

drug gangs bearing military-style assault weapons, .50 caliber sniper rifles and other high powered weapons that originate from the United States. According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, ATF, more than 7,770 guns recovered from crime scenes in Mexico were traced back to gun dealers in the U.S. during 2008, up from 3,300 in 2007. The ATF has warned that an “iron river of guns is streaming across the border at such a pace that some are being recovered in Mexico within days after their purchase in the U.S.”

According to the U.S. Department of State's latest International Narcotics Control Strategy report, “U.S.-purchased or stolen firearms account for an estimated 95 percent of Mexico's drug related killings.” Unlike Mexico's tougher gun laws, unlicensed sellers in the U.S. are allowed to sell guns without a background check, civilians are permitted to purchase military-style assault weapons, and there are no limits on the quantity of guns that can be sold at any given time. In the U.S., a trafficker can purchase as many guns they want from an unlicensed seller, no questions asked.

On March 17, 2009, both ADM James Stavridis, commander of the U.S. Southern Command, and GEN Gene Renaut, commander of the U.S. Northern Command, testified during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, which I chaired, that the large flow of guns into Mexico and Central America from the U.S. is having a destabilizing impact in those countries. Many believe this destabilization could pose a significant national security threat to the U.S. According to the report, Mexican Attorney General Medina Mora has stated that, before the assault weapons ban in the U.S. was allowed to expire, only 21 percent of the weapons seized from traffickers were assault rifles, while today, it is more than half.

President Obama has called for a comprehensive approach to the growing level of violence in Mexico. However, unless existing gun laws are strengthened, drug cartels and criminals in Mexico and the United States will continue to build their arsenals. We must act to close the gun show loophole, reinstate the assault weapons ban and enact other commonsense gun safety legislation.

OMNIBUS PUBLIC LANDS ACT

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I was pleased to attend today's Presidential signing ceremony for the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009, H.R. 146. In signing the act into law, President Obama underscored the Nation's commitment to serve as a responsible steward of our public lands and cultural and natural resources.

As a bipartisan package of more than 160 individual bills, the enactment of this act culminates many hours of congressional hearings, deliberation, and

debate. As the former chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, I was proud to have chaired hearings on individual measures in the act and to have worked with my colleagues in the House and Senate to put together a public lands package that confirms our Nation's desire to ensure that future generations will enjoy and benefit from the preservation of natural resources and historic sites.

I join those who have praised this momentous act for setting aside more than 2 million acres of land as protected wilderness and more than 1,000 miles of wild and scenic rivers. It is important to note that this act also is invaluable in protecting, preserving, and memorializing our country's cultural heritage and natural resources. This act contains four provisions that I sponsored during the 110th Congress which acknowledge the historical contributions made by Native Hawaiians as well as the need to preserve Hawaii's unique heritage and biodiversity for future generations: H.R. 3332, the Kalaupapa Memorial Act; S. 1728, the Na Hoa Pili O Kaloko-Honokohau Advisory Commission Reauthorization Act; S. 2220, the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1963 Amendments Act; and S. 320, the Paleontological Resource Preservation Act, which preserves fossils across the Nation. In addition, it includes a bill that I cosponsored, S. 1680, the Izembek and Alaska Peninsula Refuge Enhancement Act of 2008, which addresses the needs of a rural and indigenous Alaska Native community.

Section 7108 authorizes a memorial to be established at Kalaupapa National Historical Park, which is located on a remote peninsula on the island of Molokai. This long overdue memorial will honor and perpetuate the memory of those Hansen's disease patients who were forcibly relocated to the Kalaupapa community, many of whom were buried with no marked grave. This measure authorizes a nonprofit organization, Ka 'Ohana O Kalaupapa, consisting of the remaining Kalaupapa residents and the family and friends of current and past residents, to establish a memorial at a suitable location in the Park for the 8,000 residents who lived at the Kalaupapa and Kalawao communities. This monument empowers the people of Kalaupapa to share their story and the lessons learned as the community came together to overcome their hardships. Previously only recognized as a place of isolation, this monument will transform Kalaupapa into a place of healing, education, and contemplation connecting families to their ancestors.

The Na Hoa Pili O Kaloko-Honokohau Advisory Commission Reauthorization Act, section 7401, extends the authorization for the National Park's advisory commission through 2018. Located on the western coast of the island of Hawaii, Kaloko-Honokohau National Historical Park was established in 1978 to provide for

the preservation, interpretation, and perpetuation of the Park's cultural and natural features. The Advisory Commission has played an integral role in advising the National Park Service to provide for the education, enjoyment, and appreciation of traditional Native Hawaiian activities and culture within the Park.

The Kaloko-Honokohau Park is a unique part of the Hawaii National Park System as it is home to two types of fish ponds, as well as the 'Ai 'opio fish trap, a 1.7-acre pond comprised of a manmade stone and coral wall along the naturally curving shoreline. These are treasured sites not only from a cultural standpoint demonstrating the ingenuity of Native Hawaiians in engineering these fishponds but also from a resource management perspective on how in the 21st century we can utilize such traditional knowledge to enhance our understanding and shape our management practices today.

Recognizing the importance of the 'Ai 'opio fish trap, in 2008 the National Park Service Save America's Treasure program awarded a \$350,000 grant to Project Ola 'Ai 'opio, a Park Service initiative to restore the fish trap. Ocean waves and erosion have endangered the structural integrity of the trap and the grant will be used to methodically stabilize the kuapa—fish trap walls—over a 12-month period. This award not only aids in preservation of the fish trap but also ensures that visitors will be able to appreciate Hawaii's unique historical and cultural heritage into the future.

Section 13006 of the act contains my bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal years 2008 through 2017 in the amount of \$5 million for the operation and maintenance of the National Tropical Botanical Garden. A congressional charter established the National Tropical Botanical Garden in 1964 to foster horticultural research, education, and plant preservation. This authorization enables the National Tropical Botanical Garden to meet its Federal mandate and preserve unique species found only in Hawaii for the benefit of future generations. The National Tropical Botanical Garden has proven itself to be a significant national and international resource. The tranquil beauty offered by its gardens, collection of rare and endangered plant life, focused library and herbarium collections, scientific research, conservation initiatives, and education programs have all benefited the United States.

The National Tropical Botanical Garden is expressly mandated to foster and encourage research of tropical flora in agriculture, forestry, horticulture, medicine, and other sciences for the benefit of all the people in the United States. It is a national resource for biological science. Most recently, in 2008, it discovered Bilirubin, an animal pigment, in plants. This important discovery documented for the first time that an animal pigment is naturally occurring in the seed of the white bird of paradise tree.

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