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EXPRESSING SYMPATHIES AND SUPPORT FOR THE INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS AFFECTED BY THE POWERFUL TORNADOS THAT STRUCK CERTAIN COMMUNITIES ON FEBRUARY 5, 2008

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 971) expressing the sympathies and support of the House of Representatives for the individuals and institutions affected by the powerful tornados that struck communities in Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee on February 5, 2008.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 971

Whereas on the evening of Tuesday, February 5th, 2008, more than 100 tornados devastated communities in Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee;

Whereas more than 50 lives were lost in the deadliest tornado outbreak in the United States in more than 20 years;

Whereas more than a thousand homes, schools, and businesses were destroyed and tens of thousands of residents of the Mississippi Valley have been left without power;

Whereas the effect of the storms on Mississippi Valley families and businesses is still being felt;

Whereas hundreds of volunteers took time from their daily lives to help ensure that the victims of the storm are sheltered, clothed, fed, and emotionally comforted through this traumatic event;

Whereas the Federal Emergency Management Agency, first responders, the National Guard, and additional emergency personnel have coordinated with local authorities and firefighters and have performed beyond the call of duty in the preservation and protection of human lives; and

Whereas the strength, courage, and determination of the citizens of the Mississippi Valley have been evident following the tornados: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

(1) expresses its deepest sympathies to the citizens of the States hit by the storms over the devastation caused by the powerful tornados that struck their communities on February 5th, 2008;

(2) expresses its appreciation to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, first responders, and the others involved in the relief effort for their valiant service to those affected by the storms; and

(3) expresses its support as the citizens of these communities continue their efforts to rebuild their community and their lives.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COHEN) and the gentlewoman from Oklahoma (Ms. FALLIN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on House Resolution 971.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, if it's appropriate, normally I would yield myself time now, but I would like to yield some time on the front end to Mr. TANNER from Tennessee because he has to be somewhere. So with the indulgence of the other side, I would like to first yield to Mr. TANNER for remarks.

Mr. TANNER. Mr. COHEN, I do appreciate this courtesy, and I thank the gentlelady from Oklahoma for allowing me to go ahead and speak.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the Federal response to the tornados that occurred in Tennessee. I left here early last week and went down to my district in west and middle Tennessee to view, with the Governor of our State and others, the tremendous damage that was done, the loss of life that occurred. And I want to say that the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Director of FEMA were there as I got there last Thursday morning.

And as we toured in Tennessee, most of the damage that we saw occurred near Jackson, Tennessee, where our daughter, our two grandchildren and son-in-law live, at a place called Union University. President David Dockery met us there that Thursday morning, and I can only describe the devastation to Union, the dorms and so on as horrendous; and also conclude that it was a miracle that there was no more bodily injury or loss of life than occurred at Union.

But the other thing, other than the Secretary and the Director of FEMA being there was, in the aftermath of these tragedies like we've seen, and this is the fourth tornado that has basically hit Jackson, Madison County, Tennessee since 1999, the outpouring of help from friends, neighbors and others there gives one a great sense of resolve and gives one the magnanimous feeling of the human spirit rising out of the ashes of these tremendous natural disasters.

Let me just make the observation that we appreciate the quick response of the Federal Government, the State government, all of the FEMA people there, but particularly to the friends, neighbors and my constituents, of those who were injured, who lost everything, their houses gone, it is truly a blessing to see people come together, even under tragic circumstances.

I want to commend Mr. COHEN for bringing this. It hit Memphis, also, as well as middle Tennessee and the other States. But let me just simply add my congratulations to those who brought this resolution, and my thanks to those for the recognition of so many who are doing so much at this time to help those who have suffered so much.

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, if I may go on with my remarks.

I rise to support House Resolution 971, which is a resolution to express sympathy and support for the individ-

uals and institutions affected by the powerful tornados that swept through the Southeastern Conference States of Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Kentucky and Tennessee just over 2 weeks ago.

Over 100 tornados landed, they killed over 50 people, destroyed hundreds of homes, schools and businesses, and left thousands of people without power. In true American spirit and resolve, hundreds of volunteers cared for the victims and provided shelter, food and clothing.

