

or she must, by law, demonstrate an eighth grade level of understanding of the English language.

It was 150 years ago we founded common schools. We call them public schools today. Albert Shanker, the former head of the American Federation of Teachers, said the reason for the common school was so we could teach mostly immigrant children to read and write in English, to do math, and what it means to become an American, with the hope they would go home and teach their parents.

We have always known it is important as Americans to have a common language because that is how we can communicate with one another. Immigrants to our country understand this. That is why they come here. They want to be part of our country that shares the values of liberty and equal opportunity. They want to contribute to our history of striving toward those values. They want to learn our common language, and usually do, as evidenced by long waiting lists for a number of English as a second language adult education courses across our country. That is why this Senate, just a few weeks ago, passed an amendment to the immigration bill by a vote of 91 to 1 to help legal immigrants learn English and to allow those who become fluent in English to become American citizens 1 year faster.

We value our common language. It isn't an argument that is hard to understand. In fact, when I first announced this resolution, the first supportive e-mail I received in my office came from Mr. Ramon L. Cisneros, the publisher of *La Campana*, a Spanish-language newspaper in Nashville with 18,000 subscribers.

He wrote:

... Thank you for this resolution. We are Hispanic Americans and sometimes we write in Spanish for the benefit of those newcomers who are in the process of learning English. However, our common language as Americans is and will always be English. And our national symbols should always be said and sung in English.

I didn't ask Mr. Cisneros to write to me, but I am glad he did. He is proud of his Hispanic heritage. He performs an important service for Hispanics in the Nashville area, which is a growing part of our State, but he is also a proud, patriotic American. Our country is enriched by citizens like Mr. Cisneros.

I am puzzled by the reaction from some of my colleagues in the Democratic Party who seem to want to endorse the idea that we should sing the national anthem in some other language and recite the Pledge of Allegiance in some other language. We salute the American flag. We pledge allegiance to the United States, and we speak in our common language. That is how we unite ourselves.

Also, we might do a little bit better if we taught more U.S. history and civics in our public schools, which is another subject I have been working on with strong support on the Democratic

side from Senator KENNEDY, from Senator REID, and especially from Senator BYRD.

I might note that in the House of Representatives, some Democrats have already chosen to cosponsor this same identical resolution. It has been offered by Congressman RYUN of Kansas. I have a hard time understanding why Democrats in the Senate are not supportive. Maybe I just made a mistake. Maybe I misunderstood what has happened. So let me try once again.

I ask unanimous consent that S. Res. 458 be discharged from the Judiciary Committee; further, that the Senate proceed to its consideration. I further ask that the resolution and preamble be agreed to and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, on behalf of other Democratic Members, I will object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I think that makes my point. Apparently, I did not misunderstand. Apparently, the Democratic Party in the Senate does not agree that we should say the Pledge of Allegiance, sing the national anthem, and take the oath of citizenship in our common language, English. That is a grave misunderstanding of our country's greatest accomplishment. Our diversity is a magnificent achievement, but our greater achievement is that we have taken all of this diversity and formed it into one country so that we are the United States of America. It is a central part of becoming American.

I am extremely disappointed by this objection.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

ENGLISH IN AMERICA

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, let me say that Democrats and Republicans are perhaps not all of one mind on the question the Senator just raised.

I personally believe it is absolutely essential to the strength of America that we encourage and insist that people who come to this country speak in English. A common language is absolutely essential to the unity of a nation. I look to our neighbors to the north and see the incredible traumas they have been through because they are speaking in two different languages.

My own strong belief is we ought to say the pledge in English, we ought to sing the national anthem in English. That doesn't prevent someone else from singing it in another language. That does not offend me. But I do think that it is absolutely essential for the strength and the unity of our Nation that those who come here, those who become citizens, are able to speak English.

I come from a proud tradition of immigrants. We are sort of the North Dakota melting pot. I am part Danish, I am part Swedish, I am part Norwegian,

I am part German, I am part Scots-Irish, I am part French. So many of the people of my State came here from Scandinavian and German countries. They are intensely proud of their traditions. Many of them continue to speak the languages they came to this country with, but almost without exception they made a priority of learning English, speaking in English. I believe that is essential to our common heritage, that we have a common language.

I personally certainly believe that in any official setting, we ought to sing the anthem in English, we ought to say the pledge in English. If someone wants to, at some other setting, sing in some other language, that does not offend me, but in any official setting and in terms of what we ask and insist people do who are going to be part of our country, it is absolutely imperative they learn English. That is not just for the good of the country, although it is certainly that, it is also for their own good.

My wife's family came here from Italy. My wife told me many times about growing up in that family. Her grandfather for a time came and lived with them. There was an insistence in their family on speaking English even though the grandfather who lived with them spoke no English.

