

our counties, to our States, to the business and industry that does business with our governments, and ultimately to you, the taxpayer, who always pays the bill in the end no matter who writes the check.

So it is important. I hope we can work out the differences we have across the aisle on the AMT. I hope when we do that, the 1-year extension will be in there because we will have had one step down a road toward victory in getting the 3-percent withholding tax repealed.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. NELSON of Nebraska). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. KLOBUCHAR). Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE FARM BILL

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I come to the floor this afternoon to talk about why it is so important that we pass the 2007 farm bill. When a lot of people think of my home State of Washington, they think about Seattle and Boeing and Microsoft, and all those important things, but farming is an incredibly important part of Washington State's economy. We happen to be the eleventh largest farm State in the Nation and we are the third largest producer of fruits and vegetables, which are also known around here as specialty crops. This farm bill is very important to my home State because it will keep our State healthy and strong.

In fact, farming has been an important part of my own personal life. My grandfather moved to the Tri-Cities in central Washington to take a job with Welch's Grape Juice factory a long time ago, in the early 1900s, and my own dad grew up picking asparagus in central Washington. My hometown of Bothell, WA, where I grew up—a small town of about 1,000 people, now backyard to Microsoft—when I was growing up there, we were surrounded by berry farms. We grew up with a very clear understanding of how important family farms are to Washington State's economy. So I know personally that passing the farm legislation before us is absolutely critical for our farmers, who grow apples or cherries, peaches or grapes, asparagus, potatoes, and many of the other important products to Washington State.

I know this is not a perfect bill, this farm bill, but it is the best farm bill in years for my home State farmers, largely because of what it does for those specialty crops I talked about. My home State and our Nation cannot be strong unless our farmers are doing well, and this farm bill helps them stay strong by investing in programs that

help them find markets for their crops both here in the United States and abroad. Importantly, this bill will help fund research to ensure that our farmers have a healthy and safe crop in the future.

The Senate now has an opportunity to move forward a very good farm bill. Unfortunately, as we all are aware now, we have become bogged down because the Republicans are now insisting on unrelated amendments that threaten to kill the help our farmers need and deserve today. So I want to be clear about what is happening here. Republicans have been complaining for the last several days about the need to move forward legislation of any kind, but here they are blocking this bill.

I hope we can eventually make progress, but I want to talk this afternoon about what this farm bill can do and what we are losing if we don't move it forward. The biggest victory in this farm bill for Washington State is the \$2.2 billion that will help our specialty crop farmers. This is the very first time in this Nation we have addressed these specialty crops in a comprehensive and meaningful way. The money in this bill will help carry out programs I have been pushing very hard for in the last several years.

In this bill, we have \$270 million in block grants. Those block grants will help our local growers increase the competitiveness of their crops. We have \$15 million in badly needed aid for our asparagus farmers, who have been struggling to compete in this global marketplace they are required to be in, because we have been seeing a flood of cheap asparagus coming in from Peru.

This bill also helps our farmers compete in what we all know is an increasingly global marketplace and to find new markets abroad for their crops. We know South America and China and other countries are aggressively pursuing selling their crops in many of these very important nations overseas. We have to remain competitive and we have to give our farmers the ability to get out there and let other people know what we have so we can be competitive in that market.

This farm bill, importantly, increases funding for technical assistance for the specialty crop programs that will help our farmers overcome some of the barriers that threaten their ability to export their crops today. This is so important to my home State. I actually was out in our State last week, as many of us were after the Thanksgiving holiday. I was in Yakima, WA, where I had a listening session with some of our farmers, and there were some cherry farmers there who are working very hard to develop a new program in Japan. They were talking about how this technical assistance will help them help the Japanese understand how important this is so we can open an entire new market that will help my farmers locally but certainly help our Nation be competitive in this global marketplace.

Another thing this bill will do will be to help ensure that nurseries can continue to have access to safe and virus-free plant materials. This is extremely important. Apples, peaches, and grapes are very vulnerable to viruses. A single plant or a single grapevine can infect and wipe out an entire established orchard or vineyard. Washington State University at Prosser is doing some national research on this topic and they are going to be an incredibly important part of this national clean plant network.

