

evening. Like you, I was disturbed that the Republicans gave their staff the power to scrutinize Americans' tax returns, without safeguard, and I was even more outraged that this provision ended up in a bill that no one had read, hastily brought to a vote under martial law rules. If I were present, I would vote to strip this provision out of the appropriations bill, by voting "yes" on H. Con. Res. 528.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Con. Res. 528 and to express my deep concern about this Congress undermining our democracy. The taxpayer persecution language in the appropriations omnibus was an abuse of Congressional power. This language would allow members of Congress and their staff to read the tax records of any American and disclose the information.

Unfortunately, this provision is just one more example of an abuse of power by the majority party of this Congress. The process that the Republican majority has resorted to is the reason that such outrageous provisions were approved. The Republican majority has used martial law to speed through legislation without giving members the change to read it over.

Democracy suffers when members of Congress are given only a few short hours to read thousands of pages of law and it is the American citizen who must bear the burden of our actions. Democracy suffers when the minority is denied a seat at the table and the chance to be a part of the process. It is not the Members of Congress who lose out. The American citizens they are here to represent are the ones who lose out.

The taxpayer persecution language is a frightening example of a Republican majority that is willing to oppress the minority, undermine democracy, and cast the shadows of Big Brother. Rule by the majority of the majority is not a democracy.

Mr. Speaker, I speak out in frustration of a Republican party run government that seems to have little regard for the elected representatives of half of this country, and even less regard for the American citizens they represent. When our founding fathers created the United States Congress this was not what they had in mind.

We need to bridge together the widening divisions in our country. We need to begin by bringing comity and bipartisanship back to this chamber, and in so—to the Nation. We must not allow our legislative process to fail us again.

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. YOUNG) that the House suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendment to H. Con. Res. 528.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

LIMITING TRANSFER OF CERTAIN COMMODITY CREDIT CORPORATION FUNDS

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 2856) to limit the transfer of certain Commodity Credit Corporation funds between conservation programs for technical assistance for the programs.

The Clerk read as follows:

S. 2856

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1241 of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3841) is amended by striking subsection (b) and inserting the following:

“(b) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—Effective for fiscal year 2005 and each subsequent fiscal year, Commodity Credit Corporation funds made available for each of the programs specified in paragraphs (1) through (7) of subsection (a)—

“(1) shall be available for the provision of technical assistance for the programs for which funds are made available; and

“(2) shall not be available for the provision of technical assistance for conservation programs specified in subsection (a) other than the program for which the funds were made available.”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by subsection (a) takes effect on October 1, 2004.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE).

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of S. 2856. Conservation was a significant part of the 2002 farm bill. Congress increased the conservation budget by nearly \$2 billion per year, a 75 percent increase. However, there is a current shortfall in the Conservation Technical Service Assistance budget at the Natural Resources Conservation Service. This shortfall represents the costs necessary to administer the Conservation Reserve and Wetlands Reserve programs.

So far, those costs have been taken directly out of the pockets of farmers and ranchers, and, if you permit me, the environment, when fewer conservation benefits are provided by the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the other so-called donor programs. In other words, the NRCS takes money from EQIP and farmland protection so that CRP and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and WRP can be administered.

The USDA has also been using the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, or WHIP, the Farmland Protection Program, FPP, and the Grasslands Reserve Program as donor programs for CRP and WRP.

S. 2856 will help alleviate some of the implementation problems that have oc-

curred during the last 2 years when approximately \$100 million per year was being taken from the four donor programs. When the farm bill was written, it was Congress' intent that each conservation program would pay for its own technical assistance. I have been working with the Committee on the Budget and the Committee on Appropriations committees to ensure S. 2856's passage will prevent funds from being diverted from the donor programs. I have numerous groups supporting the bill, and I will include for the RECORD these letters.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, December 3, 2004.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN: We write today to ask for your support of S. 2856 on Monday, December 6, 2004. This bill, which has been adopted in the Senate, addresses a misunderstanding that has existed between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Congress as to the source of funding for the technical assistance costs for certain Farm Bill conservation programs.

