

**For Immediate Release:** Contact:Neal A. Patel

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# Bipartisan Coalition Introduces Bill Incentivizing Conservation of Agricultural Lands, Open Spaces

**(Washington, DC)**– A bipartisan coalition today introduced the Conservation Easement Incentive Act of 2015 in the House (H.R. 641) and Senate (S. 330). The legislation, authored by Senators Dean Heller (R-NV) and Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Representatives Mike Thompson (D-CA) and Mike Kelly (R-PA), provides a permanent enhanced tax incentive to family farmers, ranchers, and other landowners who choose not to develop their land and instead preserve their property for conservation. By providing tax benefits to landowners who choose conservation, the bill helps preserve our nation’s farm lands and open spaces for posterity.

“This bipartisan bill provides private land owners an important tool to conserve our state’s precious natural resources, increase outdoor recreation opportunities, and preserve our proud tradition of ranching,” **said Heller**. “In a state like Nevada, where over 85 percent of our lands are federally controlled, it is important to preserve our western way of life while keeping land in private hands and on local tax rolls.”

“Our farmers and ranchers are the best stewards of the land,” **said Stabenow**. “If this deduction becomes permanent, more landowners will take part in preserving our land, water and wildlife habitats. It’s a win for taxpayers, a win for farmers, and it’s a win for our environment.”

“Conservation easements have encouraged landowners across our county to conserve millions of acres of farm lands and scenic open spaces – so we know they work, but there’s also more we can do**” said Thompson.** “By passing this bill and making this conservation tool permanent, landowners will have the certainty they need to preserve and protect even more property and natural resources for future generations.”

“This commonsense, bipartisan legislation is about supporting farmers who want to preserve our nation’s most cherished natural resources for future generations,” **said Kelly**. “Since 2006, conservation easement has secured hundreds of thousands of acres of America’s farmland and open space for hunting, fishing, hiking, and locally-source food production. Western Pennsylvania is fortunate to be home to many vibrant and impressive land trusts, including one of the largest in the nation. This legislation will help them conserve even more farm and natural lands by making this important conservation tool a permanent part of our tax code.”

Under the Conservation Incentive Easement Act of 2015, landowners who donate their property’s development rights would maintain ownership and management of the land, but forgo their rights to develop the land in the future. The legislation would make permanent an enhanced tax incentive for donating development rights that expired at the end of 2014.

In the past, the enhanced tax incentive has been extended on a short-term basis. Consequently, this has created uncertainty among landowners and has discouraged donations because it takes an average of three years to set up a conservation easement. With a short-term extension, landowners who want to donate their development rights for conservation may not know if the enhanced tax benefits will be available to them by the time their conservation easement is established. Making the enhanced incentive permanent will give more farmers, ranchers, forest, and other landowners the assurances they need to choose land conservation over development.

In addition, the Conservation Easement Incentive Act would also help moderate-income landowners choose conservation by:

* Raising the maximum deduction a donor can take for donating a conservation easement from 30 percent of their adjusted gross income (AGI) in any year to 50 percent;
* Allowing qualified farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100 percent of their AGI; and
* Increasing the number of years over which a donor can take this deduction from 5 to 15 years.

The Conservation Easement Incentive Act has been endorsed by the Land Trust Alliance, Ducks Unlimited, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, the Nature Conservancy, the National Sports Shooting Foundation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Mule Deer Foundation, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the American Forest Foundation, the National Audubon Society, the Wildlife Society, the California Association of Wine Growers, and National Wild Turkey Federation.

H.R. 641 has been referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means for further consideration, on which Congressmen Thompson and Kelly both serve. S. 330 has been referred to Senate Finance Committee on which Stabenow and Heller serve.

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