. More than half of them are women. Women who live on Long Island for more than 40 years are 70 percent more likely to come down with breast cancer than a woman of comparable age, et cetera, and background who lives there for 20 years. Why? That is why there are so many of us who think there are some very real environmental factors that must be considered.

So I hope that all of my colleagues could support this increase of \$15 million, which is a very modest sum, to expand the NIH; and, yes, to earmark for breast cancer research to ascertain what impact the environment may have in causing the higher incidence.

I thank the Chair. I thank my colleagues for being so generous in permitting me the opportunity of making this presentation in morning business.

I yield the floor.

Mr. DORGAN addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Andrea Nygren, a fellow of my office, have privilege of the floor during this session.

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

DISASTERS IN NORTH DAKOTA

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I just returned from my home State of North Dakota. And I know my colleague has spoken as well about the challenges that we are facing in North Dakota and in our region as a result of the disasters that have occurred. I wanted to visit with my colleagues and explain to those who watch these proceedings what is happening in this State, and in this region.

North Dakota, as everyone knows who has watched the news in the last couple of weeks, has been dealt about as tough a blow as you can deal a State or region with a series of tough storms, floods, and fires.

It is normally, for those who visit and especially those of us who live there, a State blessed with enormous beauty and with sturdy, determined, and wonderful people. But for much of the past 6 months our State has been hit with some of the worst weather known to man. We have been hit with five to seven major blizzards, and additional minor blizzards, during this winter.

This photograph is of a farmer in North Dakota who stands on flat ground. But as you can see, the snow-drift is somewhere around 15 to 18 feet high on his farm. He sent me the picture just to demonstrate what kind of snow has come to his farm, and what these blizzards and winds have done to him. These nine blizzards that we have seen have dropped 3 years' worth of

snow in North Dakota, and in 3 months. Anyone who knows about North Dakota winters knows that we have some pretty difficult days in the winter from time to time.

But when you give us 3 years' worth of snow, over 10 feet of snow in a several-month period, that is an enormous quantity of moisture, and if that was not bad enough, that 3 years' worth of snow this winter arrived after 4 straight years of rainfall that was far above normal. So that snow fell on a ground that was already saturated. So when the spring thaw came, there was nowhere for melting snow to go.

Most Americans have now seen on the front pages of their newspapers and on their television sets and heard on radio news programs the result of all this. Today I want to report to you on some of the things that you may not have seen.

This is an aerial view of Harwood, ND. This is just a few miles north of Fargo, ND. This is land that is in the Red River Valley, some of the most fertile land in our entire country. It is flat as a table top. There is not a hill that you can see anywhere. And you can see what has happened. This city of Harwood, incidentally, is one of the only cities that built a little ring dike and you can see that this city is dry. It is a very small community but the flood is all around it. It gives you some dimension of this flood. I have flown over the flood about three or four times in the last week or so and all you see are miles and miles and miles of water. And you cannot see any evidence of a river. The tiny river, which is the Red River, normally not very substantial at all, has now become a 200-mile lake.

I want to talk to you about the scope of the disaster. There isn't anything that I have seen, and I have seen a fair number of disasters, both in North Dakota and around the country, that compares with it. It is deeper, it is wider and it is longer reaching with longer-term implications than any I have ever seen, and it touches almost everybody and everything. The people who keep statistics on these things tell me that about 20 percent of North Dakotans have been severely affected by this ongoing disaster. The damage to property alone will likely exceed \$1 billion and probably run into the several billions of dollars if you include all of the other ancillary problems that will result from this including preventing planting for agricultural crops and more.

Property damage is just one part of the story, and one of the reasons I have come to the Senate Chamber today is to say that even though we have lost a staggering amount of property in these floods, much more than property has been and is being destroyed. This is a challenge to our State and our region's economy that is unlike any other challenge I have ever seen.

It is really a significant blow to an economy of a region in our country.