

procurement systems. Specifically, compliance with Section 511 will require that the Commonwealth devote personnel and other resources to overseeing collection and remittance of the fees, thus causing administrative and financial burdens. The Commonwealth and its municipalities likely will face increased costs to purchase affected goods and services, as vendors can be expected to raise prices to recoup their own added costs or simply refrain from doing business with government purchasers. The negative impact of Section 511 may be particularly acute for women and minority owned businesses as well as small businesses, since it will affect cash flow, their ability to raise capital and to pay subcontractors.

I strongly encourage you to support repeal of Section 511 and to visit the Government Withholding Relief Coalition's website at [www.withholdingrelief.com](http://www.withholdingrelief.com) to see the number of government associations and businesses that support abolishing this mandate.

Sincerely,

JAY GONZALEZ,  
Secretary.

Mr. BROWN of Massachusetts. The Department of Defense alone has estimated this provision will cost about \$17 billion to comply with over the first 5 years. Unfortunately, there are many other provisions and reasons why this provision should be repealed as soon as possible. At a time when State and local governments are under extreme fiscal and financial stress, why? I don't get it. Why would we actually start to put in and enforce another unfunded, costly mandate on them to recover minimal funds for the Federal Treasury? This is a question of the Federal Government seeking more funds to pay its bills. Only in Washington—and I have been here a little over a year, very similar to what the Presiding Officer has—only in Washington can they try to convey that something like this is good when they actually spend \$10 of everybody's money, nearly, to recoup a dollar. It makes absolutely no sense to me at all.

Many businesses that contract with the government will simply pass this provision on, as we know, back to the government in the form of higher bids on contracts. So having a bid on a contract here, when this particular tax is implemented—it is going to be here and is ultimately going to cost every single one of us more money to do the same thing.

I listen to the administration, I listen to all the political pundits, I listen to everybody talk about the fact that we need to get our fiscal and financial house in order. We are in trouble fiscally. This country, if we do not do something quickly, is going to be in deep trouble. Here we are. We have an unfunded mandate, something that is going to add to the cost of doing business, and here we are. Are we going to take it up and vote on it? I hope we do. I am looking forward to the bipartisan leadership from the Presiding Officer and others on this very important issue.

Many businesses that contract with the government, as I said, will merely pass this on. It will crush them and restrict a critical cashflow and discour-

age them from participating in government contracts. They will go other places.

Members of the construction industry are also worried that the provision will tax away all of their anticipated profit on government contracts, hence diminishing competition and actually raising costs to the government at a time we cannot afford it.

This provision passed in 2005, long before we got here—but we, as the new breed of Senators, recognize we need to get our house in order. There is a reason the implementation of this has been delayed over and over. Everyone knows it can never go into effect. We will be back on the floor later this session, because we need to repeal this tax. We can do it in the next weeks. I appreciate the effort of the majority leader to now include us in the amendment process so we can actually be part of the process and come up with new ideas, from new people, to look at things in a different way and actually solve problems. That is what this amendment offers. I plan to offer it. I welcome everybody's support.

Before I conclude, I want to wish everybody a happy St. Patrick's Day and I appreciate your listening.

I yield the floor.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. JOHANNIS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

#### NATIONAL AGRICULTURE WEEK

Mr. JOHANNIS. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize an industry that has helped shape our country since the days of our Founding Fathers.

This industry is part of the very fabric of my home State of Nebraska and of many States. It drives our economy, fosters ingenuity, and preserves the value of a handshake in our society. I am speaking about agriculture, an industry near and dear to this farm boy's heart.

What better time to celebrate the remarkable advances in agriculture than National Ag Week.

It is not because of my roots on a farm, nor my time as Secretary of Agriculture that I am inspired to speak today. It is because of the remarkable men and women who rise before the sun each morning to feed the world. They provide safe, abundant, and affordable food, fiber, and fuel. They are stewards of our natural resources and drivers of innovation.

More than 2 million farmers and ranchers contribute more than \$300 billion to the U.S. economy each year. In Nebraska alone, agriculture contributes over \$15 billion to the State's economy. Our leading commodities in-

clude: cattle, corn, soybeans, hogs, wheat, dairy products, and the list goes on and on.

It is estimated that each American farmer feeds more than 144 people, a dramatic increase from just 25 people per farmer in the 1960s. And, as our population and the global population continue to grow, demand for our food, fiber, and fuel products is growing, not just at home but around the globe. In fact, USDA projects that agriculture exports will set a new record, exceeding \$135 billion this year.

