



November 2, 2009

The Honorable Charles Rangel
Chairman
Committee on Ways and means
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dave Camp
Ranking Member
Committee on Ways and Means
1139E Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Gentlemen:

On behalf of the more than 30,000 members of our respective professional organizations, we write to urge your committee to approve H.R. 1831; the Conservation Easement Incentive Act of 2009. This bipartisan legislation would make permanent the tax deduction for charitable contributions by individuals and corporations of real property interests for conservation purposes, which is set to expire at year's end.

Originally enacted in 2006 and renewed as part of the 2008 Farm Bill, this important tax incentive promotes the use of conservation easements which allow private landowners to retain ownership, control and management of the property while ensuring that the physical integrity of those lands will be conserved for the future. By incentivizing the voluntary conservation of land while preserving private property rights, this deduction has helped preserve hundreds of thousands of acres of forests, watersheds, and farms for future generations. This important deduction cannot be allowed to expire.

Since 2006 and in cooperation with the Land Trust Alliance, our organizations have undertaken special efforts to educate the appraisal community on proper valuation of conservation easements, which are considered one of the most scrutinized topics of valuation. We have developed advanced seminars that teach participants the issues found in valuation of conservation easements including compliance with IRS requirement. There have been more than a thousand participants who have learned appropriate approaches, solutions, and regulations in different areas of the country and for different clients. We recognize the importance of credible valuations and our responsibility to provide sustainable appraisals.

We have seen firsthand, the beneficial results of the Conservation Easement Program. We believe that conservation easements, if correctly applied, provide excellent long term benefits to the environment and citizens of the USA and we encourage passage of H.R. 1831.

Thank you for your consideration and if you have any questions, please contact Bill Garber, Director of Government Relations for the Appraisal Institute, at 202-292-5586 or bgarber@appraisalinstitute.org, or Peter Barash, Government Relations Consultant, American Society of Appraisers at (202) 466-2221 or peter@barashassociates.com.

Sincerely,

Appraisal Institute
American Society of Appraisers
American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers
National Association of Independent Fee Appraisers