S. 2856 ensures that the original intent of Congress will be used in the implementation of these programs where each of them will be expected to pay for their own technical assistance from their own share of the total funding made available to them. As passed by the Farm Bill, these programs have a significant backlog of requests from farmers and ranchers for conservation assistance.

We wholeheartedly support S. 2856 because without it several of these conservation programs will be significantly hampered from achieving their intended purpose—helping farmers and ranchers improve and conserve soil, air and water quality and restore and improve wildlife habitat. We ask for your strong support of this measure when it comes before the House on December 6, 2004.

Sincerely,
National Soybean Association.
National Pork Producers Council.
National Cattlemen's Beef Association.
National Association of Conservation Districts.
National Association of Wheat Growers.
National Corn Growers Association.
National Cotton Council.
National Farmers Union.
National Milk Producers Federation.
National Turkey Federation.
Southeast Dairy Farmers Association.
Western United Dairymen.

DECEMBER 6, 2004.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE: We strongly urge that you enact S. 2856 to ensure that USDA stops the practice of diverting funds from the dollar-limited, working lands conservation programs to pay for technical assistance costs associated with land requirement programs.

Since enactment of the 2002 Farm Bill, USDA has diverted more than \$200 million from EQIP, the Farmland and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), the Grasslands Reserve Program, and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) to pay for technical assistance for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Unless this problem is fixed, farmers and ranchers seeking to improve water and air quality and enhance wildlife habitat stand to lose approximately \$100 million in FY05 and nearly \$300 million in FY06 and FY07.

S. 2856 protects funding for all USDA conservation programs. S. 2856 ensures that funding for CRP and WRP technical assistance flows directly from the Commodity Credit Corporation, not from working lands

conservation programs. S. 2856 passed the Senate by Unanimous Consent on October 11, 2004, and the House-passed FY05 Congressional Budget Resolution specifically provides for the passage of the same legislation by the House. It is critical that S. 2856 is passed by the 108th Congress or scarce conservation funds will once again be lost in FY05 and subsequent years.

S. 2856 restores the original intent of the 2002 Farm Bill. The Farm Bill clearly intended USDA to use mandatory funds from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) to pay for CRP and WRP technical assistance. The plain language of the statute and legislative history support this interpretation of the Farm Bill, and the General Accounting Office concurred in an October 8, 2002, opinion. Unfortunately, a handful of government lawyers misinterpreted the 2002 Farm Bill, forcing USDA to divert funds from EQIP and other working lands programs or shut down CRP and WRP.

We strongly urge you to support passage of S. 2856 to ensure that funding for technical assistance for all Farm Bill conservation programs, including CRP and WRP, comes directly from the CCC, as intended by the 2002 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

American Farmland Trust.
Chesapeake Bay Foundation.
Defenders of Wildlife.
Environmental Defense.
National Wildlife Federation.
National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture.
Natural Resources Defense Council.
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.
Union of Concerned Scientists.

As you can see from the letters, S. 2856 receives extremely broad and deep support. Groups from varied interests such as the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and Environmental Defense are all strident supporters of S. 2856. These organizations, along with nearly 25 others, representing producers and environmental interests, encourage passage of S. 2856.

I would like to thank the gentleman from Iowa (Chairman NUSSLE) and the gentleman from Texas (Chairman BONILLA) and their staff for their assistance. I would like to thank the ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), for his support of this effort. But I cannot stress enough how much I want to thank our subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from Oklahoma (Chairman LUCAS), who has worked on this issue for years to try to get a correction, and I think that this goes a long way in helping what needs to be done get done here.

I also cannot stress enough how important these programs are or how important it is that producers have access to programs to keep the soil and air clean and to improve and restore wildlife habitat.

I urge my colleagues to support S. 2856 to ensure voluntary conservation programs are allowed to work efficiently and effectively.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of S. 2856 and support its passage. I want to

thank the gentleman from Virginia (Chairman GOODLATTE) and the gentleman from Oklahoma (Chairman LUCAS) for working with the leadership to schedule consideration of this bill today. This is an issue that has needed attention for some time, and I am pleased we are finally addressing it.

