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House of Representatives
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Remarks on Hawai'i Invasive Species Act
Congressman Ed Case (HI-01)
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Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join my colleague, Representative Tokuda, in introducing our bill to protect one of the most unique and fragile environments on Earth, our Hawai'i, from devastating invasive species.

Invasive species pose an especially grave threat to Hawaii's unique ecosystems, natural resources, and agricultural communities, in part due to Hawaii's unique geography. Hawai'i is the most isolated island chain and one of the most ecologically diverse places in the world. We are 2,282 miles from the Continental United States, 2,952 miles from Japan and 4,772 miles from Washington, DC, with no other islands in close proximity. We have within our constrained borders ten of the thirteen world climate zones, with ecosystems ranging from desert to tropical, where plants and animals that found their way to Hawai'i evolved like nowhere else. A 2014 survey identified fully 9,975 endemic species in Hawai'i. These species include the Hawaiian scarlet honeycreeper, the 'i'iwi; the flowering evergreen; and the state mammal of Hawai'i, the 'iliihoholoikauaua (Hawaiian monk seal).

However, tragically, in large part due to invasive species, Hawai'i has become the endangered species and extinction capital of the world. The Pacific Islands are home to 44% of the threatened and endangered species listed under the Endangered Species Act, and Hawai'i currently has 468 species listed as endangered, more than any other state and almost half of the total endangered species nationwide. Many of these species are critically endangered and face an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild. Although we will never know the true number of species that have gone extinct in Hawai'i, in 2021 alone nine Hawaiian species were declared extinct.

As one particularly poignant example, four years ago the *Atlantic* published an article, "The Last of Its Kind," which chronicled the death of George the snail. He was the last *achatina apexfulva*, a species of tree snail that is endemic to the island of O'ahu. This article calls attention to the fact that snails in Hawai'i are disappearing at an alarming rate, perhaps faster than any animal on Earth right now, victims of various factors in part linked to invasive species.

The threat to our state tree, the 'ōhi'a lehua, is also illustrative of our growing crisis. Used for poi boards and outrigger canoes, the 'ōhi'a lehua is important to Hawaiian culture and the islands' watersheds. As the first tree to grow in new Hawai'i lava flows, 'ōhi'a grows throughout the watershed creating new soil, stabilizing steep mountain ridges and comprises approximately 80% of Hawaii's native forests.

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However, rapid 'ōhi'a death, or ROD, caused by an invasive fungal pathogen, kills 'ōhi'a trees quickly, and threatens the stability of Hawaii's native forests. Since its discovery on the Big Island in 2014, ROD has spread to Kaua'i, Maui and O'ahu, and has killed hundreds of thousands of trees.

Hawaii's unique circumstances also have given rise to one of our nation's most diverse and productive agricultural communities. With a year-round growing cycle, our crops have ranged throughout our history from the highest quality sugar and pineapple and cattle to tropical specialty crops like fruit and cut flowers in the highest demand worldwide.

Yet it is exactly because these crops like our natural resources have adapted to Hawaii's uniqueness that they are the most susceptible to devastation from external species against which they have no natural defenses. Invasive species have drastically impacted agriculture in Hawai'i, threatening some of the island's most valuable crops in the state's third-largest industry.

One of Hawaii's most valuable crops, the macadamia nut, remains under threat from the macadamia felted coccid. Macadamia felted coccid has been found in all of Hawai'i Island's macadamia growing regions. The felted coccid reduces macadamia tree output by draining nutrients from the tree.

The cattle industry, which is one of Hawaii's most important agricultural commodities, has been dramatically affected by the introduction of the invasive two-lined spittlebug. Since being detected in 2016, the pest now infects more than 200,000 acres of grassland and is clearing lands for invasives grasses that further affect Hawaii's ecosystems.

Yet despite these incontrovertible and growing impacts of external species on Hawaii's natural resources and economy, existing federal law leaves Hawai'i largely defenseless against increasingly destructive invasives.

Imports by air and sea, the only means of in-bound transportation to our island state, lack any effective regulation to screen out invasives. This is despite a fairly robust screening of exports from Hawai'i to the Continental United States to screen out invasives from Hawai'i viewed as harmful to mainland agriculture (invasives that, ironically, were invasives into Hawai'i to start with).

I sought to crack down on this lax regime to prevent and curb invasives with my introduction of H.R. 3468 in 2005, modeled after New Zealand and other isolated jurisdictions with then like now the most stringent invasive species prevention regimes in the world. Since the introduction of that bill, the threats from invasives have only grown. Since 2005, 195 invasive species have been introduced to Hawai'i. That is in addition to the roughly 5,000 invasive species that have been introduced to Hawai'i throughout its history.

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Our bill, the Hawai'i Invasive Species Protection Act, will require the U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Inspection Service (APHIS), in cooperation with other federal departments and the State of Hawai'i, to conduct visual, x-ray and canine inspections, as appropriate, on person, baggage, cargo and any other article destined for direct movement to the State of Hawai'i. The inspections will search for high-risk invasive species and agricultural materials. The inspections will be conducted at airports, ports, and postal sorting facilities prior to direct travel to the State of Hawai'i.

Our bill further requires APHIS to work with the State of Hawai'i to develop and publish a list of the high-risk invasive species and agricultural materials for the State of Hawai'i. It pays for these inspections by increasing Agriculture Quarantine Inspection fees to cover the full cost of inspection.

Inaction is not an option. For example, the coffee berry borer, which was discovered in Kona on Hawai'i Island in 2010 already infects all of the coffee growing islands in Hawai'i. The coffee berry borer can cause yield losses of between 30 and 35 percent and affects the quality of the coffee beans, directly impacting the income of growers. Had this bill been implemented, it may have helped prevent coffee leaf rust from entering Hawai'i. The confirmed and continued presence of this fungal disease, which can lead to yield losses of between 50 and 80 percent, on multiple Hawaiian islands could leave one of Hawaii's most iconic industries devastated.

If we truly care about the threat that continued and escalating invasive species pose to one of the most invaluable and unique ecosystems on earth, in addition to our unique economy and way of life, then the stark reality is that this bill is what it will take. Again, it is not revolutionary when compared to other countries that have not only recognized this threat but actually done something about it.

And it is certainly not revolutionary when compared to longstanding domestic restrictions on exports from Hawai'i, leading to the basic point that if these invasive species prevention requirements are good enough for the rest of the country and much of the world then they are good enough for Hawai'i.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to this House for your understanding and careful consideration of Hawaii's challenge and opportunity and ask for our bill's expeditious passage.

Mahalo (thank you).

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