I express my heartfelt sympathy to all of our fellow citizens in the wake of Mother Nature's wrath, and to commend the men and women who serve this Nation as first responders, police officers, firefighters and emergency medical personnel who place themselves in great danger every day but did on this day as well to protect us and the people that were in harm's way. Our neighbors and friends deserve our sympathy and prayers, and the first responders deserve our deepest thanks and respect.

On the occasion of the day after the tornados, Congresswoman BLACKBURN joined me in Memphis, and we toured around Hickory Hills and met with some individuals, the mayors of Wharton and Harrington and other city officials in Memphis to make sure that the proper procedures were followed.

I talked to the FEMA Director, Mr. Paulison, and he assured me, and he's followed through on his promise that FEMA would do all they could to help the residents in Tennessee and in the other States as well.

I would like to commend President Bush for his quick response. He responded to Governor Bredeson's request to have Tennessee and other areas declared disaster areas, and that was done. And FEMA is on the ground, already issuing checks and helping people.

We've seen a great response from the Federal Government when it was needed, and we're looking for more response, which we're working on now, to provide to our people throughout that district.

I appreciate the gentlelady from Oklahoma (Ms. FALLIN) indulging me and allowing Mr. TANNER to speak and make his important appointment.

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

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

I rise today in support of House Resolution 971, introduced by Mr. GORDON of Tennessee. The resolution expresses the heartfelt sympathy of the House of Representatives for the victims of the devastating tornados that struck communities in the States of Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee.

On February 5, 2008, more than 100 tornados devastated communities throughout the Mississippi Valley, resulting in the deadliest tornado outbreak in the United States in 20 years.

The tornados took the lives of 50 people, injured countless others, and damaged or destroyed more than 1,000 homes. Additionally, the tornados have left tens of thousands of residents in the Mississippi Valley without power.

In response to these deadly tornados, local, State and Federal officials and emergency personnel responded swiftly to preserve and protect human lives. Their selfless actions saved lives and helped their communities in their efforts to recover from the disaster.

This resolution is a fitting commendation of the courage and determination of local citizens, businesses and volunteer organizations following the disaster. They have shown their heroism and compassion for their fellow citizens while faced with such destruction.

The citizens of the States of Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee will work hard to rebuild and to make every effort to ensure the recovery of their communities. In recognition of their efforts, this resolution reaffirms our support as they continue to rebuild their homes and their lives.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to extend my heartfelt sympathy and my prayers to all those who have been affected by this tragedy and to their families. I support this resolution and urge my colleagues to do the same.

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

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time to close.

Ms. FALLIN. Mr. Speaker, I yield as much time as she may consume to the gentleman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN).

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of House Resolution 971, and appreciate the efforts of Mr. GORDON to bring the resolution forward.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues have spoken about being on the ground and seeing firsthand the devastation and, of course, Congressman TANNER, Congressman COHEN and I all have counties that were affected by this.

We had nine counties that saw devastation and destruction with the impact of this EF-4 tornado. We had Shelby County, Fayette, McNairy, Hardin, Hickman, Perry, Wayne, Williamson, Montgomery County. Each saw devastation, destruction of property and loss of life.

Mr. Speaker, indeed, we extend our condolences to those families who have lost their lives, and to their loved ones who have seen that loss of life. And we also extend our condolences to those families who have lost their livelihood because, indeed, as has been stated, the destruction is unimaginable.

I have a poster right here from Sunday afternoon when we were in Hardin County at Sharon Baptist Church, which was a wonderful church and school. It was completely obliterated. All six buildings on the campus of that church were obliterated.

And while you see the destruction that is just unimaginable, what you

also see is the rising of the human spirit and neighbors who are reaching out to help. I asked Dr. Spencer, who pastors that church, what next? How do they move forward? Because they had nothing left. They had a hymnal that was found two counties over, but other than that, nothing left.

And he said, well, tomorrow morning we start to rebuild. And tomorrow morning we're going to be pulling out the scrap metal, and we're going to be moving the rubble to the street. And tomorrow morning is a new day. And that is the spirit that we see of individuals pitching in, neighbors coming to help.

