McKendree has continued to evolve physically as well as academically. The university now includes two campuses in Kentucky as well as the main campus in Lebanon, Illinois. It also hosts off-campus offerings at nearby Scott Air Force Base, in addition to other locations in Illinois and Kentucky. In 2006, McKendree opened the new Hettenhausen Center for the Arts which has rapidly developed into one of the premier performing arts centers in the region.

As McKendree has continued to expand and evolve, it has earned more wide-spread recognition of the excellent academic reputation it has long enjoyed locally. Recent awards and rankings include being ranked among the top 14 percent of ''Comprehensive Colleges—Bachelor's'' by U.S. News & World Report's Best Colleges 2007 and U.S. News & World Report's ''Great Schools, Great Prices'' ranking.

McKendree University has come a long way from its humble beginnings in 1828, with 72 students in two rented sheds. It now boasts a dynamic, multi-state campus with a full range of extra-curricular offerings to complement its excellent academic programs. Throughout its impressive evolution, however. McKendree University has remained true to its roots. Students still come first at McKendree. The focus of the entire McKendree community on enabling each student to fulfill his or her potential continues to mark McKendree University as ''Illinois'' First and Finest.''

Madam Speaker, I am proud to say that my wife, Dr. Georgia Costello, received her undergraduate degree from McKendree and is a member of the Board of Trustees of the University.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating the Board of Trustees, administration, faculty and students of McKendree University on the occasion of their 180th Anniversary.

RECOGNIZING INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING WEEK

HON. MARK STEVEN KIRK

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Mr. KIRK. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the importance of International Networking Week from February 4–8, 2008, and the prominent role my constituents play in preserving our competitiveness in the global economy.

As the co-chair of the U.S.-China Working group and a member of the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations Subcommittee, I know first-hand the importance that international relationships play in both diplomacy and in business.

Of special importance are organizations that create bridges between people for the mutual benefit of their members. As technology continues to bring us closer together, the relationships we forge will be more crucial than ever for companies seeking to grow their businesses.

Whether it is one of the many multinational companies in the 10th Congressional District or a locally-owned small business, networking will continue to play a vital role in the growth of the U.S. economy. From manufacturing to distribution to the point-of-sale, we are stronger for having people throughout the world work together to expand their opportunities.

PRESIDENT'S FY2009 BUDGET REQUEST

HON. JAMES R. LANGEVIN

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Mr. LANGEVIN. Madam Speaker, I rise today to express my deep concern about the budget request that President Bush transmitted to Congress earlier this week. By cutting programs important to working families and ignoring the significant economic downturn our Nation is facing, the administration has yet again demonstrated that its priorities are not those of the American people.

Our Nation is facing the real threat of a recession, and our government should be doing everything in its power to get our economy moving and to protect the American people from financial hardship. While the President has said he wants to work with Congress on an economic stimulus package, his budget request contains a number of devastating cuts to important programs that will make it even harder for our citizens to make ends meet.

Despite widespread recognition that fixing the U.S. economy will require addressing our weak housing market, the President's proposal only adds to the uncertainty that families are facing. This budget would slash funding for public housing and rental assistance programs, eliminating critical aid for lower income families, the elderly and minorities, many of whom may be facing foreclosure as a result of the subprime mortgage crisis. In Rhode Island, 400 families are at risk of losing their homes under the President's cuts to Section 8 vouchers. At the same time, he proposes to slash the Community Development Block Grant, CDBG, program, which provides vital funding for economic and community development in our State's cities and counties.

A real economic plan should also include an investment in education and job training programs that will promote new employment and ensure that our workforce can adapt to the jobs of the future. Unfortunately, those programs are not priorities in the President's budget, and even proposed funding for No Child Left Behind, a program that the President touts as one of his biggest accomplishments, does not keep pace with the rate of inflation. If this budget is enacted, Rhode Island would see $1.5 million less for after-school programs and a cut of almost $6 million for career and technical education. Even with layoffs happening all across our State, President Bush wants to cut adult employment and training services, which would decrease Rhode Island's One-Stop Career System by half a million dollars.

I am deeply disappointed that the President's budget does not even begin to fully fund special education programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Furthermore, instead of fully funding our children's public schools, President Bush has turned back to the idea of school vouchers, renaming them Pell Grants for Kids. Vouchers will not solve our country's education woes, and naming them after Rhode Island's esteemed Senator Pell, who championed public education, is grossly misleading and dishonors the legacy of a great Senator.

The President's budget also fails to make higher education affordable for students with economic challenges. Rhode Island, where college tuition has risen 45 percent in 4 years, would see a $7 million decrease in educational grants for college students. This budget also raises the funding level of Pell grants only by slashing funding for math and science courses that prepare students for technical programs after high school. To maintain our economic advantage in the coming years, our Nation must invest more in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education. Cutting these programs is shortsighted and endangers our international competitiveness.