I also wish to talk about a part of this bill that gets neglected way too often as we talk about it, and that is the nutritional programs. I think very few people realize that over half of the farm bill goes to these important nutritional programs. Those are the programs that will help our kids in our schools get access to fresh fruits and vegetables in their school lunches. We hear all these reports about obesity. I read this morning that the life expectancy of the younger generation is going to be, for the first time, less than our generation because of obesity. We have to make sure our kids, at the very youngest ages, are getting access to the best nutrition possible. This farm bill helps to do that, to make sure fruits and vegetables are part of a nutritious lunch and are accessible at an early age when they are beginning to understand, to learn, and to eat the right things so we don't have obesity which, as we all know, leads to a lot of the health care problems in this Nation today.

The farm bill also is helpful in terms of the nutritional programs for people who get food stamps and other assistance, so they also get access to fresh, nutritious food. The bill will help end the benefit erosion we have seen in the food stamp program over the years, and that is especially important today for our low-income families. Our low-income families are struggling today with gas prices rising, health care access, and all the other things that impact them, just as much if not more than most of the rest of our families. Making sure they have access to a food stamp program that makes sure they have adequate nutrition is especially keen and especially important right now. To use an old cliche, I see this as a win-win. These nutritional programs help our children and adults fight obesity and, at the same time, it helps our specialty crop growers.

Finally, I wish we had been able to include important improvements to the safety net that is so critical to the wheat farmers in my State. I have been working for a number of years now with the wheat farmers in Washington State to help improve the counter-cyclical payment program so it will actually work for them. Unfortunately, we could not make significant changes in this bill, but I am happy the bill holds them harmless, and that was important.

None of us get everything we want in this bill. I am not out here on the floor

to hold up this bill because I didn't get one thing I wanted. I am working to move this bill forward because, in the large part, it is best for our Nation's farmers, and I hope we all step back and recognize that. In a democratic body, we have to fight for what we believe in, but at the end of the day it is our responsibility to make sure the larger bill moves forward. I find it very troubling that because some people didn't get something they wanted, they are now stopping this farm bill in the aggregate from moving forward.

We have a lot of opportunity now to do good for our farmers, so it is very troubling that we see the Republicans coming to the floor now and objecting to this bill. We have to ask: Why are they objecting? So we go and look at the record, and they are saying they are not allowed to get, I think it is over 200 amendments now that are listed here up for consideration on this bill. I was reading through them a few minutes ago, on what they want us to vote on in order to move this farm bill forward. There are over 200 amendments. That is not going to happen in the last 2 weeks we have in this session.

At the expense of asking for extraneous amendments that have nothing to do with the farm bill, they are holding up these critically important nutritional programs, programs that our farmers need in order to keep their livelihoods going, and sending out all across the Nation a huge question mark about whether they are going to have what they need as they move into the next growing cycles. I looked at this list of amendments. There are amendments they want us to consider on a farm bill for fire sprinklers and tort reform and estate tax repeal. They may all be critical issues, but a farm bill is not where we consider these issues.

This bill is far too important for our Nation's health and our economy to use it now as a vehicle for some kind of political game. Only once in our modern history has a nonrelevant amendment been added to the farm bill. Each and every time we have considered the farm bill, the majority and the minority have worked out a reasonable agreement that helps clear the path forward for this important bill. What we see today, unfortunately, is a Republican minority that has decided to throw out the history books and continue to set a record-setting pace of obstruction and kill the help our farmers need and deserve.

Today our families are all struggling—gas prices, energy prices, mortgage crisis, health care costs. We have to get beyond the politics and make sure our farmers and our kids benefit from the very critical investments in this farm bill. These aren't just numbers in a bill. As you well know, Madam President, coming from a State that depends on agriculture, these programs can make or break people's livelihoods.

We have got to come together, and I urge our Republicans to get their ship in order, come to the table with a reasonable plan to move forward, and let us get this bill passed.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

MAKING TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS TO THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT OF 1965

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask the Chair to lay before the Senate a message from the House of Representatives with respect to S. 2371, Higher Education Technicals.