Now they've also been so well supported by FEMA, by Director Paulison, by TEMA, and the team that is on the ground, by our State and local elected officials who didn't sit around and wait for someone to say they're coming to take care of it. They took action and said, we're going to get this done. It has been a wonderful testament to the volunteer spirit of our great State of Tennessee.

I commend all of those who have served, who have shown up to help and again extend my condolences to those who have lost family members and have lost the means of their livelihood.

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield as much time as the gentleman from Pall Mall, Tennessee (Mr. LINCOLN DAVIS) needs.

Mr. LINCOLN DAVIS of Tennessee. I thank the gentleman from Memphis, and deeply appreciate your management today of this resolution that we are discussing here on the U.S. House floor.

The tornados and storms and winds that recently tore across the South wrought upon each of our States the tragedy of loss of lives and families being separated. By now all of us have seen the images of fallen trees and toppled homes and, one by one, Tennesseans and other Southerners affected by this disaster have begun the seemingly impossible task of piecing their lives together, clearing wreckage, mourning the lost, and recovering whatever the storm failed to claim.

Our planet, for all its blessings, chooses indiscriminately at times to affront our shores, plains, valleys and farmlands with terrible acts. I'm proud to say, though, as we face the worst of the forces we cannot control, we continue to see the best of the humanitarian spirit that is very much within our power to command.

In this time of need, volunteer associations from the United Way to the Red Cross helped bring aid and comfort to the affected. Within days of the tornados' passing, the Red Cross alone helped provide shelter, comfort and over 44,000 meals with the help of nearly 1,600 Red Cross staff and volunteers in Tennessee alone.

Our local sheriff's departments and volunteer fire departments, neighbors, friends, those from the farm next door or the neighbor next door that may not

have lost their home gathered together to offer a shoulder of condolence, hope for the future, and concern and compassion for those affected.

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It was not long ago that the people of New Orleans endured the worst of what can happen when we fail to act. And in the wake of the storms in Tennessee and the South, we have shown that we will never commit the sin of inaction again. This week and last, we have shown there is no tornado so powerful, no storm so terrible that the winds of compassion cannot restore and repair any damage brought upon us.

We rise today to honor the losses of those affected, to grieve for those who were so callously and abruptly taken from us that night, and we placed a renewal of our great country and our States in the wake of this storm.

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

Ms. FALLIN. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he would consume to the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. WAMP).

Mr. WAMP. Mr. Speaker, I think Mahatma Gandhi once said that if all of the people who profess to be Christians would act like Jesus, the world would be at their feet. And I was reminded of that last week, because when we gathered Sunday morning for the Johnson Atchley Sunday School class at Red Bank Baptist Church where I go, ironically the lesson was on witnessing; and many times people consider "witnessing" as sharing the Gospel verbally. But we all know the most powerful witness that anybody can give of their faith and their commitment to the Lord is in what they do. And, man, did we ever see that again last week in Tennessee.

I have to tell of the people in Madison County who've been hit and hit again over the last several years by tornados because one of the students at Union University, who was hurt very badly, is David Wilson, who happens to be a very, very close friend of my family. His parents are two of my wife's and my best friends, and he cotaught that Sunday school class with me at Red Bank Baptist Church for a number of years. His son was transported today from the hospital in Madison County across the street to Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga where he will be continuing in recovery. But he was hurt critically, and he was underneath the rubble for 4 hours with other students at Union University.

I have got to tell you, the experience that the family saw there was a witness of their faith and their goodness. They not only had the basics of water and food and shelter, they found a home and they took care of them, but they went and got him eyeglasses and met every single need, and they made sure he was flown back to the hospital at home today and met every single need. And that's how people express their love for God is by sharing what they have with others, especially in a time of need.

Tennesseans are good people. And, man, when folks are hurting, everybody comes to help. We saw it again in Madison County. And on behalf of the Wilson family, I want to say from the other end of the State, thank you to the good people of that entire area where the tornados hit yet again. Thank you to Union University for meeting every need. Thank God none of the students died.

David Wilson has got a long, long road back to stand and walk again. We pray for the Wilsons. We pray for David. We pray and thank God for all the people who helped at this time of need. Just appreciate the goodness of the people of Tennessee who came out and helped in so many ways and all of those professionals that were there, it has been said.

