

in determining how to purchase their products, and today that information is not disclosed. And we have a bill introduced, House bill 693, that I believe deserves a hearing. We ought to have a vote on it in the House.

We need country of origin labeling. We need to make sure that the producers of this country have the protections that are necessary to allow them to do what they do best, and that is provide the best source of food and fiber for the American people.

The gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. POMEROY) and I will be introducing crop insurance legislation which addresses some of the problems in that program and makes it workable so that our producers have an opportunity to hedge against loss and make sure that they are, again, able to survive and prosper in this economy.

We need sanctions reform. There are a lot of countries in the world that we cannot do business with, and it makes no sense, and I think we need to have a debate in this Congress about what we can do to better open markets so that our producers have an opportunity to make a living and to survive.

Every small town, every Main Street across my State and many States across rural America, suffers when the ag economy suffers, and there is not an economy in any Main Street in South Dakota today that is not feeling the effects of this crisis.

So I believe it ought to be a priority of this Congress. I am going to fight very, very hard and work with other Members from rural States who want to work together to see that we produce a series of initiatives, a series of solutions that will help address the serious needs that we have and the concerns that we have in the agricultural sector of our economy.

So I look forward to working my friends and colleagues on both sides of the political aisle. This ought to be a bipartisan issue.

□ 1900

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the special order time of the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE).

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MORAN of Kansas). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from North Dakota?

There was no objection.

AUCTIONS, AUCTIONS, AUCTIONS: WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE FAMILY FARM?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. POMEROY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on the comments of my friend and colleague, the gentleman

from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE) relative to the agriculture crisis. I cannot say how terrible it is relative to the farm economy in North Dakota.

I have with me today some auction bills. We have been seeing a lot of these auction bills. Consider that each auction bill represents a sale of a family farm, the end of literally generations of tradition of farming the land. It goes on for pages.

Recently, Ag Week Periodical, which covers the Red River Valley, the most prosperous part of agriculture in my State, published 150 farm auctions. This is 150 individual operators throwing in the towel, ending, again, the tradition handed down for generations of making a living off their land. In each case, it is a tragedy and something to be avoided.

One friend of mine, and I am going to offer this for the RECORD, who is selling out after 120 consecutive years of production on this family farm, wrote an op-ed to the newspaper and he has on the title of it, now at least we do not have to wonder anymore.

Mr. Speaker, there are an awful lot of families wondering tonight whether or not they will be able to get a crop in the ground this spring. Imagine, we all deal with career uncertainty surely as Members of the House up for election every other year. We really never know until the election is over what we are going to be doing, but we have people at this late point in the spring not knowing whether they will be able to put a crop in the ground right now.

Obviously, if they cannot get the financing to get a crop in the ground they have no idea what they are going to do to put shoes on their kids' feet, to put food on the table.

We have got a full-blown crisis in agriculture directly related to the financing capital farmers need to get their crop in the ground this spring.

For that reason, the administration advanced several weeks ago emergency funding requests so that we might have additional loan authority funded. The request is for \$152 million and it is part of the supplemental appropriations bill sent up by the White House; \$109 million of that would make \$1.1 billion in additional lending authority available to farmers, \$42 million so that the USDA could actually hire additional staff to process these applications and get the money out.

Here is what has happened. In light of the collapse in commodity prices, farmers have had terrible losses. As they sit down with their regular bankers, they are unable to show cash flow and, therefore, unable, ineligible in many cases, for the financing that they had otherwise expected.

Now there are programs available for these farmers, FSA lending programs, direct lending programs, USDA loan guarantee programs, but because so many have had trouble in lending in the normal course, they have come to the USDA and overwhelmed the resources available for those USDA loans.

Right now North Dakota, we have a backlog. We do not have enough money to meet the loan need now and it is anticipated that that loan need is going to increase dramatically over the next few days. There is \$4.4 million in unmet loan need that has come into the North Dakota FSA offices over the last 2 days alone. This is a crisis, and it is a crisis with a very narrow window of time for us to address.