I find many who come from an immigrant background—as did I, as did my wife and her family—in our families, there was an understanding that the first order of business was to learn English, to speak English if we were going to be part of this country of which we are so proud.

I hope very much this is not presented as a partisan matter. I don't think it is. As one person on this side of the aisle, I believe it is imperative that we take the pledge in English, that we sing the anthem in English, that we insist that people who come to be part of this country learn English. I believe it is absolutely essential that English clearly be the official language of our Nation. That is absolutely imperative for us as a country.

I also believe it is absolutely in the interest of the people who come here. That is certainly the lesson learned in my family, of people coming from all over the globe. My relatives who came from Denmark, my relatives who came from Sweden, my relatives who came from Norway, and my relatives who came from Germany were so proud to be part of this country. And they recognized that it was in their interest and it was their responsibility as a first order of business to learn English.

SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS AND AGRICULTURE DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I rise to talk about the legislation we have just passed and to say to my colleagues there are provisions in the legislation for agriculture disaster that have been ridiculed in some circles. I would say

APRIL 25, 2006.

that those who have ridiculed the notion of disaster assistance for our Nation's farmers are way off base, and they really do not know what they are talking about.

I was extremely disappointed in the Secretary of Agriculture, who has suggested the only problem that farmers have is in the gulf of this country. Look, we recognize that no part of the country was harder hit by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita than the gulf region. And these legislative proposals that are in this bill will first and foremost help them because these are national provisions, these are not provisions just for one section of our country.

But to suggest that nobody else in the country has had serious problems, that reflects an ignorance that ill becomes the Secretary of Agriculture, ill becomes a man who is supposed to be the spokesman for this Nation's farmers and ranchers.

Yes, Hurricanes Rita and Katrina devastated the gulf, and they deserve first-priority consideration. But they were not the only ones hurt. Here are the headlines out of North Dakota: "Rain Halts Harvest;" "North Dakota Receives Major Disaster Declaration;" "Heavy Rain Leads To Crop Diseases;" "Beef Crop Could Be The Smallest In 10 Years;" "Crops, Hay Lost To Flooding;" "Rain Takes Its Toll On North Dakota Crops;" "Area Farmers Battle Flooding, Disease."

Those were the headlines all across my State last year.

Shown on this chart are the number of counties in my State—they are the counties in yellow—that were given disaster designations by the President—by the President—last year. They are the counties in yellow. I say to the Presiding Officer, you will notice every single county was designated a disaster. Why? Because we had rainfall 250 percent of normal. I do not know what is happening. Some say it is global climate change. Some say it is a weather cycle. I do not know. But I do know the result.

The result is this, as shown in this picture: The result is farms all across North Dakota that looked like they were in the middle of lakes last year. This is what eastern North Dakota looked like last year, when we had a million acres of land that was even prevented from being planted—a million acres.

The Secretary of Agriculture said there is no problem outside the gulf. Where has he been? Who is he listening to? Does he not do even the least amount of homework before he makes these statements? We need a new Secretary of Agriculture, if that is what he reports to the President.

These are the acres prevented from being planted in North Dakota last year—over a million acres that could not even be planted—and this Secretary of Agriculture says there is no problem outside the Gulf States?

Mr. Secretary, you ought to get with it. You ought to inform yourself before making such ridiculous statements.

As shown in this picture, this is North Dakota last year. These are tractors stuck in the mud. They could not plant. And in hundreds of thousands of additional acres where they were able to plant, they got dramatically reduced production. In those places they got production, when they went to the elevator, they got dramatically discounted prices. Why? Because of a disaster of enormous consequence—no, not as severe as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, where there was loss of life, which we mourn along with those who lost loved ones. We absolutely respect that they had, by far, the biggest catastrophe. And this legislation will primarily help them.

I am the author of this legislation. I had 27 cosponsors, on a bipartisan basis, in the Senate. When it was offered in the Appropriations Committee, it passed on a unanimous vote. When there was an attempt to take out this assistance on the floor of the Senate, 72 Senators said: No, we are not going to take out disaster assistance for our Nation's farmers and ranchers. That was the right decision. And, yes, this should be national in scope because everyone who is an American who suffered a natural disaster deserves some assistance.

Not only did farmers and ranchers suffer egregiously in different parts of the country from different types of natural disasters, but they were also hit with a second blow, and that was a dramatic runup in agricultural energy inputs. Every part of agriculture is dependent on inputs that are based on petroleum—whether it is fuel, with the cost up \$3 billion; fertilizer, with the cost up \$1.4 billion; marketing, storage, and transportation, with the cost up \$400 million; electricity, with the cost up \$200 million—with total energy-related costs up \$5 billion in one year in agriculture.

