

Iraq. The unit quickly assumed the mission and took over all Army fixed-wing cargo operations under Multi-National Forces-Iraq. This expansive support covered Mosul, Kirkuk, and Basra, in addition to a dozen smaller air bases throughout the country. From passengers to blood to ammunition, Alpha Company flew six aircraft per day to get as much moved as possible. This amounted to two aircraft above and beyond the mission requirement. Alpha Company implemented the first fully standardized night vision goggle flight program, greatly increasing aircrew survivability by operating in hours of darkness. This also enhanced the performance capabilities of the C-23 by operating in generally cooler temperatures.

The company's support of Other Coalition Forces-Iraq, OCF-I; Special Operations, was instrumental in the timely transportation of sensitive cargo and detained personnel. The company increased existing support by 100 percent and developed mission support into Baghdad. This mission had not existed prior to Alpha Company's arrival. It filled a crucial gap in aviation support for OCF-I and was pivotal to ongoing combat operations. LTG Stanley McChrystal, head of special operations in Iraq, cited the unit for their dependable and outstanding service to OCF-I.

In April 2008, the unit surged to increase its operational tempo by 100 percent to support combat operations in and around Basra. During the 2 weeks at the height of the operation, Alpha Company flew 377 hours, more hours than ever recorded by a C-23 company in a 2-week period. By the end of April, the company was preparing to redeploy back to home-stations, families, and loved ones. For their meritorious performance of duty and courage over the dangerous skies of Iraq, the company earned 4 Bronze Star Medals, 7 Meritorious Service Medals and 38 Air Medals. During their 6 months in Iraq, the company flew over 4,000 flight hours, moved over 9,000,000 pounds of cargo and over 20,000 passengers, more than any other C-23 company in a 6-month period since the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Alpha Company's accomplishments are extraordinary and truly reflective of the distinguished service and dedication of America's citizen soldier. The State of Oregon is profoundly proud and deeply grateful for their sacrifice and commitment. It is with great pride that I honor their service today and enter their accomplishment into the RECORD.

NATIONAL MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I am proud today to ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing the National Military Appreciation Month. As a cosponsor of the bill that designated May as the National Military Appreciation Month in 1999, I ask my colleagues and

fellow Americans to honor, remember, and thank the generations of American military personnel and their loved ones, whose sacrifices have brought us the liberties that we enjoy today.

This May, the National Military Appreciation Month acknowledges a number of important milestones that highlight the best traditions of our Nation's military history: Loyalty Day, May 1, VE Day, May 8, Military Spouse Appreciation Day, May 9, Armed Forces Day, May 17, and Memorial Day, May 26. These special dates during National Military Appreciation Month provide reminders of the invaluable contributions that our military personnel and their loved ones have made throughout the course of our Nation's history. Every man and woman who has worn the uniforms of our armed services, and every person who has supported their endeavors deserves our gratitude and respect. Their contributions continue to protect and promote the values that define the United States.

During this month of remembrance, I am continuing my work to ensure that our servicemembers and veterans receive the honor and care they rightly deserve, and that those serving in war can return home soon.

In the Senate, I am working for concurrent receipt for our retired military personnel so that disabled veterans can receive the benefits they deserve. With Senators LIEBERMAN, BOND, and OBAMA, I have also championed efforts to improve mental health care and services for Active Duty military and veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I proudly support Senator JIM WEBB's new GI bill, S. 22, to vastly improve educational benefits for our newest generation of servicemembers and veterans. We must all remain committed to ensuring that our military members, veterans, and their families are taken care of.

As Americans from across the Nation pay tribute to our military this month, I offer my appreciation and admiration for all the men and women who have contributed to the history and traditions of the U.S. Armed Forces.

THE FARM, NUTRITION, AND BIOENERGY ACT OF 2007

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought recognition to discuss my reasons for voting for the conference report to H.R. 2419, The Farm, Nutrition, and Bioenergy Act of 2007. Also known as the 2007 farm bill, this legislation determines America's agriculture and domestic nutrition policy for the next 5 years. It has, received substantial criticism because of subsidies paid to farmers of five major commodities or crops: corn, cotton, rice, soybeans, and wheat. On April 29, 2008, President Bush called the legislation a "massive, bloated farm bill" and has said he would veto it. The bill has also drawn criticism from taxpayer advocacy groups.