If a farmer cannot get the crop in the ground in the spring, the money coming along here in July or August is not going to do a lick of good. The window is gone. They have lost the chance to plant, and for these operators that means they have lost the farm.

I would say to my colleagues, please let us move this supplemental appropriation request along. Everyone knows of the urgent straits in farm country, not just in North Dakota or South Dakota but throughout the country, and we must respond to this by getting that loan guarantee money replenished so that it can get out to the farmers so they can get their crop in the ground this spring, so they don't lose their farms.

It is as simple as that. It is very straightforward. This is a body that unfortunately sometimes cannot operate very quickly, but there is just no mistake. The urgency is now. We have to act. Failure to act is going to mean a lot more auction bills and that, in each instance, is a tragedy.

NOW WE DON'T HAVE TO WONDER ANYMORE

Bismarck, N.D.—On June 15, near Mayville, N.D., there will be another farm auction—just another farm auction—barely noticed by most in these days of collapsing agriculture as we know it. Just another sale bill.

Just another gathering of neighbors, family, friends and buyers—buyers who realize that with all sales at this time, there should be some pieces of equipment useful to them that will go at a bargain price. Friends and neighbors will come to offer moral support and experience the friendly social atmosphere that is unique to rural America. Family members will come to witness the end of the family tradition.

Last year was the 120th crop planted and harvested since the original homestead was taken in 1878. Some of the family members want to witness the auction as a closure, similar to attending a funeral for a loved one. Sometimes it takes an event to provide acceptance of what has happened.

For many years we have seen hundreds of sale bills, been to auctions and wondered what these folks were going through—what they were feeling. I'm sure that for most it was every bit as difficult as it is now for us. I would guess that after the initial sense of failure and depression, there is an uneasy sense of relief that the hopelessness can now be dismissed and energies can be devoted to something positive.

Now we don't have to wonder anymore. The initial feelings have come and gone. The personal feelings have been pushed aside for the most part—at least on the surface. Now the business decisions must take over. Emotions will have to give way to the matters at hand. The plans on how to best organize and handle preparations for the sale are now a priority.

Occasionally regrets surface, and I wonder what we could have done differently to have

avoided the present situation. What did my grandparents do when faced with the perils of pioneer life at the turn of the century? What did my parents do when they were faced with hard times prior to and during the depression of the 1930s?

The accounts of their struggles are fresh on my mind. I listened intently as they described how drought, rust and low prices nearly pushed them over the edge. Only hard work, hope, determination and a strong faith sustained them. Faith in God and in a society that would ultimately rescue America from a bad situation. They endured and persevered. And with the help of federal farm programs at the last, even prospered.

This came at a time when the world seemed to care about its food supply and those who produced it. As time passed and a degree of prosperity continued some became frustrated with the aspect and methods of supply management. A bit of arrogance told some that we no longer needed any help from the federal government and that we could handle things now.

The commodity traders, food processors and exploiters of the ag sector of our economy could now have their way. Congress listened to the wrong people—those whose interests were not supportive of farm families. A non farm bill called "Freedom to Farm" was crafted and passed over the objections of our rural congressional delegations. This, along with the years of crop disease, bad foreign trade policies and apathetic citizens, all contributed to our present situation.

Our country has never experienced overall hunger. Many European countries have, and they appreciate and protect their agriculture producers. We have been scolded for not being efficient. We have been told to produce more—we have. We have been told to market smarter—we have. We have been told to expand—we have.

None of this helps without an equitable price. In the Legislature we have attempted in a small way to address the problems with the proposals forwarded by the Commission on the Future of Agriculture. Nearly all proposals have been defeated by the Republican majority.

What now? Do we in the North Dakota Legislature turn our backs on the No. 1 industry in our state and let what is left crumble further? Or do we put some plans forward to help solve the problems at the state level? It may already be too late to ask Congress for help given the demographics of our rural/urban population split. Are we going to offer any hope that we are willing to save agriculture as we know it?

It is too late for some of us. But it is still not too late for North Dakota. We must use what we have left of this session to get to the business of supporting rural families and communities.

