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House of Representatives

The House met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. ISRAEL).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
May 22, 2007.

I hereby appoint the Honorable STEVE ISRAEL to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 25 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate extend beyond 9:50 a.m.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

FARM BILL/FOOD BILL

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The farm bill is described as the most important legislation that most of America ignores. It's big, complex and involves lots of money all over the country, but the details are not well known. One of the reasons might be the name. We call it a farm bill. But it could and perhaps should be called a food bill, because that is what it is.

Many people do not understand that the farm bill isn't just about farmers. It is a bill that funds food stamps, nutritional programs and farmers' markets. The programs we're talking about all impact rural, urban and suburban families alike.

Currently, our farm programs provide too little help to the majority of American farmers and ranchers. The majority of commodity payments go to a few large-scale farm operations with only 40 percent of the farmers receiving any commodity payments at all. My State of Oregon is an example. Even though it is a major agricultural producer, it really doesn't benefit that much from the farm bill.

With the 2007 farm bill reauthorization, we have a chance to make dramatic reforms in American agricultural policy by crafting forward-looking policies to help farmers manage the transition to a new farm economy. I would suggest some basic principles for strengthening the farm bill so that we ensure the future of American agriculture by giving small farmers the increased markets they need, a dependable workforce, the ability to pass their farms and heritage on to the next generation, and be protected from urban sprawl.

Farm workers also need safe, family wage jobs, and rural communities need a stronger economy. We need to provide safe access to nutrition and reliable foods to all Americans, especially the most vulnerable members of our communities; children, the elderly and the poor.

We need to increase the health and safety of our communities by improving access to local markets that can improve farmers' revenues, improve rural economies, and strengthen the vital connections between urban and rural communities. We can have programs to reimburse farmers for providing environmental services such as flood control, carbon sinks and wildlife

habitat. This can help reduce global warming, increase communities' resilience to natural events, and give farmers the opportunity to diversify their revenue stream.

In short, we can move American agriculture into the 21st century by not being devoted to policies from the last 200 years.

To that end, I have recently introduced the Local Food and Farm Support Act to connect local farms to schools to provide healthy food choices for children and promoting a stronger local farm economy by providing funding and programs that connect farmers with local markets, including school to cafeteria programs, and the promotion of farmers' markets. This legislation would provide grants to farmers to explore innovative new ways to connect to local markets and increase food assistance for senior and low-income families.

Mr. Speaker, I could just as easily talk about the farm bill as being the most important piece of environmental legislation we will consider in this Congress, because the potential for energy with biomass and wind, greenhouse gas reduction and energy conservation all enable us to reduce the carbon and energy footprint of America's vast agricultural landscape. In the area of water, a sound farm bill is the best and most cost-effective way to improve the quality and quantity of water across America, and of course it is essential to land preservation.

This is why we all need to pay attention to this critical legislation. Every Member of Congress should deal with the challenge to work with America's farmers and ranchers to produce agricultural legislation that meets the needs of America in the 21st century.

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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