

At home games during this season, the Celtics, their fans and the Massachusetts State Lottery saluted the efforts of each honoree in special presentations on the basketball court. Over 300 individuals have now received the "Heroes Among Us" award, and it has become one of the most widely recognized honors in New England. I commend each of the honorees for the 2005–2006 season. They are truly heroes among us, and I ask unanimous consent that their names and communities may be printed in the RECORD.

Bill Driscoll, Jr., Milton, MA
 Captain Bob DeFlaminis, Franklin, MA
 Sergeant Jim Flaherty, Quincy, MA
 Michael Rodrigues, Hopedale, MA
 Nick Prefontaine, Shrewsbury, MA
 Chiara Arcidy, Bedford, NH
 Dr. Sam Nosike, Watertown, MA
 Brendan and Kelley McDonough, North Chelmsford, MA
 Principal Bill Henderson and Patrick O'Hearn Elementary School, Dorchester, MA
 Carrie Larson, Bedford, MA
 Brian Russell, Merrimack, NH
 Dr. Peter Raffalli, North Andover, MA
 Bob Manger, Scituate, MA
 Jay Blake, Marston Mills, MA
 Jane Smith, Shrewsbury, MA
 Adam Roberge, East Kingston, NH
 Stuart Molk, Danvers, MA
 Ron Bell, Milton, MA
 Marie Poulin, Quincy, MA
 David Russell, Ipswich, MA
 Ryan Curtis, Lynn, MA
 Alex Ingoglia, Malden, MA
 Matthew Scibelli, Malden, MA
 Brian Short, Medford, MA
 Mirelle Manzone, Dover, MA
 David and Stephanie Dodson, Weston, MA
 Anthony Fiorino, East Boston, MA
 Josh Algarin, Holbrook, MA
 Georgiana Melendez, Peabody, MA
 Reverend William Dickerson, Dorchester, MA
 Theresa Reilly, Roslindale, MA
 Dean Levy, Marshfield, MA
 Sean McDonough, North Quincy, MA
 Sarah Fader, Ipswich, MA
 Suzanne Wintle, Weston, MA
 Tiesha Hughes, Boston, MA
 Stan Kosloski, Cromwell, CT
 Ron Goodman, Quincy, MA
 Theresa Lynn, Jamaica Plain, MA
 Denise Carriere, Andover, MA
 Mark Mitchell, West Springfield, MA
 Donna Tardif, Freeport, ME
 Lieutenant Jim Meeks, Chestnut Hill, MA
 Donna Fournier Cuomo, North Andover, MA
 Members of the Original Tuskegee Airmen:
 Luther McIlwain, Methuen, MA, James Sheppard, Portland, ME

AGRICULTURE DISASTERS IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, extreme weather conditions pounded much of South Dakota in 2005, leaving nearly 60 out of the State's 66 counties eligible for Federal disaster aid. Many family farmers and ranchers have had little reprieve from the previous year of harsh weather conditions, as blizzards and drought have already hampered the 2006 production year. On top of natural disasters, low commodity prices and skyrocketing energy costs are forcing producers to make tough decisions in order to keep their oper-

ations afloat. I believe we can do more to help ease the burdens that our producers bear, and I want to draw the Senate's attention to a handful of South Dakota counties devastated by natural disaster in 2005 and into 2006.

In 2005, 59 South Dakota counties were included in Presidential or Secretarial emergency declarations as either primary or contiguous disaster counties. These counties experienced natural disasters such as drought, high winds, extreme heat, flash flooding, hail, prairie fires, spring frost, severe storms, and blizzards.

For example, 2005 marked the fourth consecutive year of experiencing drought conditions in central South Dakota, including Hand, Hughes, Hyde, Stanley, and Sully counties. Inadequate snowfall, meager spring rains, high temperatures, and desolating winds led to sparse pastures and a lack of forage crops necessary for feeding livestock. Without adequate precipitation, producers were forced to reduce the size of their livestock herds. Of the 57,500 acres planted or growing in Stanley County, losses ranged from 35 to 70 percent. In Sully County, 50 to 70 percent of 280,075 acres planted or growing were lost due to drought conditions. Hyde County's corn, soybean, and sunflower crops experienced yield losses ranging from 50 to 80 percent.

In southern South Dakota, Charles Mix County experienced much of the same drought conditions. While drought typically wreaks havoc on an area over an extended period of time, one day of particularly extreme temperatures and strong winds on top of severe drought can devastate already struggling crops. On July 23, 2005, the temperature reached 114 degrees Fahrenheit with 45-mile-per-hour winds. These conditions led to a 60 percent loss of corn yields, 50 percent loss of soybean yields, and 30 to 35 percent of yield losses in sorghum, alfalfa, mixed forage, and grass. Neighboring county, Hutchinson County, experienced 100 percent loss of prevented corn and soybean yields and 50 percent loss of corn and soybean yields.