The Presiding Officer (Ms. KLOBUCHAR) laid before the Senate the following message from the House of Representatives:

S. 2371

Resolved, That the bill from the Senate (S. 2371) entitled "An Act to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to make technical corrections", do pass with the following amendment:

Page 3, after line 11 of the Senate engrossed bill, insert the following new section:

SEC. 3. TEACH GRANTS TECHNICAL AMENDMENTS.

Subpart 9 of part A of title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070g et seq.) is amended—

(1) in section 420L(1)(B), by striking "sound" and inserting "responsible"; and

(2) in section 420M—

(A) by striking "academic year" each place it appears in subsections (a)(1) and (c)(1) and inserting "year"; and

(B) in subsection (c)(2)—

(i) by striking "other student assistance" and inserting "other assistance the student may receive"; and

(ii) by striking the second sentence.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate concur in the House amendment and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

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

CHARLIE W. NORWOOD LIVING ORGAN DONATION ACT

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask the Chair to lay before the Senate a message from the House of Representatives with respect to H.R. 710, Charlie W. Norwood Living Organ Donation Act.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. KLOBUCHAR) laid before the Senate the following message from the House of Representatives:

H.R. 710

Resolved, That the House agree to the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 710) entitled "An Act to amend the National Organ Transplant Act to provide that criminal penalties do not apply to paired donations of human kidneys, and for other purposes", with the following House amendments to Senate amendment:

In lieu of the matter proposed to be inserted by the amendment of the Senate to the text of the bill, insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Charlie W. Norwood Living Organ Donation Act".

SEC. 2. AMENDMENTS TO THE NATIONAL ORGAN TRANSPLANT ACT.

Section 301 of the National Organ Transplant Act (42 U.S.C. 274e) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a), by adding at the end the following: "The preceding sentence does not apply with respect to human organ paired donation.;" and

(2) in subsection (c), by adding at the end the following:

"(4) The term 'human organ paired donation' means the donation and receipt of human organs under the following circumstances:

"(A) An individual (referred to in this paragraph as the 'first donor') desires to make a living donation of a human organ specifically to a particular patient (referred to in this paragraph as the 'first patient'), but such donor is biologically incompatible as a donor for such patient.

"(B) A second individual (referred to in this paragraph as the 'second donor') desires to make a living donation of a human organ specifically to a second particular patient (referred to in this paragraph as the 'second patient'), but such donor is biologically incompatible as a donor for such patient.

"(C) Subject to subparagraph (D), the first donor is biologically compatible as a donor of a human organ for the second patient, and the second donor is biologically compatible as a donor of a human organ for the first patient.

"(D) If there is any additional donor-patient pair as described in subparagraph (A) or (B), each donor in the group of donor-patient pairs is biologically compatible as a donor of a human organ for a patient in such group.

"(E) All donors and patients in the group of donor-patient pairs (whether 2 pairs or more than 2 pairs) enter into a single agreement to donate and receive such human organs, respectively, according to such biological compatibility in the group.

"(F) Other than as described in subparagraph (E), no valuable consideration is knowingly acquired, received, or otherwise transferred with respect to the human organs referred to in such subparagraph.."

SEC. 3. REPORT.

Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter, the Secretary of Health and Human Services shall submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report that details the progress made towards understanding the long-term health effects of living organ donation.

SEC. 4. NO IMPACT ON SOCIAL SECURITY TRUST FUND.

Nothing in this Act (or an amendment made by this Act) shall be construed to alter or amend the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 301 et seq.) or any regulation promulgated under that Act.

Amend the title so as to read: "An Act to amend the National Organ Transplant Act to provide that criminal penalties do not apply to human organ paired donation, and for other purposes."

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate concur in the House amendments and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

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

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, this bipartisan legislation makes technical changes to legislation I previously introduced, S. 487, along with Senators BOND, DORGAN, GRAHAM, DURBIN, MIKULSKI, PRYOR, CARDIN, ISAKSON, COLEMAN, BROWN, and CHAMBLISS and which passed the Senate on July 9, 2007. Companion legislation, H.R. 710, was introduced in the House by Representatives CHARLES NORWOOD and JAY INSLEE,