The 2007 farm bill conference report scores at \$307 billion over 5 years. How-

ever, this increase is fully off-set with customs users fees that are collected by the Border and Transportation Security Directorate—formerly the U.S. Customs Service—of the Department of Homeland Security for processing passengers, conveyances and merchandise entering the United States. The White House has agreed that this bill does not include any tax increase.

During my tenure in the U.S. Senate, I have fought hard for agriculture and nutrition programs in Pennsylvania. However, I do have concerns with direct payment subsidies for farmers where the amount is not based on the price of the commodity and, more importantly, with large, almost endless, payments to producers. In 2006, Riceland Foods, Inc. located in Stuttgart, AR, received \$7,710,705 for rice, soybean, wheat, and corn production. In 2006, the top 10 recipients of direct subsidies for production of corn, cotton, rice, soybeans, and wheat were, in order of rank, Iowa, Illinois, Texas, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Arkansas, Indiana, North Dakota, and Missouri. Pennsylvania's agriculture producers are not the recipients of these large subsidies, as Pennsylvania is a major producer of milk, Christmas trees, and specialty crops, which include mushrooms, apples, and fruits and vegetables. My home State ranks No. 1 in the production of mushrooms, No. 4 in the production of apples and freestone peaches, and No. 5 in the production of milk and grapes in the U.S. Pennsylvania ranks 32 out of 50 in terms of Federal Government agricultural payments, despite the fact that agriculture is PA's No. 1 industry.

These large subsidies were a major concern when I voted against the 2002 farm bill conference report, even though the bill contained crucial programs for Pennsylvania, including the milk income loss contract, MILC, and conservation and nutrition programs. It would be my preference that we move toward a free market for agriculture.

While this legislation is not perfect, it is a much better alternative to an extension of the 2002 farm bill or the reversion to nonexpiring provisions of primarily the Agriculture Adjustment Act of 1938 and the Agriculture Act of 1949—permanent law. The 2002 farm bill did not include any reforms of program subsidies and the 1938 and 1949 laws are drastically different from current policy, inconsistent with current farming, marketing, and trade agreements, and would mandate higher subsidy rates and land controls.

I have reviewed the pending conference report to determine its benefits for the entire country, not just Pennsylvania where I have heard from many constituents and stakeholders expressing their support. This bill is not perfect, but it still moves America in the right direction. Our Nation, like Pennsylvania, will on the whole benefit from the 2007 farm bill. It makes key reforms to subsidy programs which I

will discuss more in detail later. In addition, this legislation includes funding for domestic nutrition programs, conservation programs, programs to help rural America, and the milk income loss contract, MILC, program for America's dairy producers. For the first time, the farm bill would extend assistance to specialty crop producers through marketing and research programs.

This conference report includes significant subsidy reforms. Under current law, producers are not eligible for payments if their adjusted gross income, AGI, exceeds \$2.5 million. In the final 2007 farm bill, a producers' non-farm income may not exceed \$500,000 in order to receive a payment. Further, a producers' farm income, or AGI, cannot exceed more than \$750,000 in order to receive a payment. One key reform is the elimination of the so-called "three-entity rule," which enabled a farmer to collect twice the maximum payment limit amount by setting up multiple businesses on the same farm. The White House was influential in this outcome, which I support. Although the final language did not attain more stringent reforms as preferred by the White House or the Dorgan/Grassley amendment to the 2007 farm bill, this AGI reform is a step in the right direction. I have been a consistent supporter of efforts to limit payments to the major program crop producers. Further, the measure includes Crop Insurance subsidy reform by reducing the administrative and operating—A&O—reimbursement provided to agents by 2.3 percentage points and increasing catastrophic—CAT—and non-insured assistance program—NAP—insurance fees.

The bill includes \$209 billion for nutrition programs which is 68 percent of the entire cost of the bill. I have long supported nutrition programs, also known as domestic food assistance programs, which are crucial to help less fortunate Americans and those experiencing difficult times. They include the Food Stamp Program, The Emergency Food Assistance Program, TEFAP, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, Community Food Projects, the Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, and fresh fruit and vegetable initiatives.

The Food Stamp Program helps 26 million low-income Americans buy healthy food each month. Its benefits have not been raised in 30 years and the conference report raises the minimum benefit from \$10 to \$14 per week, indexed for inflation. Further, the final 2007 farm bill also includes \$1 billion to expand the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program—FFVP—nationwide to reach nearly 3 million low-income children. The FFVP allows schools to offer and promote free fresh fruits and vegetables during the day.