The conservation title of the 2002 farm bill made a major investment of new funding in a variety of existing and new conservation programs. I was proud to have played a role in that effort to help our farmers and ranchers conserve and enhance the natural resources under their control.

Many of us, as well as producers out in the field, were frustrated by the actions taken by USDA to try and address how to provide technical assistance for the Conservation Reserve and Wetland Reserve programs. Borrowing from some programs to pay for the technical assistance to carry out WRP and CRP was not a good solution. It was a solution forced upon them by OMB after dueling interpretations by this administration based on language included in the 2002 farm bill. We never intended such draconian measures, which required them to rob Peter to pay Paul. This bill corrects and guides the administration on the implementation of these vital conservation programs after several attempts made by Congress to fix this problem.

There is currently a \$3.4 billion backlog of applications in the various conservation programs that have not been funded, despite the infusion of new money from the 2002 farm bill. Passage of this legislation will be a small but important step in helping to address that backlog. It will also provide for some certainty for those landowners who are signing up for the CRP and WRP programs and allow us to fulfill our commitments made in the 2002 farm bill to conservation.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS) the chairman of the Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research of the Committee on Agriculture, who has been a real leader in fighting for fairness in these conservation programs.

Mr. LUCAS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of S. 2865. I, along with my ranking member on the Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research, have worked tirelessly as an advocate of voluntary agricultural programs since becoming chairman of the subcommittee.

The 2002 farm bill provided that each conservation program was supposed to pay for its own technical assistance costs out of the funds provided for it. During the implementation of the farm bill, the USDA lawyers, in my opinion, misinterpreted how Congress intended

to pay for technical assistance. Under their interpretation, the CRP and WRP programs would not have had enough money to do sign-ups.

The 2003 omnibus appropriation bill added a short-term, stopgap measure that would allow funds from EQIP, WHIP, Farmland Protection and GRP programs to be donated to fund CRP and WRP sign-ups. Approximately \$100 million per year has been diverted from these programs to fund CRP and WRP.

This was not a long-term, sustainable solution, so we began working with the budget committees to find a solution. The CRP program will have nearly 20 million of its 39.2 million acres eligible for new contracts in the next 5 years. For the next 4 years, EQIP, WHIP, Farmland Protection and GRP could lose nearly \$406 million to CRP and WRP implementation sign-ups.

□ 1500

Mr. Speaker, S. 2856 was provided for in the House budget and is a fair solution for the entire conservation community. This bill will ensure that producers can voluntarily keep America's air and water clean and provide better habitat for its wildlife.

I would certainly be remiss if I did not thank the leadership staff for working with us and the chairman and the ranking member for their full efforts.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to add to the RECORD letters from 44 different groups supporting this measure, from farm producer groups to environmental groups to sportsman groups.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, December 6, 2004.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN: We write today to ask for your support of S. 2856, which may be on the House Calendar today, Monday, December 6, 2004. This bill, which has been adopted in the Senate, addresses a misunderstanding that has existed between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Congress as to the source of funding for the technical assistance costs for certain Farm Bill conservation programs.

S. 2856 ensures that the original intent of Congress will be used in the implementation of these programs where each of them will be expected to pay for their own technical assistance from their own share of the total funding made available to them. As passed by the Farm Bill, these programs have a significant backlog of request from farmers and ranchers for conservation assistance.

We wholeheartedly support S. 2856 because without it several of these conservation programs will be significantly hampered from achieving their intended purpose—helping farmers and ranchers improve and conserve soil, air and water quality and restore and improve wildlife habitat. We ask for your strong support of this measure when it comes before the House on December 6, 2004.

Sincerely,
American Farm Bureau Federation.
American Soybean Association.
National Pork Producers Council.
National Cattlemen's Beef Association.
National Association of Conservation Districts.
National Association of Wheat Growers.
National Chicken Council.
National Corn Growers Association.
National Cotton Council.

National Farmers Union.
National Milk Producers Federation.
National Turkey Federation.
Southeast Dairy Farmers Association.
United Chicken Council.
United Egg Producers.
USA Rice Federation.
U.S. Rice Producers Association.
Western United Dairymen.

