

scheduling of drugs under CSA and whether we need to change the relevant laws. But today we honor the memory of Hillory Farias and Samantha Reid by taking an act that will hopefully reduce the risk of GHB abuse being visited upon unsuspecting women.

ELECTRONIC BENEFIT TRANSFER INTEROPERABILITY AND PORTABILITY ACT OF 1999

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Agriculture Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 1733, and that the Senate then proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1733) to amend the Food Stamp Act of 1977 to provide for a national standard of interoperability and portability applicable to electronic food stamp benefit transactions.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

AMENDMENT NO. 2785

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, there is a substitute amendment at the desk submitted by Senator FITZGERALD, and I ask for its consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Maine (Ms. COLLINS), for Mr. FITZGERALD, proposes an amendment numbered 2785.

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Electronic Benefit Transfer Interoperability and Portability Act of 1999".

SEC. 2. PURPOSES.

The purposes of this Act are—

(1) to protect the integrity of the food stamp program;

(2) to ensure cost-effective portability of food stamp benefits across State borders without imposing additional administrative expenses for special equipment to address problems relating to the portability;

(3) to enhance the flow of interstate commerce involving electronic transactions involving food stamp benefits under a uniform national standard of interoperability and portability; and

(4) to eliminate the inefficiencies resulting from a patchwork of State-administered systems and regulations established to carry out the food stamp program

SEC. 3. INTEROPERABILITY AND PORTABILITY OF FOOD STAMP TRANSACTIONS.

Section 7 of the Food Stamp Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 2016) is amended by adding at the end the following:

"(k) INTEROPERABILITY AND PORTABILITY OF ELECTRONIC BENEFIT TRANSFER TRANSACTIONS.—

"(1) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

"(A) ELECTRONIC BENEFIT TRANSFER CARD.—The term 'electronic benefit transfer card' means a card that provides benefits under this Act through an electronic benefit transfer service (as defined in subsection (i)(1)(A)).

"(B) ELECTRONIC BENEFIT TRANSFER CONTRACT.—The term 'electronic benefit transfer

contract' means a contract that provides for the issuance, use, or redemption of coupons in the form of electronic benefit transfer cards.

"(C) INTEROPERABILITY.—The term 'interoperability' means a system that enables a coupon issued in the form of an electronic benefit transfer card to be redeemed in any State.

"(D) INTERSTATE TRANSACTION.—The term 'interstate transaction' means a transaction that is initiated in 1 State by the use of an electronic benefit transfer card that is issued in another State.

"(E) PORTABILITY.—The term 'portability' means a system that enables a coupon issued in the form of an electronic benefit transfer card to be used in any State by a household to purchase food at a retail food store or wholesale food concern approved under this Act.

"(F) SETTLING.—The term 'settling' means movement, and reporting such movement, of funds from an electronic benefit transfer card issuer that is located in 1 State to a retail food store, or wholesale food concern, that is located in another State, to accomplish an interstate transaction.

"(G) SMART CARD.—The term 'smart card' means an intelligent benefit card described in section 17(f).

"(H) SWITCHING.—The term 'switching' means the routing of an interstate transaction that consists of transmitting the details of a transaction electronically recorded through the use of an electronic benefit transfer card in 1 State to the issuer of the card that is in another State.

"(2) REQUIREMENT.—Not later than October 1, 2002, the Secretary shall ensure that systems that provide for the electronic issuance, use, and redemption of coupons in the form of electronic benefit transfer cards are interoperable, and food stamp benefits are portable, among all States.

"(3) COST.—The cost of achieving the interoperability and portability required under paragraph (2) shall not be imposed on any food stamp retail store, or any wholesale food concern, approved to participate in the food stamp program.

"(4) STANDARDS.—Not later than 210 days after the date of enactment of this subsection, the Secretary shall promulgate regulations that—

"(A) adopt a uniform national standard of interoperability and portability required under paragraph (2) that is based on the standard of interoperability and portability used by a majority of State agencies; and

"(B) require that any electronic benefit transfer contract that is entered into 30 days or more after the regulations are promulgated, by or on behalf of a State agency, provide for the interoperability and portability required under paragraph (2) in accordance with the national standard.

"(5) EXEMPTIONS.—

"(A) CONTRACTS.—The requirements of paragraph (2) shall not apply to the transfer of benefits under an electronic benefit transfer contract before the expiration of the term of the contract if the contract—

"(i) is entered into before the date that is 30 days after the regulations are promulgated under paragraph (4); and

"(ii) expires after October 1, 2002.