At a time when so many families are having difficulty paving their bills, this budget also shreds the safety net programs that help the poorest Americans. I am extremely disappointed that the President seeks to cut $570 million from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. Despite record heating oil prices, the President wants to slash this program by 22 percent, a cut that would harm our elderly. Ironically, the budget will cause the heating costs of the poor to rise by eliminating the Weatherization Assistance Program. A Federal program that helps people actually reduce their energy consumption. These programs are vital to places like Rhode Island where families are struggling with astronomical heating costs.

The budget also endangers health care programs for our Nation's poor and elderly by placing critical domestic health care programs on the chopping block. The President has proposed nearly $200 billion in cuts to Medicare and Medicaid over the next 5 years. Unfortunately, he aims to achieve these cuts by reducing reimbursements to health care providers and charging Medicare beneficiaries higher premiums for prescription drug coverage and doctors' services. This could not come at a worse time for the 316,000 Rhode Island citizens that receive care under these vital programs and are seeing the costs of goods rise and their purchasing power fall. Furthermore, the health care slated to receive additional reimbursement cuts under this proposal continue to struggle to properly treat the Medicare population. While I agree that we need to address the long-term solvency of Medicare, any reforms should be implemented in a manner that is responsive to the needs of beneficiaries and providers alike.

Also contained within the President's budget is a suggested increase of $20 billion over 5 years for the State Children's Health Insurance Program, SCHIP. This amount falls drastically short of the bipartisan SCHIP bill passed by Congress in 2007 that would have expanded coverage for millions of children. Unfortunately, the President vetoed that legislation and has instead presented us with a proposal that might well be insufficient to cover current SCHIP participants, let alone cover children who are currently eligible but not yet enrolled in the program. As a longtime supporter of SCHIP, I cannot stress how important this program is to our children, expectant mothers, and parents alike. It is my hope that we will be able to work in a bipartisan manner to ensure that this program receives a proper reauthorization.

Federal health care programs are vital not only to our Nation's children, seniors, and disabled, but also to the brave men and women who served our country. While the President's budget includes an increase for VA funding. I highly doubt it will keep pace with the health care demands of our returning veterans. I am also dismayed by his cut of almost $40 million to medical and prosthetic research, programs that have helped our wounded veterans return to a normal life. Once again, the President has placed the burden of health care cost increases on veterans themselves by proposing to increase co-payments and introduce enrollment fees for VA medical care. Congress has opposed those efforts in the past, and we will continue to do so.

Finally, as a member of the Homeland Security Committee, I am concerned about the impacts of the President's budget on our Nation's capacity for response, resiliency, and recovery in the wake of a national catastrophe. The budget calls for an unprecedented 79 percent cut to the State Homeland Security Grant Program, which awarded $34.8 million to Rhode Island from 2004 to 2007. The budget would also eliminate the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response, SAFER, Grant program and would slash funding for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program, despite clear evidence that more resources are needed to adequately staff and equip fire departments. Local law enforcement would also suffer under the President's budget, which would cut funding to the Community Oriented Policing Services, COPS, program and to Justice Assistance Grants, JAGS, which have reduced crime in communities nationwide. Our State and local law enforcement must have the resources they need to be effective, and I will fight to block these proposed cuts.

It is obvious that the President's budget does not reflect America's priorities. So, we must ask, what are the President's priorities? While he recommends raising health care costs for veterans, the President wants $70 billion more to continue the war in Iraq, though Defense Secretary Gates stated today that that number could climb to $170 billion. While he wants Congress to permanently extend his tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, his budget does not contain a long-term fix for the Alternative Minimum Tax, which if left unaddressed could mean a significant tax increase on our middle class. While he slashes programs for our most vulnerable citizens, his refusal to follow fiscally responsible budgeting practices would mean more deficits in the coming years, burdening future generations with crushing interest on the national debt. These priorities are wrong for America. I am confident that Congress will develop a more humane and careful roadmap for the coming year, and I look forward to working with the Democratic leadership toward that goal.

INTRODUCTION OF COLORADO FOREST INSECT EMERGENCY RESPONSE ACT

HON. MARK UDALL

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Madam Speaker, today I am introducing an additional bill to address the danger to Colorado's communities, water supplies, and infrastructure from the increasing risk of very severe wildfires on our forested lands.

I have put a priority on reducing those risks since I was elected to Congress. In 2000, with our then-colleague, Representative Hefley, I introduced legislation to facilitate reducing the buildup of fuel in the parts of Colorado that the Forest Service, working with State and local partners, identified at greatest risk of fire—the so-called ''red zones.''