DECEMBER 6, 2004.

Hon. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker, Office of the Speaker, Capitol Building, Washington, DC.

Hon. TOM DELAY,
Majority Leader, Capitol Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR SPEAKER HASTERT AND MAJORITY LEADER DELAY: As the House reconvenes this week with the appropriations for FY 2005, the conservation and sportsmen's organizations listed above, which represent a diverse spectrum of interests with a combined membership of millions, stand together urging you and your Congressional colleagues to support S. 2856. Your support of this bill would mean the technical assistance funding needs of all the conservation programs would be met, including the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), without reducing the acres authorized for those very popular programs and without diverting funds from other Farm Bill conservation programs.

The enactment of the 2002 Farm Bill resulted in conflicting interpretations of the Conservation Title's funding for technical assistance, and resulted in leaving all the conservation programs in danger. A decision was made to use funds of four conservation programs as donors for delivery of WRP and CRP in FY 2003 and FY 2004. This was the combined result of the limitation on the use of Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funds under the "Section 11 Cap" and the decision by Congress in the FY 2003 omnibus appropriations bill to prohibit the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) from using discretionary Conservation Operations account funds to pay for Farm Bill program technical assistance.

Unfortunately, this decision resulted in a net loss of funding to all conservation programs. We believe any proposal to fund CRP and WRP technical assistance through a reduction in the number of program acres fails to recognize the tremendous public benefits to soil, water quality and wildlife habitat provided by the acres enrolled in these two programs as well as the tremendous producer demand for these programs. The 2002 Farm Bill clearly intended USDA to use mandatory funds from the CCC to pay for technical assistance for all programs. The plain language of the statute and legislative history support this interpretation of the Farm Bill funding provision, as well as the legal opinion issued by the General Accounting Office in October 2002.

If Congress fails to solve this problem, farmers and the environment stand to lose. Despite the increase in conservation funding provided by the 2002 Farm Bill, most farmers and ranchers offering to restore wetlands or grasslands, retire marginal farmland, or to simply change their farming practice to improve water and air quality are still rejected when they seek financial and technical assistance through voluntary USDA conservation programs.

There is strong, bi-partisan, nationwide support for CRP and WRP, evidenced by last year's defeat of a Senate amendment that would have effectively shut down technical assistance funding the CRP. There was widespread opposition to the amendment because it did not provide a holistic solution to the technical assistance problem, and lacked a

definitive source of funds. In a strong show of support, a majority of the Senate agreed that the amendment equated to abandoning one of the most successful conservation programs in the United States.

We respectfully request you to support efforts during your deliberations to include the FY 2005 Agriculture Appropriations bill a permanent fix for this problem that ensures that technical assistance for all conservation programs is provided directly from the CCC. Additionally, we encourage you to work to protect acres authorized for CRP and WRP in the 2002 Farm Bill. If you or your staff has questions about this issue, please call Barton James (Ducks Unlimited) at 202-347-1530.

Thank you for considering our view of the importance of Farm Bill conservation programs and the need to secure the necessary technical assistance funding without severe impacts to the resource benefits achieved on the ground.

Archery Trade Association.
Bowhunting Preservation Alliance.
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation.
Ducks Unlimited.
International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.
International Hunter Education Association.
Izaak Walton League of America.
Orion—The Hunter's Institute.
Pheasants Forever.
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.
Safari Club International.
Texas Wildlife Association.
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.
Whitetails Unlimited, Inc.
Wildlife Forever.
Wildlife Management Institute.
The Wildlife Society.

DECEMBER 6, 2004.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE: We strongly urge that you enact S. 2856 to ensure that USDA stops the practice of diverting funds from the dollar-limited, working lands conservation programs to pay for technical assistance costs associated with land retirement programs.

Since enactment of the 2002 Farm Bill, USDA has diverted more than \$200 million from EQIP, the Farmland and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), the Grasslands Reserve Program, and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) to pay for technical assistance for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Unless this problem is fixed, farmers and ranchers seeking to improve water and air quality and enhance wildlife habitat stand to lose approximately \$100 million in FY05 and nearly \$300 million in FY06 and FY07.