"(B) WAIVER.—At the request of a State agency, the Secretary may provide 1 waiver to temporarily exempt, for a period ending on or before the date specified under clause (iii), the State agency from complying with the requirements of paragraph (2), if the State agency—

"(i) establishes to the satisfaction of the Secretary that the State agency faces unusual technological barriers to achieving by

October 1, 2002, the interoperability and portability required under paragraph (2);

"(ii) demonstrates that the best interest of the food stamp program would be served by granting the waiver with respect to the electronic benefit transfer system used by the State agency to administer the food stamp program; and

"(iii) specifies a date by which the State agency will achieve the interoperability and portability required under paragraph (2).

"(C) SMART CARD SYSTEMS.—The Secretary shall allow a State agency that is using smart cards for the delivery of food stamp program benefits to comply with the requirements of paragraph (2) at such time after October 1, 2002, as the Secretary determines that a practicable technological method is available for interoperability with electronic benefit transfer cards.

"(6) FUNDING.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—In accordance with regulations promulgated by the Secretary, the Secretary shall pay 100 percent of the costs incurred by a State agency under this Act for switching and settling interstate transactions—

"(i) incurred after the date of enactment of this subsection and before October 1, 2002, if the State agency uses the standard of interoperability and portability adopted by a majority of State agencies; and

"(ii) incurred after September 30, 2002, if the State agency uses the uniform national standard of interoperability and portability adopted under paragraph (4)(A).

"(B) LIMITATION.—The total amount paid to State agencies for each fiscal year under subparagraph (A) shall not exceed \$500,000."

SEC. 4. STUDY OF ALTERNATIVES FOR HANDLING ELECTRONIC BENEFIT TRANSACTIONS INVOLVING FOOD STAMP BENEFITS.

Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Agriculture shall study and report to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate on alternatives for handling interstate electronic benefit transactions involving food stamp benefits provided under the Food Stamp Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 2011 et seq.), including the feasibility and desirability of a single hub for switching (as defined in section 7(k)(1) of that Act (as added by section 3)).

Mr. FITZGERALD. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the passage of the Electronic Benefit Transfer Interoperability and Portability Act of 1999. This legislation addresses the problem of food stamp beneficiaries being unable to redeem their benefits in authorized stores that may be located outside their state of residence.

As you may know, Congress passed legislation in 1996 that required the federal government to deliver food stamp benefits electronically, rather than using paper coupons. Most states have started the process of issuing plastic cards, very similar to ATM cards, to access these benefits. The federal government termed this new process, electronic benefits transfer (EBT).

You may have noticed a separate button on the payment terminal in your local supermarket with the designation "EBT" or a separate stand-alone payment terminal to handle these new transactions.

More than half of the country has already switched from the paper coupons

to this new EBT card. However, one significant issue is causing problems in the program for retailers, states, and recipients. That issue is the inability of recipients to use their state-issued cards across state lines. This is especially true in communities that are near a state border.

Under the old paper system, recipients could use the coupons in any state in the country. Under the new electronic system, that is the case. Customers go into a food store expecting to use their federal benefits to purchase food. When they cannot use their EBT cards, they become frustrated and dissatisfied with the food stamp program.

For example, under the old system, a food stamp recipient living in Palmyra, Missouri could use his food stamp coupons in his favorite grocery store in Quincy, Illinois, just over the border. Similarly, a recipient living in Illinois could visit family in Tennessee and still purchase food for his children. Food stamp beneficiaries are not unlike the average shopper. Cross-border shopping occurs for a variety of reasons. One reason is convenience; another equally important reason is the cost of groceries. The supermarket industry is very competitive. Customers paying with every type of tender except EBT have the ability to shop around for the best prices. Shouldn't recipients of our nation's federal food assistance benefits be able to stretch their dollars without regard to state borders?

Another reason for cross-border shopping is convenience. While one of my constituents may live in the metro east area of Illinois, he or she may work in St. Louis. Under the current situation, if the only grocery store between work and home is in Missouri, the recipient cannot purchase food without traveling miles out of the way.

The legislation would once again provide for the portability of food assistance benefits and allow food stamp recipients the flexibility of shopping at locations that they choose.