That had a devastating effect in my State. I just had a series of farm meetings in which farmers brought to me their operating statements—the difference between last year and this year—and income was cut in half—cut in half—in 1 year because of natural disasters, because of discounted prices, because of a failure to even be able to plant, and, on top of that, because of dramatically escalating energy prices.

And we have a Secretary of Agriculture who says there is no problem outside the Gulf States? Excuse me, Mr. Secretary, where have you been? Shame on you for providing that kind of false statement to the American people.

Here, shown on this chart, are the agricultural groups that endorsed the legislation, the disaster assistance that we passed—22 groups—the broad spectrum of American agriculture saying: Yes, disaster assistance is essential.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have this material printed in the RECORD listing the 22 groups.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Hon. SAXBY CHAMBLISS,
Chairman, Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

Hon. THAD COCHRAN,
Chairman, Appropriations Committee, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

Hon. TOM HARKIN,
Ranking Member, Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

Hon. ROBERT C. BYRD,
Ranking Member, Appropriations Committee, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN CHAMBLISS AND CHAIRMAN COCHRAN, SENATOR HARKIN AND SENATOR BYRD: On behalf of the below signed organizations, we are writing to urge you to oppose any efforts to delete the agricultural disaster assistance provisions from the FY06 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill when it is considered by the full Senate.

Virtually every state in the nation has been impacted by significant weather related and disaster losses. About 80 percent of U.S. counties were declared disaster or contiguous disaster counties last year due to devastating hurricanes, fires, floods, excessive moisture and severe drought. Besides heavy crop and livestock losses and increased production costs associated with rapidly escalating input costs, many producers also face contaminated fields and infrastructure losses that pose serious, long-term challenges to economic recovery.

We appreciate recent supplemental assistance offered to help some of the victims of the 2005 hurricane season. Unfortunately, this assistance is not available to all farmers and ranchers who suffered devastating losses due to hurricanes. Furthermore, none of the supplemental assistance is available to producers who suffered significant economic losses to crop and livestock operations as a result of fires, flooding, drought, excessive moisture and the record-high energy costs brought on by natural disasters.

Because of the urgent need for disaster assistance and the widespread losses which span the country, we believe the provisions in the supplemental appropriations measure are crafted in a manner that offers producers the combination of supplemental direct assistance and production loss assistance that is both timely and tailored to meet all disaster-related losses. Many producers need assistance within weeks to repay loans and secure new financing in time for spring planting, so prompt action on this measure is vitally important given that traditional production loss assistance can take up to six months.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,
Agricultural Retailers Association.
Alabama Peanut Producers Association.
American Beekeeping Federation.
American Farm Bureau Federation.
American Sheep Industry Association.
American Soybean Association.
American Sugar Alliance.
Farm Credit Council.
Florida Peanut Producers Association.
Georgia Peanut Commission.
Independent Community Bankers of America.

National Association of Wheat Growers.
National Barley Growers Association.
National Corn Growers Association.
National Cotton Council.
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives.
National Farmers Union.
National Sorghum Producers.
National Sunflower Association.
Southern Peanut Farmers Federation.
USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council.
USA Rice Federation.

US Canola Association.
US Rice Producers Association.
Western Peanut Growers.

Mr. CONRAD. Maybe the Secretary of Agriculture might want to inform himself of what has been said.

Finally, I have a letter from the State agriculture commissioners telling us, unanimously, disaster assistance was necessary and needed.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the letter be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
STATE DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE,
Washington, DC, April 20, 2006.

MEMBERS OF THE U.S. SENATE.

DEAR SENATOR: I am writing on behalf of the state commissioners, secretaries and directors of agriculture to express our strong support for emergency disaster assistance for farmers and ranchers as agreed to by the Senate Appropriations Committee in H.R. 4939, the FY 2006 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror and Hurricane Recovery (report 109-230). Assistance is necessary to help farmers, ranchers and their communities recoup from financial losses due to hurricanes, drought, fires, tornadoes, floods, and other natural disasters.

Nearly all states have been affected by natural disasters and in turn many farms and ranches across this country have suffered losses and damages. About 80 percent of U.S. counties were declared disaster or contiguous disaster counties in the last year. While there are risk management programs, such as crop insurance, disaster loans, and emergency grazing; the relief needed greatly exceeds the levels these programs can provide. Supplemental assistance is being offered to farmers and ranchers harmed by the 2005 hurricane season, however, not all producers will be able to attain the necessary levels of assistance to return to viable production levels.

In addition, the weather-related damages and losses in agriculture have significantly affected specialty crop producers and nursery businesses. States appreciate the provision that also provides grants to states that can be used to provide economic assistance to agricultural producers, and gives priority to the support of specialty crops and livestock. This section demonstrates how the federal government and states can partner with one another in directing assistance to those who need it most.