And thanks to this delegation for pulling together yet again. And for the people who were hurt in other States and affected and for loss of life, our prayers went up. This is really what it's all about is people being there, because that's really all we are here for is to love God and to serve others.

Ms. FALLIN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to inquire of Congressman COHEN if he has got any more speakers.

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, no.

Ms. FALLIN. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlery from Oklahoma for her management and Mr. WAMP, Mrs. BLACKBURN, Mr. DAVIS who spoke, and Mr. GORDON and Mr. OBERSTAR who provided statements.

Abraham Lincoln was a great supporter of government and knew that government could do things for people in need and was an important instrument of good in society. Abraham Lincoln might have best expressed it. In a crisis like this, we realize how important government can be when first responders come to the rescue and do jobs of heroic proportion.

Too many times when we are not faced with tragedies and catastrophic events, we don't reflect on the importance of government. And government is the policeman on the street. And it's the paramedic, and it's the firefighter. And it shouldn't just be on 9/11 or on days when you think about 9/11 or tornados you think about these people. But they are government, and they show government works, and they show government worked in this particular situation. It's still working as FEMA's helping people get compensation for their losses and seeing they have habitable places to live in and that the Small Business Administration is helping get businesses started.

Indeed, as Mr. WAMP and others said, it's the volunteer spirit that was shown by people in Tennessee and Alabama and Arkansas and throughout the South. They showed their care for their neighbors. There were people from Georgia and the Red Cross who came into Memphis to help people there.

I want to thank everybody who's helped all of the victims and thank Mr.

GORDON for being the proud sponsor on this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that everybody join in voting for the passage of this resolution.

Mr. CRAMER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the victims of the February 6, 2008, tornados in Lawrence and Jackson Counties, Alabama.

Today, I stand with my colleagues from Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee to express our sympathy to the victims of one of the deadliest storms in the past 20 years. In total, over 50 individuals passed away in five states across the Southeast and more than a thousand homes, schools, and businesses were destroyed.

It is with a heavy heart that I remember those from my community who passed, members of the Coleman family of Aldridge Grove, including Gregory, Rebekah, and Gereck; Linda Tinker of Pisgah; and Faye Nell McCullough of Moulton. Thirty-five individuals in north Alabama were also injured, and hundreds of homes were either damaged or completely destroyed by the storm.

On the Thursday following the storm, I joined Alabama Governor Bob Riley to tour the affected areas, and Mr. Speaker, this region has a long road to recovery.

Mr. Speaker, I also rise to thank north Alabama's first responders and State and local emergency management officials for their work throughout the storm and its aftermath. Additionally, I would like to recognize the people of north Alabama, who are once again opening up their hearts and working hard to support the storm victims. I continue to be amazed by the outpouring of sympathy our community exhibits during times of tragedy. These were scenes that I know were similar in communities across the Southeast and I'm proud we recognize these men and women tonight.

As we know, damages caused by tornados are unpredictable. Some families' homes can be lost completely, while their neighbors' homes go relatively untouched. We owe it to those affected to do everything that we can to help them pick up the pieces. We must help them rebuild their homes, repair their community's infrastructure, and move on with their lives.

I encourage my colleagues to support this resolution and help these communities recover.

Mr. WHITFIELD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of this resolution and to offer my most heartfelt sympathy for all Americans who were affected by the tornadoes and other violent weather systems that hit the Delta region States including my State, Kentucky, on February 5th and 6th.

In the First Congressional District of Kentucky, seven individuals tragically lost their lives and many more were injured or displaced. As with any major weather event, there also was significant damage to public and private property, as well as power, water, and communications outages. In total, this storm claimed more than 50 lives across the Nation and thousands of other Americans' lives were dramatically changed in one of the deadliest tornado outbreaks in decades.

Sadly, we are all too familiar with the tragedy and sorrow that takes place when major catastrophic events occur. I had the opportunity to travel to my District shortly after the storms hit, and I was able to speak with many

Kentuckians and see firsthand the devastation. While it was heartbreaking to see, I was encouraged by the sense of community and civic responsibility we Americans have. But, these folks cannot go at this alone,

Governor Steve Beshear recently sent a letter to President Bush requesting a Federal disaster declaration and my colleagues and I in the Kentucky delegation sent a letter in support of this request. I hope that this appeal for help will be answered expeditiously.