Interoperability works well today with ATM/Debit cards, the type of cards that EBT was modeled after. Consumers and merchants are confident that when a MAC card issued by a bank in Pittsburgh is presented, authorization and settlement of that transaction will work the same as when a Star card, issued by Bank of America in California is presented. This occurs regardless of where the merchant is located.

Unfortunately, this is currently not the case with EBT cards. If every state operated their EBT program under a standard set of operating rules, as this legislation requires, companies operating in multiple states could be more efficient, resolve any discrepancies in customer accounts more quickly, and ultimately hold down the price of groceries for all consumers.

This legislation is more about good government than it is about food

stamps. Since 1996, the transition from paper coupons to electronic benefit transfers has saved the federal government a significant amount of money. For example, while the food stamp caseload decreased 24 percent from fiscal year 1995 to 1998, food stamp production and redemption costs dropped by an impressive 39 percent. While it is estimated that the bill's implementation will cost the federal government no more than \$500,000 annually, it will save at least \$20 million per year when paper coupons are a thing of the past.

This legislation is sound public policy that enjoys strong bipartisan support. I thank my colleagues, Senators LEAHY, LUGAR, HARKIN, CRAIG, COCHRAN, CRAPO, KOHL, and KERREY for joining me as co-sponsors of this bill. This legislation is vitally important to every food stamp recipient, every state food stamp program administrator, and every grocery store in the country.

I thank the presiding officer, and I yield the floor.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the amendment be agreed to, the bill be read a third time and passed, as amended, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements relating to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment (No. 2785) was agreed to.

The bill (S. 1733), as amended, was read the third time and passed, as follows:

[The bill was not available for printing. It will appear in a future edition of the RECORD.]

MAKING TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS TO THE ENROLLMENT OF H.R. 3194

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate turn to the consideration of Senate Concurrent Resolution 77 now at the desk introduced earlier by Senators LOTT and DASCHLE, and that the resolution be considered read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the concurrent resolution by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 77) making technical corrections to the enrollment of H.R. 3194.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the concurrent resolution.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the concurrent resolution is agreed to.

The concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 77) was agreed to.

The concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 77) is as follows:

S. CON. RES. 77

Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring). That the Clerk of the House of Representatives, in the enrollment of the bill (H.R. 3194), making appropriations

for the government of the District of Columbia and other activities chargeable in whole or in part against revenues of said District for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2000, and for other purposes, shall make the following correction:

At the appropriate place of the bill insert the following:

COMMODITY CREDIT CORPORATION PRODUCER-OWNED MARKETING ASSOCIATIONS FORGIVENESS

SEC. 1. The Secretary of Agriculture shall reduce the amount of any principal due on a loan made to marketing association incorporated in the State of North Carolina for the 1999 crop of an agricultural commodity by at least 75 percent if the marketing association suffered losses of the agricultural commodity in a county with respect to which—(1) a natural disaster was declared by the Secretary for losses due to Hurricane Dennis, Floyd, or Irene; or (2) a major disaster or emergency was declared by the President for losses due to Hurricane Dennis, Floyd, or Irene under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.)

If the Secretary assigns a grade quality for the 1999 crop of an agricultural commodity marketed by an association described in this section that is below the base quality of the agricultural commodity, the Secretary shall compensate the association for losses incurred by the association as a result of the reduction in grade quality.

Up to \$81,000,000 of the resources of the Commodity Credit Corporation shall be used for the cost of this section: *Provided*, That the entire amount necessary to carry out this section shall be available only to the extent that an official budget request for the entire amount, that includes designation of the entire amount of the request as an emergency requirement as defined in the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, as amended, is transmitted by the President to the Congress: *Provided further*, That the entire amount is designated by the Congress as an emergency requirement pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A) and Section 252(e) of such Act.

SEC. 2. In administering \$50,000,000 in emergency supplemental funding for the Emergency Conservation Program, the Secretary shall give priority to the repair of structures essential to the operation of the farm.

EXEMPTIONS PURSUANT TO THE FEDERAL REPORTS ELIMINATION AND SUNSET ACT OF 1995

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Governmental Affairs Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 3111, and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the bill by title. The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3111) to exempt certain reports from automatic elimination and sunset pursuant to the Federal Reports Elimination and Sunset Act.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

AMENDMENT NO. 2786

(Purpose: To provide continued reporting of intercepted wire, oral, and electronic communications)

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, Senator LEAHY has an amendment at the desk.