THE PRESENCE OF SQUALENE IN SICK GULF WAR VETS SHOULD BE INVESTIGATED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. METCALF) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. METCALF. Mr. Speaker, I am here today to address an issue of critical importance to many of our constituents. Over a year ago, my office was contacted by several veterans and others who were concerned about reports that the presence of antibodies for squalene had been discovered in blood samples of sick Gulf War veterans.

How could squalene antibodies show up in the bodies of Gulf War veterans? Squalene is a component of adjuvant formulations used in some experimental vaccines but not in any licensed vaccines. It has not been licensed.

An adjuvant is a toxic substance incorporated into a vaccine to accelerate, enhance or prolong specific immune responses.

After my initial inquiries, I determined that it would be prudent to ask the GAO to conduct an investigation to determine the facts surrounding these disturbing reports.

With over 100,000 of our Gulf War era veterans suffering, I believed it was imperative that we provide them with the truth regarding this issue. If there was nothing to substantiate the assertions, then we should be able to report those findings back to the veteran's community and move on with the search to provide them with the best possible treatment for Gulf War illnesses.

GAO's report, recently released to me, is very disturbing and raises an increased number of serious questions. Its title, "Gulf War Illnesses: Questions About the Presence of Squalene Antibodies in Veterans can be Resolved," indicates that we can get to the truth about squalene.

The GAO report's conclusion is troubling and demands immediate attention. The GAO recommended that the Department of Defense should act now to expand on the research already conducted. The GAO found that independent research had been undertaken using valid scientific measures, which has found the presence of squalene in sick Gulf War vets.

They interviewed the dedicated immunologist who headed the project and the respected lead researcher from Tulane University in New Orleans who developed the test which provided these results. Their inquiry led them to vaccine experts who confirmed the validity of the methods used.

After a thorough investigation, the GAO determined that the quality of the independent research demands, demands that the Department of Defense aggressively pursue these findings.

Specifically, the report states that DOD should conduct research designed to replicate or dispute the independent research results that revealed the presence of squalene antibodies in the blood of ill Gulf War veterans. If DOD's research affirms the presence of these antibodies, additional research must be conducted, designed to assess the significance of that finding.

The Department of Defense response to these recommendations has been unconscionable. They have stated that since they did not use squalene as an adjuvant during the Gulf War, there is no reason to test for it at this time. That is ducking the issue completely. They are willing to wait possibly for a year or more until the research is published to determine whether or not it warrants further review.

Considering the suffering of so many of our brave men and women who are living daily with the painful consequences of their service to our Nation, I cannot comprehend the DOD's reluctance. Over \$100 million, \$100 million, has been spent on investigating Gulf War illnesses, with little success. Surely, we can find a few thousand dollars to replicate or dispute the research results. We owe the veterans the truth.

Recently we have seen journalistic investigations examining this issue. Additional concerns have been raised by Gary Matsumoto in *Vanity Fair* and Paul Rodriguez of *Insight Magazine*.

We must exercise our constitutional oversight role to unravel this mystery and provide a clear presentation of the facts.

I have asked the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPENCE), the chairman of the Committee on Armed Services, and the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP), the chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, to hold a joint hearing regarding the results of the GAO report. I believe it is essential to hear firsthand from the GAO investigators and obtain answers from DOD officials and others under oath to many of the questions that remain outstanding.

It is imperative that DOD cooperate. We must find the truth wherever the next step leads.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. SNYDER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. SNYDER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

REPORT FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. COBURN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to take a few minutes tonight. I know via C-SPAN that this is going to be very hard for the people at home to read but I think it shows a tremendous problem that we have in our foreign policy and how that policy is being carried out.

I want to just read it verbatim. What this is is listings taken directly from the U.S. Department of State's 1998 Human Rights Practices Report.

The Department of State is required by law to assess human rights violations ongoing in countries that we have dealings with.

There are two countries here that are listed, and we have significant involvement, ongoing today, with these two countries. If I may, under country A, this government's human rights record worsened significantly and there were