

I also believe that providing the tax credit will help many first-time homeowners get into a house and give them the extra cash they need to be able to meet their mortgage payments.

Now, there are two new provisions added to our measure that we did not introduce last week. Senator COLEMAN provided language to give returning war veterans more time to avoid home foreclosure. Currently, they have a 3-month window from their return to the private sector to work out any mortgage difficulties they may have. That may not be enough time for a vet newly returned from the war zone and dealing with a host of family and financial problems. Our proposal would extend the returned war veteran protection against foreclosure to 6 months after they return.

We have also introduced provisions of the Federal Housing Act reform bill that passed the Senate 93 to 1 last year. That bipartisan, near unanimous reform bill deserves to become law, and it will assist the FHA in stepping up to the plate in many areas where that agency can provide the kind of help and assistance we initially intended it to provide.

Now, in contrast to the housing proposal introduced on the other side, Republicans will avoid making home ownership more expensive, especially for low-income families, through harmful bankruptcy changes that increase the cost of borrowing or encourage costly litigation.

If we put in law the fact that bankruptcy judges will be able to cram down on lenders' onerous terms that were not included in the initial mortgage, they will find that mortgage companies may increase their rates by 1.5 to 2 percent. That could mean at least 6 million Americans would no longer be able to afford a mortgage to buy the home they need.

Also, we will oppose plowing billions of dollars into big Government programs that will not help our neediest families now. We will also oppose adding more dollars to programs that are still flush with funds that were given them in December.

Together, these housing proposals will help families such as those of Katherine Gwinn and Willie Clay and neighborhoods across the country get through this crisis. I urge my colleagues to support it, and I invite all colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join with us to see if we cannot pass something that will provide relief now for the many families across this Nation who are suffering because of the subprime mortgage meltdown and the resulting financial pressures it puts on the lending industry and, through them, to the families themselves.

This is the time. Now is the time for congressional action. I hope that with a broad coalition of my colleagues, we will be able to make these additions and provide assistance to suffering American families.

By Mr. REED (for himself and Mr. HAGEL):

S. 2735. A bill to establish the Council on Healthy Housing, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I introduce, along with Senator HAGEL, the Healthy Housing Council Act of 2008. This legislation would establish an independent interagency Council on Healthy Housing in the executive branch. The bill would improve the coordination of existing but fragmented programs, so that families can access Government programs and services in a more efficient and effective manner.

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, more than 6 million households live in housing with moderate or severe heating, plumbing, or electric hazards. This count of moderate or severe physical problems does not even include significant lead-based paint hazards, which persist in 24 million, or approximately four times as many, households.

Low-income and minority individuals and families are disproportionately affected by housing-related health hazards. We know that residents of poorly designed, constructed, or maintained housing are at greater risk for serious illnesses and injuries, including cancer, carbon monoxide poisoning, burns, falls, rodent bites, childhood lead poisoning, and asthma. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, non-Hispanic Blacks and Mexican-Americans are three times as likely to have elevated blood-lead levels, compared to non-Hispanic whites. About 1.2 million housing units with significant lead-based paint hazards house low-income families with children under 6 years of age.

If the disease and injury toll taken on our Nation's individuals and families, particularly our children, is not enough to demonstrate the need for coordinated Federal Government action on housing-related health hazards, consider some of the annual costs.

According to research at the Mount Sinai Children's Environmental Health Center, annual costs for environmentally attributable childhood diseases in the U.S. total an estimated \$54.9 billion. That number is approximately 3 percent of total health care costs.

The good news is that low-cost preventative measures can have dramatic effects. For example, properly installing and maintaining a smoke alarm can cut the risk of fire death in half. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that providing healthy housing to American families will help prevent 20 million asthma cases, 240,000 incidents of elevated blood-lead levels in young children, 14,000 burn injuries, and 21,000 radon-associated lung cancer deaths.

While there are many programs in place to address housing-related health hazards, these programs are fragmented and spread across many agencies, making it difficult for at-risk families to access assistance or to re-

ceive the comprehensive information they need. It is time for better coordination.

This bill authorizes \$750,000 for each of fiscal years 2009 to 2013 for an independent Council on Healthy Housing, which would bring Federal, State, and local government representatives, as well as industry and nonprofit representatives, to the table at least once a year.

The council would review, monitor, and evaluate existing housing, health, energy, and environmental programs. The council would then make recommendations to reduce duplication, ensure collaboration, identify best practices, and develop a comprehensive healthy housing research agenda.

In order to ensure that members of the public are informed of and benefit from the council's activities, the council would hold biannual stakeholder meetings, keep an updated Web site, and work towards unified healthy housing data collection and maintenance.

While there is a growing consensus on ways to help communities make housing healthier, there is also a lack of coordinated programs and information, which has made it difficult for the public to access research and data. By creating this council, we can provide a sorely needed forum for otherwise disparate health and housing experts, whether in the Government, private, or nonprofit sector, to share their experiences, successes, and agendas for the future.

The Healthy Housing Council Act will help us start working towards a time when an affordable, decent, and healthy home will be not just the American dream, but the American promise. I hope my colleagues will join me and Senator HAGEL in supporting this bipartisan bill and other healthy housing efforts.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the text of the bill was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

S. 2735

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Healthy Housing Council Act of 2008".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

- (1) In the United States—
 - (A) 6,000,000 households live in homes with moderate or severe physical hazards;
 - (B) 24,000,000 homes have significant lead-based paint hazards;
 - (C) 11,000,000 homes have had leaks in the last 12 months;
 - (D) 6,000,000 homes have had signs of mice in the last 3 months; and
 - (E) 1 in 15 homes have dangerous levels of radon.
- (2) Residents of housing that is poorly designed, constructed, or maintained are at risk for cancer, carbon monoxide poisoning,