We are now in the middle of the 2006 production season and Farm Service Agencies, FSA, in parts of the State report conditions edging toward severe drought and fear that without adequate precipitation soon, many counties will be faced yet again with another difficult year of production. Livestock producers are increasing supplemental feeding early this year due to poor pasture conditions and lack of water in dams and dugouts. Farmers are left with very little to work with, as both the topsoil and subsoil lack the necessary moisture to produce operation-sustaining crops. This cycle of drought conditions has created a new element of synergism in the agriculture industry, compounding year upon year of devastating effects not only on producers' pocketbooks, on livestock and land conditions.

Campbell County, in north-central South Dakota, is one among many

counties experiencing drought again this year. Entering into its fourth year of drought conditions, with only 1.54 inches of rainfall to date for 2006, Campbell County is currently 63 percent below the normal precipitation for the area. Today, many water sources are dry due to below normal snowfall during the winter months yielding no runoff, and below normal rainfall this spring. In addition to drought, frost has forced producers to shorten grazing time on native pastures and native and tame greases.

In central South Dakota, drought is rearing its ugly head for the fourth and fifth consecutive years. Hand County is experiencing yet another extremely dry year, with approximately 330 livestock producers affected and an estimated \$210,000 needed in Emergency Conservation Program, ECP, funds to correct the damage. In Lyman County, winter and spring wheat yields will likely yield zero to 40 percent of normal. Row crops, which were planted into dry ground, are not germinating and will likely fail unless adequate precipitation is received soon. While most livestock producers in these areas have not liquidated as of yet, should these conditions persist, they will be forced to sell their entire herd.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is Clay County, which experienced a series of heavy rains, flooding, hail, and frost in 2005. Much of the alfalfa affected by the excessive rain incurred a significant quality loss, because most of the first cutting was not able to be marketed as dairy-quality hay. The majority of producers affected suffered a 20 to 40 percent of yield losses, while 100 to 125 producers experienced greater than 30 percent in losses. Of those with greater loss, some producers received assistance from the FSA Farm Loan Division in order to keep their farm in operation.

Counties throughout the State have also been impacted by frost or freezing temperatures. Haakon County, in western South Dakota, had frost hit winter wheat and alfalfa crops in March of 2005, only to experience freezing temperatures two months later. Eighty percent of yield losses affected the 15,800 acres of alfalfa and 10 to 20 percent of winter wheat yields were lost. Among other counties affected by frost or freezing temperatures were Brown, Gregory, McPherson, Hyde, Potter, Brookings, Perkins, Clay, and Sully.

Dealing with winter storms is certainly not new to South Dakotans. However, from time to time the combination of unusually high winds, freezing rain, and large snow accumulation results in the temporary paralysis of communities and agriculture operations. Not only did severe winter weather in 2005 and the spring of 2006 take a toll on livestock, but many producers were without electricity for days and even weeks. Producers' pocketbooks took an extra hit because of the high fuel costs it took to run generators around the clock.

From November 27 through November 29, 2005, severe winter storms swept through much of eastern South Dakota. President Bush declared 42 primary and contiguous counties as emergency designations. In Hamlin and Deuel Counties, 30 percent of producers' alfalfa and winter wheat were lost in that particular blizzard.

Western South Dakota was hit with severe blizzard conditions on April 18 and 19, 2006, dropping as much as 24 inches of snow. Harding, Meade, Haakon, and Butte counties were among those hardest hit by the spring blizzard, with the total estimate of livestock losses at approximately 11,732. Harding County experienced the worst losses. According to the Harding County FSA office, 60 of the 300 producers contacted reported losses totaling 2,500 cows and calves and 6,000 sheep. For one producer in northwest Harding County, about one-third of his herd died when between 450 and 500 of his sheep piled up against a fence and suffocated. Butte County also sustained significant losses to their livestock herd.

I briefly described the agricultural conditions South Dakota's family farmers and ranchers have faced over the last year and a half. The counties I described are merely a snapshot of the reality that our producers experience following a natural disaster. In some cases, disasters are limited to portions of one county, while other disasters span large parts of the state, affecting all producers.

Every farmer or rancher knows that each production year is a gamble with Mother Nature. Unfortunately, all too often most producers at some point lose this gamble and suffer the devastating effects of a natural disaster. I understand the financial and emotional hardships that this places on many family operations' struggle to survive. Because agriculture is the driving force behind South Dakota's economy, it is crucial that producers receive the resources necessary to recover from their losses.