Concepts from that legislation were included in the National Fire Plan developed by the Clinton Administration and were also incorporated into the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. As a Member of the Resources Committee, I had worked to develop the version of that legislation that the committee approved in 2002, and while I could not support the different version initially passed by the House in 2003, I voted for the revised version developed in conference with the Senate later that year—the version that President Bush signed into law.

Since then welcome progress has been made—in Colorado, at least—in developing community wildfire protection plans and focusing fuel-reduction projects in the priority ''red zone'' areas, two important aspects of the new law. But at the same time nature has continued to add to the buildup of fuel in the form of both new growth and dead and dying mature trees.

In recognition of the serious nature of the problem, the entire Colorado delegation—both here in the House and in the Senate, too—worked together to reach consensus on a broad-scale legislative response. The result was legislation—H.R. 3072 and S. 1797, the Colorado Forest Management Improvement Act of 2007—which I introduced last year in the House with the cosponsorship of the entire Colorado delegation and which Senators SALAZAR and ALLARD introduced in the Senate. Together with two bills I introduced last week—H.R. 5216, the Wildfire Risk Reduction and Renewable Biomass Utilization Act and H.R. 5218, the Fire Safe Community Act—the bill I am introducing today is designed to complement the Colorado Forest Management Act to respond to the increasingly widespread extent to which our State's forests are being altered by infestations of bark beetles and other insects.

These insects help to balance tree densities and set the stage for fires and thereby the generation of new tree growth. And when forests are healthy and there are adequate supplies of water, their effects are relatively low-scale and isolated. But under the right conditions—such as drought, unusually warm winters, or when there are dense stands of even-aged trees—the insects can cause large-scale tree mortality, turning whole mountainsides and valleys rust red. And that is happening now in many parts of Colorado, as was made unmistakably clear recently when Federal and State foresters reported that the beetle infestation first detected in 1996 grew by a half-million acres last year, bringing the total number of acres attacked by bark beetles to 1.5 million, and has spread further into Front Range counties east of the Continental Divide.

My goal in introducing legislation dealing with this issue is not to eradicate insects in our forests—nor should it be, because insects are a natural part of forest ecosystems. Instead, I seek to make it possible for there to be more rapid responses to the insect epidemic in those areas where such responses are needed in order to protect communities from increased wildfire dangers.

The bill I am introducing today would add a new section to the Healthy Forests Act. which would apply only to Colorado, to specifically address insect epidemics. It would authorize the Forest Service or Interior Department to identify as ''insect emergency areas'' Federal lands that have already been slated for fuel-reduction work in community wildfire protection plans and that have so many insect-killed trees that there is an urgent need for work to reduce the fire-related risks to human life and property or municipal water supply.

The Forest Service or Interior Department could do this on its own initiative or in response to a request from a State agency or a Colorado political subdivision (such as a county, city, or other local government). After receipt of such a request, a decision must be made within 90 days.

In any such emergency areas, the Forest Service or Interior Department would be authorized to remove dead or dying trees on an expedited basis, including use of a ''categorical exclusion'' from normal review under the National Environmental Policy Act, NEPA. Although categorical exclusions from NEPA are controversial, I believe they are appropriate for these emergency situations.

For the information of our colleagues, here is a more detailed outline of the bill:

COLORADO FOREST INSECT EMERGENCY RESPONSE ACT

This bill, based on provisions in the Udall-Salazar bill (H.R. 4875) of 2006, will add a new section to the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to specifically address the forest insect epidemic in Colorado.

It would authorize the Forest Service or the Interior Department, as relevant, to identify as ''insect emergency areas'' Federal lands in Colorado that have already been slated for fuel-reduction work in community wildfire protection plans and that have so many insect-killed trees that there is an urgent need for work to reduce the fire-related risks to human life and property or municipal water supplies.

The Forest Service or Interior Department could make such a determination on its own initiative or in response to a request from any Colorado State agency or any Colorado political subdivision (such as a county, city, or other local government). The relevant Federal agency must respond to such a request by making a decision within 90 days.

The bill would reduce the extent to which analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, NEPA, must be done prior to implementing fuel-reduction—i.e., thinning or tree-removal projects in insect-emergency areas. This would be done in two ways:

(1) by allowing the abbreviated NEPA reviews to be used for projects on any lands covered by a wildfire protection plan for a Colorado community in or adjacent to an insect-emergency area (the Act now allows this only for projects on lands within 1.5 miles of a community's boundaries); and

(2) by allowing the Forest Service or Interior Department to forego NEPA analysis entirely through use of a ''categorical exclusion'' with regard to a project involving only lands that are both within an insect-emergency area and covered by a community wildfire protection plan.