We understand that the Senate will consider this legislation when they return from the Easter Recess NASDA strongly urges your prompt action and support of this emergency assistance. We look forward to working with you and your staff on this issue so important to agriculture.

Sincerely,

J. CARLTON COURTER, III,
Commissioner, NASDA President.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I hope the Secretary of Agriculture gets the message—gets the message—disaster assistance is needed in this country.

I thank the Chair.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. ENSIGN. Mr. President, I would like to speak in morning business and ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 10 minutes.

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

MEDICAL CARE ACCESS PROTECTION ACT

Mr. ENSIGN. Mr. President, yesterday, I introduced the Medical Care Access Protection Act to address our Nation's medical liability crisis.

High medical liability insurance premiums are threatening the stability of our Nation's health care delivery system. These rates are forcing many doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers to move out of high-liability States, limit the scope of their practices, and even close their doors permanently.

The crisis is affecting more and more patients and is threatening access to reliable quality health care services in many States across our country.

Because of unaffordable medical liability insurance premiums, it is now common for obstetricians to no longer deliver babies, and for other specialists to no longer provide emergency calls or provide certain high-risk procedures.

Ask yourself this question: What if you were in need of an emergency procedure? What if you were the woman who had a high-risk pregnancy and could not find a specialist to provide you with the care you needed? The medical liability crisis is threatening access to reliable quality health care services this is happening to patients all over America.

Additionally, some emergency departments have been forced to temporarily shut down in recent years. In my home State of Nevada, our level I trauma center closed for 10 days in 2002. This closure left every patient within a 10,000 square mile area unserved by a level I trauma center.

Jim Lawson, unfortunately, was one of those in need of the trauma unit at that time. Jim lived in Las Vegas, and was just one month shy of his 60th birthday. He had recently returned from visiting his daughter in California. When he returned, he was injured in a severe car accident.

Jim should have been taken to University Medical Center's level I trauma center, but it was closed. Instead, Jim was taken to another emergency room, where he was to be stabilized and then transferred to Salt Lake City's trauma center. Tragically, Jim never made it that far. He died that day due to cardiac arrest caused by blunt force from physical trauma.

Why was Nevada's only level I trauma center closed? A simple fact: Medical liability premiums could not be afforded by the doctors, and there were not enough doctors to provide care. The State had to actually step in and take over the liability to reopen the trauma center.

More than 35 percent of neurosurgeons have altered their emergency or trauma call coverage because of the medical liability crisis. This means that patients with head injuries or in need of neurosurgical services must be transferred to other facilities, delaying much needed care.

An example of this problem was brought to my attention by Dr. Alamo

of Henderson, Nevada. Dr. Alamo was presented with a teenager suffering from myasthenia gravis. She was in a crisis and in need of immediate medical treatment. Because of the medical liability situation, there was no emergency neurologist on call to assist this young woman. Dr. Alamo called several in the area, and none of them wanted to take her case because of the medical liability situation. So Dr. Alamo had the young woman transported to California by helicopter to receive the medical care she needed.

These kinds of situations should not happen and should not be forced to happen because of the medical liability crisis we have in America today. Stories such as these are becoming all too common across our country.

I recently heard of seven patients who died in Chester County, Pennsylvania, because they did not have access to neurosurgical care. These patients were transported to neighboring counties instead of being treated locally where there was no available neurosurgeon. Some of these patients died during transport, and others died while on the operating table. This is unacceptable.

Women's health care is also in serious jeopardy. In Pennsylvania, the legal climate caused nine maternity wards to close over the past several years. And hundreds of OB/GYNs have left the State, retired, or limited their services. This story is being repeated all over America.

The bottom line is that patients cannot get the health care they need when they need it most. By definition, I believe this is a medical crisis. This crisis is affecting more and more patients, and it is threatening access to care.

To address the growing medical liability crisis in my State of Nevada, legislation was enacted that includes a cap on noneconomic damages and a cap on total damages for trauma care.

In order to control health care costs and make health care more readily available, we must extend similar protections to other States.

Our entire Nation needs serious medical liability reform now.

Without Federal legislation, the exodus of these providers from the practice of medicine will continue, and patients will find it increasingly difficult to obtain needed care. This is not a Republican or Democratic issue; this is a patient issue. Simply put, patients cannot find access to care when they need it most in many areas.

I introduced the Medical Care Access Protection Act to address the national crisis our doctors, hospitals, and those needing health care face today. My legislation is a comprehensive medical liability reform measure. The bill sets reasonable limits on noneconomic damages, while also providing for unlimited economic damages.

The Medical Care Access Protection Act is a responsible reform measure that includes joint liability and collateral source improvements, and limits