S. 2856 protects funding for all USDA conservation programs. S. 2856 ensures that funding for CRP and WRP technical assistance flows directly from the Commodity Credit Corporation, not from working lands conservation programs. S. 2856 passed the Senate by Unanimous Consent on October 11, 2004, and the House-passed FY05 Congressional Budget Resolution specifically provides for the passage of the same legislation by the House. It is critical that S. 2856 is passed by the 108th Congress or scarce conservation funds will once again be lost in FY05 and subsequent years.

S. 2856 restores the original intent of the 2002 Farm Bill. The Farm Bill clearly intended USDA to sue mandatory funds from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) to pay for CRP and WRP technical assistance. The plain language of the statute and legislative history support this interpretation of the Farm Bill, and the General Accounting

Office concurred in an October 8, 2002, opinion. Unfortunately, a handful of government lawyers misinterpreted the 2002 Farm Bill, forcing USDA to divert funds from EQIP and other working lands programs or shut down CRP and WRP.

We strongly urge you to support passage of S. 2856 to ensure that funding for technical assistance for all Farm Bill conservation programs, including CRP and WRP, comes directly from the CCC, as intended by the 2002 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,
American Farmland Trust.
Chesapeake Bay Foundation.
Defenders of Wildlife.
Environmental Defense.
National Wildlife Federation.
National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture.

Natural Resources Defense Council.
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.
Union of Concerned Scientists.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. HOLDEN), the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Conservation.

Mr. HOLDEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

I congratulate and thank the gentleman from Virginia (Chairman GOODLATTE) and our subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS), for his hard work on this legislation. I would like to take a moment to congratulate and thank the ranking member of the committee, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), on an outstanding congressional career. As we all know, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) will be leaving us and not serving in the next Congress. But I just want to say to the gentleman that not only is the Committee on Agriculture going to miss his leadership; the entire agriculture community across the country is going to miss his guidance and his input. On a personal note I am truly going to miss his leadership, and I thank him for all of the help that he has given to me personally over the years.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of S. 2856, which will fix a problem with technical assistance funding for agriculture conservation programs. Our intent was to allow for farm bill programs to pay for themselves. However, due to different interpretations of the law and congressional rewriting, we are now in a situation in which major programs are paying for others.

There is a huge problem with donor programs such as the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Grassland Reserve Program, and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, providing technical assistance funding for the Conservation Reserve Program and Wetlands Reserve Program.

These donations continue to inhibit the implementation of these effective programs in the way that Congress intended. We must make sure that implementation reflects intent. It was never our plan to have key conservation programs act as donors for others. We

need to correct this problem, and that is exactly what S. 2856 will do.

In fiscal year 2003, there were significant contributions being made by EQIP, Farmland Protection, WHIP, and the GRP to the Conservation Reserve Program and Wetlands Reserve Program. EQIP donated \$57.6 million, Farmland Protection donated \$18 million, WHIP gave \$5.6 million, and Grasslands Reserve gave \$9.5 million.

In my home State of Pennsylvania, these conservation programs are extremely important.

In fiscal year 2003, Pennsylvania received \$8.4 million to fund 293 contracts throughout the EQIP program. There were actually 1,238 unfunded contracts totaling \$35.4 million. In 2004, Pennsylvania received \$11.9 million, a significant increase, but not enough to fund all of the contracts that are on hold.

The problem is the same for Farmland Protection, which is critical to Pennsylvania. In 2003, Pennsylvania received \$4.9 million to protect 6,266 acres. In 2004, the State received less, approximately \$4 million for the program.

Allowing vital programs such as EQIP and Farm and Ranchland Protection to be donors for other conservation programs only makes the funding backlog worse.

Therefore, I urge my colleagues to support S. 2856 and implement technical assistance funding for agriculture conservation programs the way in which Congress intended.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. HOLDEN) for his contribution, as well, to this effort, and also more especially thank him for the kind words he has extended to our colleague, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), who has served this Congress with distinction for 26 years, the last 8 of which as the ranking member of the Committee on Agriculture. He is known across the country as somebody who has helped American agriculture.