In response to the many natural disasters that producers throughout the country have suffered, Senator KENT CONRAD and I introduced the Emergency Agricultural Disaster Assistance Act of 2006 on March 16, 2006. Our relief package would provide emergency production loss and economic assistance to agricultural producers for losses sustained during the 2005 production year. Assistance for crop production losses, livestock assistance, supplemental nutrition, and economic disaster assistance to aid with rapidly-increasing production input costs are included in our bill. In addition, a number of provisions in the bill address agricultural recovery in the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Senators KENT CONRAD, BYRON DORGAN and I worked to fold our standalone bill into the larger spending bill, the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, H.R. 4939. On May 4, 2006,

the Senate passed the \$109 billion emergency funding package, of which \$3.9 billion would be used for agriculture disaster relief. As a negotiator in the conference consideration of the bill, I fought to secure meaningful disaster aid for producers. However, House leadership demonstrated their priorities, leaving America's family farmers and ranchers out to dry yet again. The conference report that was presented to the committee contained only money for Hurricane Katrina-related agriculture disaster—not a penny was included to provide relief for the flooding and drought conditions that have plagued so many of our producers in 2005.

While this administration insists that the 2005 crop year was outstanding, if not a record-breaking year, the disaster situations I just described indicate otherwise. This agreement was a raw deal for our producers and a raw deal for our rural communities.

FEDERAL INTEROPERABLE COMMUNICATIONS AND SAFETY ACT

Mrs. CLINTON. Despite the fact that there has been progress on the issue of interoperability, such as the transfer of much needed spectrum for first responder communications and the allocation of \$1 billion for interoperability grants that passed last year, it is clear that incidents like Hurricane Katrina demonstrate that there remains more work to be done.

What I am concerned about is that 5 years after 9/11, I do not believe that there has been the leadership role at the Federal level to give this issue the full attention and high profile that it demands.

I believe we need an office at DHS that will be charged with continually analyzing, continually assessing, and continually thinking about how to coordinate not only the Federal agencies that manage and operate communications systems, but the local and State governments, who often have very different ideas of what interoperability means.

Additionally, we also need to give that office the resources and authority it needs to carry out its mission.

We have ostensibly given the leadership role of one of the most critical issues to emerge from 9/11 and Katrina to the SAFECOM Office within DHS. However, it is my understanding that this office has fewer than 10 full-time employees and for all intents and purposes is buried within the DHS bureaucracy. While I understand that this office is headed and staffed by dedicated professionals, how do we provide the Federal leadership necessary with fewer than 10 people?

SAFECOM, according to its own Director, needs more authority in funding decisions and its interactions with other agencies.

We have got to get serious about this matter, and I believe that legislation I have recently introduced, S. 3172, the

Federal Interoperable Communications Act of 2006, takes us a step in that direction and I would like to thank Senators SALAZAR and DURBIN for cosponsoring my legislation.

My bill is not radical in how it is put together nor does it espouse to have the latest technology that will solve the interoperability problem once and for all. But it does put forth a blueprint in how the Federal Government can utilize all of the assets at its disposal and ensure that there is clear accountability and leadership on this issue at the Federal level.

It creates an interoperability czar who would report directly to the Secretary of Homeland Security. It also puts that czar in charge of a central interoperability office and gives it a clear mission, outlines responsibilities and expectations, and allows it to get the resources it would need to carry out its mission.

It requires the development of a national strategy, which would include an inventory that identifies the channels and frequencies used in every Federal agency and keeps track of what is being used by the State and local officials, so that when first responders from the Federal Government or other jurisdictions respond to an incident, they will know what frequencies and radios are being used.

This strategy sets clear benchmarks to ensure that we are constantly evaluating our capabilities and adjusting our strategies accordingly to changes in threats, advancements in technology and other factors.

My bill would also help ensure that the money that we are spending now on interoperability grants is being spent wisely and efficiently by ensuring that the grant guidelines are consistent with the goals and mission of the Office of Emergency Communication and that grant recipients have submitted a statewide interoperability plan or have adopted national consensus standards of how their platforms will work.

There have been dozens of first responders, emergency support providers, and Federal, State, and local officials who have testified before Congress, where they have cited the need for consistency in Federal grant guidelines and clarity in the DHS mission for a national emergency communications plan, and my bill seeks to address those concerns.

My bill also will help ensure that there is always an open line of communication between the State and local governments, the private sector, and the Interoperability Czar by creating regional working groups that include virtually every entity with an interest in communications policy that can report the specific needs and progress in a region.

Finally, the bill also creates an Emergency Communications Preparedness Center which will be a consortium of all the Federal agencies that have