

As I stated at the outset, since 2000, efforts at smoking reduction have largely atrophied. A Harris poll released just last year demonstrated that after two decades of reduction in smoking rates, progress has stalled. In 2009, do we really want to say that one in four Americans smoking is an acceptable statistic, and that we will turn a blind eye to the fact that all too many young Americans have taken up smoking? Do we really want to say that although in the last 12 years America created YouTube, the iPod, the iPhone and more—yet we can't keep children from smoking altogether or substantially lower the instances of smoking by adults. Our response must be nothing less than the bill we are championing today.

And make no mistake, time is of the essence. The reality is the average smoker begins at age 19. So many individuals take up tobacco use before they can ever legally purchase the product. And let there be no mistake about it—our youth are targeted to be the next generation of tobacco consumers.

In fact, in my home State of Maine, 1 in 7 high school students currently smokes, and each year, 1,600 youth become new daily smokers. And most concerning, an estimated 27,000 youth now living in Maine will die prematurely from health consequences related to cigarette smoking, and health care costs in Maine directly caused by smoking have reached a whopping \$602 million annually.

Maine has responded with a comprehensive tobacco prevention and control program known as the Partnership for a Tobacco-Free Maine which is funded with proceeds from the tobacco settlement. And I am proud to say that Maine is among the States that have maximized their tobacco settlement money for the purpose of reducing smoking rates and easing related health problems. That is why Maine has established Healthy Maine Partnerships, including 31 local partnerships that span the entire geography of Maine, which are engaging in more than 156 policy and environmental change efforts to reduce tobacco use, increase physical activity, and encourage healthy eating at local schools, worksites, hospitals, recreation centers and other community sites.

While I commend the efforts of States such as Maine in attempting to stem the tide of youth smoking, what we have not yet dealt with is the known practices of tobacco companies marketing directly to our children. The fact is, the industry has not only targeted children as its new customers, but it has designed products for them as well. Even as one prohibition is imposed—such as restricting the use of cartoon characters like “Joe Camel”—we find that the tobacco industry devises a new scheme. We witnessed the new flavored products in packaging which was designed to appeal to a new generation. Many “child-oriented” flavors have been developed including

such varieties as chocolate, vanilla, berry, lime and the package I am holding—coconut-and-pineapple-flavored Kauai Koala.

Although State-level bills to ban flavored cigarettes have been introduced in New York, Minnesota, West Virginia, Connecticut, Illinois, North Carolina, and Texas—a move in the right direction to be sure—there is more we must do. It is time for Congress to act to protect our youth—to safeguard our children and in the process send a clear message to those in the tobacco industry that we will not permit them to recruit our children at increasingly younger ages to become lifelong cigarette smokers.

Our bill will achieve what we failed to accomplish 12 years ago, and we can ill afford to allow this opportunity to pass. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this timely and necessary legislation to protect the health of all Americans, especially the millions of children at risk of becoming cigarette smokers.

I yield the floor.

COMMENDING ERIK NECCIAI

Ms. SNOWE. Madam President, I rise today to recognize the outstanding service Erik Necciai has provided to the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship in his capacity as a professional staff member and counsel. When Erik joined the Committee staff just—over 2 years ago—in June 2007 I knew that I had selected a top-notch staffer who cared deeply about making a difference in peoples' lives, and I will feel a deep loss with his departure from Capitol Hill later this week.

Indicative of the dedicated person Erik is, he began his work on the committee the day after he arrived home from his honeymoon in romantic Italy with his new bride, Tina. During his first weeks here, Erik was focused on preparing for a committee roundtable regarding legislative suggestions to improve the Small Business Innovation Research, SBIR, program. He was simultaneously studying for the Maryland bar exam—no small feat! As if that was not enough, Erik faced a daily commute of roughly 2 hours each way, coming from his home in Solomon's Island, MD. After a whirlwind first month, Erik settled in quickly, remaining a proactive staff member who consistently sought new and critical avenues to increase contracting opportunities to small businesses and reform the Small Business Administration's HUBZone program.