He worked with my predecessor, our colleague Congressman Combest, his neighbor, former neighbor in Texas, to write the last farm bill which has been a noteworthy success in the first almost 4 years now of its implementation. He is somebody that I will miss as my partner in working with American agriculture, and I thank him and commend him for more than a quarter century of service to the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I thank my colleague, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. HOLDEN), and I thank my chairman for the kind words. I do believe this is the last time that I will occupy this mike. I thought it was so a few weeks ago, but it was not; we had one more shot. But I do very much

appreciate the kind words that have been said, and we will miss this place. Mr. Speaker, we will miss you. You do an excellent job of conducting House business. Every time you handle the gavel, you do it in a way that is very fair and very professionally done.

Mr. Chairman, it has been a pleasure serving with you, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE). I would be less than honest to not say that I would much rather have had the titles reversed, but that was not to be. And were it not to be, then I appreciate the fact that the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) has maintained the same bipartisan, nonpartisan activities on his part that has made the House Committee on Agriculture one of the few committees of this body that still works in the way in which I think our forefathers intended that it work: full consultation.

Listening to some of the previous comments about staff and what have you, I can honestly say that we have never had that problem on the House Committee on Agriculture, to the best of my knowledge. Our staffs, both committee and subcommittee, have always worked together in a way in which we put forward the quality work that I believe this committee has put forward to this House in the 26 years that I have had the privilege of serving here.

I want to thank my staff, those who are with me on the floor, and those who are not, who have worked and served with me, some of them my entire 26 years. We cannot do without staff. Many times they get the blame for things that go wrong, and we get the credit for things that go right. But day in and day out, this body cannot operate without the professional staff, and I want to thank my staff and thank the majority staff. Because I truly, truly mean it when I say what I already said a moment ago about the manner in which the House Committee on Agriculture has worked.

Mr. KIND. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of S. 2856. This important legislation clarifies Congress's intent in the last Farm bill—that administrative costs needed to implement voluntary conservation programs should flow from the Commodity Credit Corporation and not from the working lands programs themselves. It is crucial that we pass this bill today otherwise scarce conservation funds will once again be lost.

Mr. Speaker, USDA has diverted more than \$200 million from four working lands conservation programs. Specifically, USDA diverted precious funds from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Farmland and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), the Grasslands Reserve Program, and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) to pay for administrative costs.

The 2002 Farm Bill clearly intended USDA to use mandatory funds from the Commodity Credit Corporation to pay for the administrative costs of two land retirement programs. The plain language of the statute and legislative history, including a critical colloquy, support this interpretation of the Farm Bill, and GAO concurred in a recent memo. But, gov-

ernment lawyers misinterpreted the 2002 Farm Bill and forced USDA to divert working lands funds.

Despite the funds provided by the 2002 Farm Bill, most farmers and ranchers offering to restore wetlands and grasslands or offering to change the way they farm to improve air and water quality are still rejected when they seek USDA conservation assistance. For example, farmers and ranchers face \$3 billion backlog when they seek financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to improve water quality or wildlife habitat. These long lines only grow longer when funds are diverted.

By providing new funds for working lands programs like EQIP and WHIP in the 2002 Farm Bill, Congress provided needed resources to help farmers manage working lands to produce food and fiber and simultaneously enhance water quality and wildlife habitat. For example, EQIP helps share the cost of a broad range of land management practices that help the environment, including more efficient use of fertilizers and pesticides, and innovative technologies to store and reuse animal waste.

Lastly, because 70 percent of the American landscape is private land, farming dramatically affects the health of America's rivers, lakes and bays and the fate of America's rare species. Most rare species depend upon private lands for the survival, and many will become extinct without help from private landowners. When farmers and ranchers take steps to help improve air and water quality or assist rare species, they can face new costs, new risks, or loss of income. Conservation programs help share these costs, underwrite these risks, or offset losses of income.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important bill to America's hardworking farmers and ranchers and I urge my colleague's support.

Mr. STENHOLM. I have no further requests for time and, Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support S. 2856, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 2856.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the bill just considered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Virginia?

There was no objection.