Mr. Speaker, I also would like to offer my appreciation and gratitude to all the first responders who acted bravely and swiftly to help minimize the effects of these storms. Without their heroism, there could have been far more human suffering that would have taken place.

My thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of those who lost their lives, and I hope that all Americans affected by this event will soon be able to get their lives back in order.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H. Res. 971, a resolution to express sympathy for the victims of the tornados that struck Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

On the evening of February 5th, 2008, more than 100 tornados devastated communities in Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee and provided us yet another reminder of the horrific impacts of natural disasters. I express my heartfelt sympathy to those who have suffered significant losses as a result of these terrible storms, especially to those who suffered the ultimate loss—the loss of a loved one.

I also rise once again, as I did in May of last year in the wake of devastating fires in my district, and again in August of last year after the tragic bridge failure in Minneapolis, to commend the men and women who serve this nation as police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel, placing themselves in great danger every day in order to protect each one of us.

Twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year, all over this country, when any type of tragedy enters our lives, from a medical emergency facing a neighbor to a large-scale natural disaster, terrorist attack, or other incident, our Nation's emergency responders and charitable organizations are the first on the scene to provide professional services, expert help, aid, and comfort. These well-trained, highly skilled individuals are truly on the front lines in preparing for, responding to, and mitigating damages from a variety of hazards.

Disasters such as the devastating tornadoes that hit just last week demonstrate the countless selfless acts of our Nation's charitable organizations and our Nation's rust responders. These first responders deserve our deepest thanks and respect.

I strongly support this resolution and urge its passage.

Mr. GORDON of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 971.

My home State is known as the Volunteer State, and over the last 8 days, the people of Tennessee have proven why we wear that nickname so proudly. When I visited with my neighbors in Macon, Sumner and Trousdale counties after the storm, the devastation was unimaginable. In many instances homes and businesses weren't just knocked down; they were completely gone. People were hurting.

But you could not spend time with them without recognizing how strong the community is. And I saw it again and again last week. In the worst of circumstances, friends, neighbors, complete strangers all banded together to help those who are hurting right now. As many of you watched the news last week you no doubt learned that, while Tennessee took the hardest hit, this was not something exclusive to us. People in Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Indiana also put their lives on hold to help their neighbors recover.

While we can rebuild our communities, we cannot replace human lives. Today I rise to remember the 13 lives lost in Macon County, the 7 in Sumner, the 2 in Trousdale. I also want to honor the First Responders and the volunteers who have treated the injured and who are working so hard to put our communities back together. It's going to take some time, but we're going to get there. And I want to thank President Bush and Governor Bredeisen for acting so quickly to get help to our communities.

I thank my colleagues for their support last week and their continued support throughout the recovery process. As the President accurately stated a week ago, at times like these, "Prayers can help and so can the government." In Middle Tennessee and throughout the South, we will continue to need those prayers and need the President's help as we work to rebuild the lives and communities affected by these storms.

The national cameras are gone and the debris is being removed, but we still have a lot of work ahead of us.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WALZ of Minnesota). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COHEN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 971.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### BLOCKING PROPERTY OF ADDITIONAL PERSONS IN CONNECTION WITH THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY WITH RESPECT TO SYRIA—MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES (H. DOC. NO. 110-95)

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following message from the President of the United States; which was read and, together with the accompanying papers, without objection, referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs and ordered to be printed:

*To the Congress of the United States:*

Pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, as amended (50 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) (IEEPA), I hereby report that I have issued an Executive Order taking additional steps with respect to the Government of Syria's continued engagement in certain conduct that formed the basis for the national emergency declared in Execu-

tive Order 13338 of May 11, 2004, including but not limited to its efforts to undermine the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq.