Over his 2 years on the Hill, Erik has helped me develop thoughtful and probing legislation regarding small business contracting and procurement. Committee Chair Mary Landrieu and I will soon be introducing crucial legislation to reauthorize and make significant improvements to the SBIR and Small Business Technology Transfer, STTR, programs, and Erik was instru-

mental in helping us craft this bill. Additionally, Erik always prepared comprehensive and insightful background materials for me that included meticulously researched statistics for committee hearings and roundtables. He has also been personally responsive to small businesses seeking help navigating the confusing and difficult maze known as Federal contracting. And Erik has been an aggressive watchdog, exhorting government agencies to not just meet but exceed their small business contracting goals.

Prior to joining the committee staff, Erik had already assembled an impressive and varied resume. A contracting specialist and procurement technician and Navy acquisitions consultant for the Department of the Navy, Erik came to the Senate armed with the necessary experience and knowledge to hit the ground running in procurement. A 2006 dean's list graduate of the Thomas M. Cooley Law School in Michigan, Erik has also interned for the circuit court of his home county in Frederick, MD, in addition to serving as a law clerk for the District Court of Ingham County, MI. These experiences all led to the in-depth and extensive knowledge Erik possess about contract law.

He graduated from Virginia Tech in 2002 with a major in biology and chemistry. This led to his work in 2003 as a research scientist for the National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health. Prior to taking that position, Erik went overseas to South Africa to take part in student research. He organized and presented several lectures on government and conservation issues, including voting rights and the AIDS epidemic.

Erik has also given generously of his time in the service of others. He has been a dental assistant at the Virginia Homeless Dental Clinic, and received the Volunteer of the Year Award for his stellar work as a hospital operating room assistant. A division I varsity scholarship athlete in track and field—who was named a 2002 Virginia Tech Athlete of the Year—Erik has also combined his athletic prowess and engaging speaking skills to participate as a motivational speaker for Special Olympics athletes.

Erik's perpetual smile and charming demeanor make him eminently likeable and easily approachable. His responsible nature and insightful analytical skills make him a key member of any group, and a talented Hill staffer. The consummate team player, Erik never seeks credit or recognition for himself, but always looks for ways that government can empower people to improve their lot.

A proud native of Maryland, Erik Necciai has already led an exciting life. But on Thursday, Erik leaves the Senate to begin a new chapter as the director of an international consulting firm headquartered locally in Northern Virginia. I only hope that he can find a way to reduce his commute time. That

said, Erik's determination, sincerity, thoughtfulness, and character will be sorely missed in the halls of the Russell Building. I wish Erik and his beautiful wife Tina the best in all of their endeavors, and sincerely thank Erik for his remarkable commitment to public service.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

HONORING MICHAEL McGOVERN

Mr. REED. Madam President, I rise to recognize and honor the significant accomplishments of Special Olympics Rhode Island executive director Mike McGovern. Mike is retiring this month after 21 years of working to expand opportunities for Rhode Islanders with disabilities. He has been a lifelong friend, since grammar school and high school. He is someone I respect and admire immensely, and this respect and admiration is shared by the entire community of Rhode Island.

He has demonstrated a lifelong commitment to upholding the mission and values of the Special Olympics. Mike's special dedication and enthusiasm have ensured that the Special Olympics Rhode Island remains one of the most impressive organizations in our State, providing year-round sports training and competitions to approximately 2,700 young and adult athletes across the State.

Mike began his involvement with Special Olympics Rhode Island as a volunteer for 18 years, every year pitching in, helping out. That is the way he is—a generous heart, a great sense of community and neighborliness. He then served as assistant executive director for Special Olympics Rhode Island from 1988 to 1998, when he took over the role of executive director.

Under his leadership, Special Olympics Rhode Island expanded the number of sports offered to 20. His athlete-centered approach helped the program experience a 40-percent increase in competitors.

Mike has also worked hard to ensure that the funding goals of Special Olympics Rhode Island were achieved. During his time with Special Olympics Rhode Island, the organization built a budget surplus of over \$1 million. He also helped launch a capital campaign to establish a permanent home for Special Olympics Rhode Island. His innovative spirit, which characterized his entire tenure, was evident in many different ways—particularly 33 years ago, when he and several friends cofounded the Penguin Plunge, which is an annual New Year's Day ritual in Jamestown, RI, where hardy souls, hundreds of them, brave the frigid waters of Narragansett Bay to raise money for Special Olympics Rhode Island and raise a feeling of camaraderie, fellowship, and good spirits to begin the year.

