

bettering his community through public service. Mike was presented a plaque recognizing his service from the Lacona Fire Chief, Robert Dittmer, and a potluck dinner and ceremony was held for Mike.

I know that my colleagues in the United States Congress join me in commending Mike Garrison for his many years of loyalty and service in protecting the community of Lacona. It is an immense honor to represent Mike in Congress, and I wish all the best to him as he embarks on this next chapter in life.

EXPRESSING DISAPPOINTMENT
WITH THE DEEP CUTS TO CON-
SERVATION IN THE AGRICUL-
TURAL APPROPRIATIONS BILL

HON. RON KIND

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 24, 2011

Mr. KIND. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my disappointment in the deep cuts made to conservation programs in H.R. 2112, the Agricultural Appropriations Bill. I represent one of the most productive farming regions in the country, and these cuts will have lasting consequences in my district. As the father of two young children, I am extremely concerned about passing an undue financial burden on to future generations. It is clear to all that sacrifices must be made, but conservation programs that play a vital role in protecting our Nation's lands and waters must be protected, and should not be disproportionately undermined as they have been through the appropriations process.

Conservation programs have in recent years suffered a number of devastating financial blows, which will profoundly affect the ability of farmers to reach our stewardship goals. The 2008 Farm Bill as well as H.R. 1 in the 112th Congress included drastic cuts to flagship programs like CRP and WRP without proportionate cuts to Title I programs. This effectively puts the interests of large agribusiness in front of nutrition and conservation, rather than realizing the need for equal sacrifice by all stakeholders.

Increases in commodity prices have led to farmers feeling pressure to bring sensitive lands back into production, and that means it's going to affect wildlife habitat, highly erodible land with sediment and nutrient flows flowing off and contaminating our water and drinking supply. We are seeing already that CRP enrollment is dropping because farmers are choosing to take that land out of CRP and putting it back into production.

The real, measurable consequences of these actions will be felt in my district and across the country. Fishing, hunting and other types of outdoor recreation generate millions of jobs, primarily in rural counties. Managing farms, ranches and forest lands to create habitat for wildlife—and protecting farmland from sprawl—is critical to rural economic development based upon hunting and fishing. It is estimated that one-third of America's river miles, 45 percent of America's lakes, and 44 percent of America's bays still fail to meet water quality standards. Conservation programs play an important role in alleviating these problems by reducing soil erosion and bolstering natural water filtration, and are in

many ways the last defense against over-exploitation of land and water pollution.

In this bill, the Conservation Stewardship Program, which pays growers to farm more sustainably, is slated to be cut by 171 million dollars. This visionary program rewards past stewardship, but also incentivizes improvements that bring about additional environmental benefits. It is a shining example of the kind of programmatic innovation and forward thinking that should be rewarded by Congress, which makes this reduction in funding particularly disappointing.

Funds for The Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) are also being cut. This program has played a critical role in conserving our Nation's wetlands, and the environmental and economic benefits associated with them. The United States has already lost over half its native wetlands, and continues to lose these crucial habitats at an alarming rate. WRP provides an avenue for farmers to take wetlands, which are normally considered underproductive for farming anyway, out of production so that they may continue to provide habitat and ecosystem services.

Finally, the cuts to conservation programs will be damaging to agriculture and food security. Cutting funds to conservation will put millions of acres of farmland at risk to unplanned development.

I have made conserving our natural heritage one of the hallmarks of my work in Congress, and I cannot stand by and watch these cuts without making my voice heard. While I am concerned about passing on a financial burden to my children, I am also concerned about passing on an environmental burden. Cutting these programs will only cause problems for future generations.

NATIONAL HOMEOWNERSHIP
MONTH

HON. RUBÉN HINOJOSA

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 24, 2011

Mr. HINOJOSA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of June 2011 National Homeownership Month.

The most current data show that of 130.7 million homes in the United States, 74.9 million serve as principal residences. Another 37.0 million homes are renter-occupied, and the remaining 18.8 million are either for sale, for rent, or for seasonal use.

Despite the recent economic decline, the people of the United States remain one of the best-housed populations in the world. Owning a home remains a fundamental part of the American dream and the largest personal investment many families will ever make. High homeownership rates help communities through higher property values, lower crime, and higher civic participation. Homeownership promotes a more even distribution of income and wealth, and establishes greater individual financial security. It improves living conditions, which can lead to a healthier population.

Homeownership creates neighborhood stability since owners are more inclined to remain in the community for a longer period of time than renters. It has been proven to increase social and political involvement due to the concern about one's property value. Home-

ownership correlates with lower neighborhood crime. It fosters more responsible behavior among youths in the community, such as higher academic achievement and lower teen pregnancy rates, due to the monitoring mechanism put in place to maintain the attractiveness of a community. Economists have been able to establish that a correlation between homeownership and these positive neighborhood effects does exist.

Improving homeownership opportunities requires the commitment and cooperation of the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, including the Federal Government and State and local governments. It is of the utmost importance that we maintain the mortgage interest deduction and the 30-year fixed rate mortgage as their elimination would damage the availability and cost of mortgage capital for millions of Americans, especially while the housing market recovery remains fragile. The same can be said of the ill-conceived downpayment portion of the "Qualified Residential Mortgages" proposal.

As part of the financial reform legislation, we here in Congress designed a clear framework for improving the quality of mortgage lending and restoring private capital to the housing market. To discourage excessive risk taking, we required securitizers to retain five percent of the credit risk on loans packaged and sold as mortgage securities. However, because across-the-board risk retention would impose significant costs on responsible, creditworthy borrowers, we also created an exemption for "Qualified Residential Mortgages," defined to include mortgages with product features and sound underwriting standards that have been proven to reduce default. Rather than creating a system of penalties to discourage bad lending and incentives for appropriate lending, regulators have developed a rule that is too narrowly drawn. Of particular concern are the provisions of the proposal mandating high downpayments.

The principal barrier to homeownership is accumulating the money needed for downpayment and closing costs. It is estimated that it would take the average American family, living frugally and saving at the current national rate, nearly seven years to save for a 5 percent down payment on a \$200,000 home and more than 10 years to save for 10 percent down.

The regulators' proposal to require a 20 percent downpayment is tantamount to declaring war on homeownership. Only the elite in the United States would be able to afford such a downpayment. The supermajority of residents in Hidalgo County located in my district in Texas would not be able to meet the downpayment requirement, thereby depriving them of the American Dream. Hidalgo County is the second poorest county in the country. 89 percent of my constituents are Hispanic, the poorest of the poor, and tend to operate in a cash society. My constituents already have difficulty meeting current downpayment requirements, much less an even higher, ill-conceived 20 percent downpayment. It has been proven that once my poorest constituents actually own a home, they manage to make the monthly mortgage payments and turn a household into an actual "home."

The proposed qualified residential mortgage definition harms creditworthy borrowers while frustrating housing recovery. It violates congressional intent and makes homeownership more expensive for millions of responsible consumers.