This order will block the property and interests in property of persons determined by the Secretary of the Treasury, after consultation with the Secretary of State, to be responsible for, to have engaged in, to have facilitated, or to have secured improper advantage as a result of, public corruption by senior officials within the Government of Syria. The order also revises a provision in Executive Order 13338 to block the property and interests in property of persons determined by the Secretary of the Treasury, after consultation with the Secretary of State, to be responsible for or otherwise significantly contributing to actions or decisions of the Government of Syria that have the purpose or effect of undermining efforts to stabilize Iraq or of allowing the use of Syrian territory or facilities to undermine efforts to stabilize Iraq.

I delegated to the Secretary of the Treasury the authority to take such actions, after consultation with the Secretary of State, including the promulgation of rules and regulations, and to employ all powers granted to the President by IEEPA as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of my order.

I wish to emphasize, as well, my ongoing concern over the destabilizing role Syria continues to play in Lebanon, including its efforts to obstruct, through intimidation and violence, Lebanon's democratic processes.

I am enclosing a copy of the Executive Order I have issued.

GEORGE W. BUSH.

THE WHITE HOUSE, February 13, 2008.

#### FARM BILL MUST NOT REDUCE FOOD STAMP BENEFITS

(Mr. MCGOVERN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, last year the House did its job and passed a fully funded farm bill with important improvements in the food stamp and TEFAP programs. The Senate, unfortunately, was not so responsible.

Now that the farm bill negotiations are under way, we hear that reducing funding for food stamps and food banks is on the table.

Mr. Speaker, this farm bill should not be negotiated on the backs of the hungry. Feeding hungry people is never wrong, but taking food out of their mouths is, and that's what a reduction in the House-passed domestic nutrition title would do.

Mr. Speaker, we must draw a line in the sand and say enough is enough. House farm bill negotiators must stand up to the Senate and say, "Not this time."

The recently passed stimulus package does not include food stamp provi-

sions, even though economists across the political spectrum agree that food stamps are one of the best ways to stimulate the economy.

And now food stamps may be cut below the House-passed levels? We can and must do better.

I submit for the RECORD a letter signed by 153 Democrats to the chairman of the Agriculture Committee urging him to hold the line and insist on the House-passed nutrition title in his negotiations.

JANUARY 30, 2008.

Hon. COLIN C. PETERSON,  
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture, Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN PETERSON: We want to thank you and the Members of the Agriculture Committee for your hard work on H.R. 2419, the Farm, Nutrition and Bioenergy Act of 2007. We appreciate how well you balanced the needs of farmers and consumers in the legislation. One of the key reasons for our support for the bill is the inclusion of a strong nutrition title that addresses the needs of the tens of millions of Americans, including many children and working families, who struggle against hunger by investing in and strengthening the Food Stamp Program. This bill also provides needed long-term support to our nation's food banks.

As you know, hunger is getting worse in America while the costs of food, housing and utilities are rising. We have a responsibility to help low- and middle-income families as they face these challenges. The Farm Bill is a safety net that protects people from going hungry; it represents one of the single most important opportunities we have this year to address the needs of disadvantaged children, struggling working families, seniors and people with disabilities in our communities. We will be doing a disservice to anyone who must rely on these programs if we acquiesce to provisions that ultimately deny hungry Americans food in their time of need.

New investments in the nutrition title are long overdue. The average food stamp benefit is a mere \$1 a person a meal. The \$10 minimum benefit has been stuck at the same level for 30 years. The \$2,000 limit on assets for most food stamp households has not changed in two decades. And the shortfall in TEFAP commodities purchases is leaving many food bank shelves empty. It is vital that the conference agreement secure permanent funding at no less than the House-passed levels for the food stamp and TEFAP programs, and we strongly urge to include these improvements in the conference report.

We commend you for the important improvements included in the nutrition title of the House-passed bill. While there are also many improvements in the nutrition title of the Senate-passed bill, there is a profound and very troubling difference between the House and Senate nutrition titles. The House bill would make these provisions permanent law while, under the Senate bill, all the major benefit improvements would terminate after 2012. Simply, this means that these important policy improvements would return to today's law, resulting in a major reduction in benefits to more than 10 million recipients. Should these improvements sunset in 2013 and return to the 2008 levels, more than 300,000 low-income people would be cut off from food stamps altogether. We should be working to end hunger in America. We think you would agree that a final conference agreement that sunsets and underfunds improvements in the nutrition title would be unacceptable.