Last month, Mike attended his final games as executive director. Held at the University of Rhode Island in King-

ston, Special Olympics Rhode Island dedicated its 2009 State summer games to Mike McGovern for his outstanding, long-time commitment to the Special Olympics. Speaking at the games, he spoke of being inspired by the courage of the athletes through their ability to defy stereotypes, to compete, to strive—all of them—to win. We, too, are inspired by his commitment to a very noble cause.

Through his presence at the organization, he imbued it with a special spirit. That spirit will be missed. But he will continue to serve because that is his nature.

Thank you, Mike, for your exemplary service. You have been a strong advocate for thousands of Special Olympics athletes, both on and off the playing field. Your dedicated leadership and hard work have helped thousands of Rhode Islanders with disabilities achieve their goals.

Also, you have been a great success in something as important—as a husband, as a father, as a friend. I wish you and your lovely family, your wife and your children, the best in your well-deserved retirement.

Let me conclude by saying Rhode Island's special athletes have never had a more special friend than Mike McGovern.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia is recognized.

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Chamber as in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

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

HONORING JIM WOOTEN

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam President, it is a distinct honor and privilege for me to stand on the floor of the Senate to pay tribute to a gentleman I went to college with, a gentleman who has reported on politics and government in Georgia for the better part of the last 35 years, a gentleman who recently announced his retirement at the end of this month from the associate editorial page responsibilities at the Atlanta Journal and Constitution.

Mr. Jim Wooten, born and raised in McRae, GA, veteran of Vietnam, 20 years in the Georgia Air National Guard, former President of the Georgia Press Association, lifetime trustee of the Georgia Press Association's educational fund, has made a tremendous contribution to our State and to the public lives of all our people. I rise to pay tribute to him.

One of the greatest tributes of all that I can share is what happened on Monday, at lunch this week. I had a luncheon with the Board of Cox Enterprises. The Cox newspapers own the Atlanta Constitution, as they do the Palm Beach Post and the Dayton paper. They own many other businesses. It is a huge privately held company.

At that luncheon, unsolicited by me, the name of Jim Wooten came up and, one by one, the leaders of Cox Enterprises talked about the tremendous contributions that Jim Wooten has made to their newspaper.

As one who was first elected in 1976 and has been written about many times by Jim Wooten, I wanted to add my tribute to his journalistic talent and the contribution he has made. I am not sure I know of any other writer I have read who has reported on what is going on in politics in our State, who has gotten it right more often—in fact always—than Jim Wooten.

Conservative? Yes, he is conservative. But he is pragmatic. When he writes his opinions on the editorial page of the Atlanta Constitution, it makes a difference in the minds and attitudes of Georgia's people.

I say job well done to Jim Wooten. I hope his retirement is successful and rewarding in every way he wishes it to be, and I thank him very much for all the contributions he has made to the lives of all Georgians and, in one case, to this Georgian.

HOUSING

Mr. ISAKSON. I would like to talk for a minute, if I can, Madam President, about a very important issue. I don't come to the floor all that often, but people will tell you I come to the floor too often to talk about the housing industry. I am going to do it for a little bit tonight because it is critically important to our economy and to our country.

A year and a half ago, I introduced a piece of legislation, in January of 2008, creating a housing tax credit of \$15,000 for any family who would buy and occupy their home as a principal residence in the United States. I did so because housing had collapsed, foreclosures were beginning to become rampant and are rampant today. Standing inventory proliferated, builders were going out of business, and our economy was in a downward slide.

The CBO score on that \$15,000 tax credit is \$34.2 billion, and I was told last January that was too expensive, we couldn't afford to do it. By my last count—Senator COBURN is a better counter than I am—we spent about \$5.5 trillion trying to fix an economy that has been in a continual downward slide.

Fortunately, in July of last year, with the help of Members on both sides, we did get a tax credit passed, but it was basically an interest-free loan for \$7,500, it was means tested to families who were first-time home buyers or had incomes under \$150,000. It did no good.

Later in the year, I finally convinced this body, and we took off the limitation in terms of the payback and made it a real tax credit and raised it from \$7,500 to \$8,000 and it has made a difference. First-time home buyers used it and the market stabilized, but we don't