The conference report includes \$25 billion for conservation programs to help America's farmers use environmentally friendly farming practices in

order to allow farmers to till the soil and raise livestock, while still protecting the land. In Pennsylvania alone, about one-quarter of all acres is farmland. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Wetlands Reserve Program, the Grassland Reserve Program, the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program are all worthy initiatives that need improvement and funding. Beyond providing funding for national conservation programs, the bill has \$438 million for conservation programs in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed which includes large sections of Pennsylvania.

Rural America, the backbone of our country, will benefit from this comprehensive legislation by reducing the backlog of unfunded pending rural development water and wastewater loan and grant applications. Also, broadband service will be expanded to rural America to allow access to those businesses, farms, and families in rural areas with no or very limited service. Further, a new rural microenterprise assistance program would be established for low and moderate income individuals to help develop the skills necessary to establish new small businesses in rural America. Lastly, the conference report provides \$250 million in mandatory funding for grants and loan guarantees for renewable energy and energy efficiency systems for farmers, ranchers, and rural small businesses. One item of note is that reduction of the production tax credit for corn ethanol from 51 cents/gallon to 45 cents/gallon to reduce the incentive to shift corn production from feed to fuel in order to ensure that we are planting enough acres for other crops, including wheat and soybeans, for food.

Finally, our dairy producers will continue to have the safety-net they deserve with a much-needed modification. The 2007 farm bill conference report funds the MILC program that provides countercyclical payments to our dairy producers when the price of milk falls below a set trigger price. This trigger price, as modified, will be adjusted on a monthly basis depending on the changes in the costs of feed. Increasing input costs are straining our producers and this will ensure that the payment will compensate for the increasing costs incurred by the dairy farmer. Also, the payment rate will be increased back to 45 percent from 34 percent and the cap on milk production will increase from 2.4 million pounds to 2.98 million pounds per year. Since its inception in the 2002 farm bill, the MILC program has provided more than \$220 million to Pennsylvania dairy farmers. I have been a strong supporter of a mechanism to ensure that dairy farmers receive a fair price for the milk they produce considering the increased input costs. The bill also includes provisions to make the dairy industry more transparent by requiring mandatory reporting of dairy commodities and establishing a Federal Milk Marketing Order Review Commission.

America's specialty crop producers which include most fruits and vegetables will get the assistance they need to market their products. The bill provides about \$1.3 billion in mandatory funding for specialty crop block grants, technical assistance, and farmers' market promotion. This is the most ever set aside in a farm bill to assist these farmers who are left out of traditional Federal farm programs. The measure establishes the National Clean Plant Network consisting of centers across America to efficiently produce and distribute healthy planting stock of critical high-value new varieties of fruit trees and grapevines. These centers will be the first line of defense against devastating viruses, like the Plum Pox virus outbreak in Adams County, PA, in 1999. Also, both nursery and Christmas trees are included in the Tree Assistance Program which provides disaster relief for growers who lost their crops of trees due to natural disasters. Pennsylvania growers produce over 10 million trees every year.

The 2007 farm bill is good for America and good for Pennsylvania. Therefore, I support this crucial legislation.

CUBAN INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I would like to recognize that today, May 20, is Cuban Independence Day. I am honored to join with Cubans around the world in commemorating this day.

On behalf of the people of Florida and all Americans, I rise to reaffirm our solidarity with the Cuban people as they continue their fight for freedom and self-determination. Dictatorships and tyranny have no place in this hemisphere. The U.S must continue to pressure the Cuban regime, while supporting the Cuban people.

It is my great hope, that the people of Cuba, with their passion for liberty and their desire to live in a free and transparent democracy, will soon enjoy the same rights and freedoms that we do. We stand in solidarity with the Cuban people as they continue to fight for democratic change and true independence in their homeland.

Thank you and may God bless the Cuban people.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

HONORING SARAH ROZENSKY

• Mr. BAYH. Mr. President, I today honor Mrs. Sarah Rozensky, who served with excellence in my office for over 6 years. Sarah performed her duties with the utmost distinction and a level of professionalism and virtue rarely seen. I am proud to have this opportunity to recognize Sarah for the tremendous work she has done for the office and my family. My wife, Susan, and my sons, Beau and Nick, will also be eternally grateful for her service.

Sarah came to my office with the highest of recommendations from the