It is estimated that every dollar in agriculture exports generates \$1.36 in additional economic activities, including transportation, warehousing, and financing.

Nebraska's \$4.8 billion in agricultural exports last year generates an additional \$6.5 billion in economic activity. Now that is a big deal, particularly during these struggling economic times.

However, the demands facing our Nation's farmers and ranchers are daunting.

We should ensure the government is not adding unnecessary regulatory and paperwork burdens to their load.

Instead, we must empower our Nation's farmers and ranchers to continue to be among the most competitive, productive, and efficient in the world.

We should be actively promoting U.S. agriculture by enhancing renewable fuels; ensuring regulations are transparent and science-based; and creating international opportunities through enhanced trade agreements.

This last one should be easy, but this administration has made it difficult.

Congress has been waiting on the President to submit three free trade agreements, Colombia, Panama, and Korea for more than 2 years now.

It is estimated that this cumulative delay has cost almost \$2.5 billion in lost agriculture exports per year.

And while we have been hobbled on the sidelines, our competitors, including, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, and the EU, have been full speed ahead on trade agreements that put U.S. agriculture at a disadvantage.

Instead of a maintaining market share and a preference for Nebraska grown wheat, corn, and beef, consumers in Colombia, Panama, and Korea could turn to our competitors.

That is because their trade agreements have lowered tariffs while ours collect dust on a White House shelf.

And once market share is lost by the United States, it is difficult to regain.

I have talked to colleagues on both sides of the aisle who understand this reality.

In fact, the chairman of the committee that oversees trade could not have been more clear in recent comments. Senator Max Baucus said:

"The Time Is Here. The Time Is Now. We're Losing Market Share Hand Over Fist."

I could not agree more.

Yet, more than 2 years into their term, the administration still has failed to send us these pending trade agreements for approval.

Our Nation's farmers, ranchers and many American workers are asking for them.

They know that new orders will be placed and business will flow from the agreements.

New jobs will be created.

Instead of spending hundreds of millions of dollars to try to create jobs, how about we sign agreements that will do it for us?

Approving trade agreements increases spending: zero. Not one penny. Congress simply says, "aye."

Perhaps that simply makes too much sense for Washington.

The bottom line is that increased trade is one of many opportunities that will help to ensure a bright future for American agriculture.

There are many reasons to be optimistic.

One need only consider the breathtaking advances in productivity.

I have long said that our farmers and ranchers can compete with anyone in the world on a level playing field.

It is nothing short of phenomenal that average corn yields are now 160 bushels per each acre of land compared to only 53 bushels just 50 years ago.

Frankly, it is difficult to keep pace with the new technologies transforming agriculture.

Consider this. Thanks to biotechnology and improved farming practices, last year, American farmers nearly doubled their soybean production from 1980 levels, with just a 10 percent increase in total acres planted.

And did you know, some farmers now use satellite and GPS technology to apply water and fertilizer where and when it has the greatest benefit to crops.

American agriculture truly is a remarkable success story.

It is true that we have big challenges ahead for agriculture. I say bring them on.

Our producers have faced down every challenge set before them and I am confident nothing will stand in the way.

That is, assuming the Federal Government does not wrap so much red tape around them as to suffocate their ingenuity.

There simply is no more resilient bunch than farmers and ranchers.

How many Americans would be willing to work hard often 7 days a week, only to leave any profit in the hands of Mother Nature?

Only those who recognize that living close to the land comes with its own rewards, and feeding the world is a higher calling.

I would suggest that agriculture is the very foundation of our country's rich heritage. Our Founders clearly understood and appreciated the importance of agriculture.

George Washington once said he knew of "no pursuit in which more real

and important services can be rendered to any country than by improving its agriculture. . . ."

Thomas Jefferson noted that "Agriculture . . . is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals and happiness."

National Ag Week is a good time to reflect on the rich agricultural history of this great Nation. It is a time to celebrate the exciting scientific advances and new opportunities.

One thing all my colleagues should be able to agree on: We owe our Nation's farmers and ranchers a sincere thank-you. Every time we go to the grocery store, we are reminded how little of our disposable income we spend in this great Nation because of the good work of our farmers and ranchers. We compare better in our country than just about any country in the world.

So we are grateful today for their good work. We say thank you to them for the food, fiber, and fuel that keeps our Nation strong.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I would like to speak for about 10 minutes. I know Senator BINGAMAN is on the floor, and maybe other Members are coming to the floor to talk on other subjects.

#### REAUTHORIZATION OF THE SBIR AND STTR PROGRAMS

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I guess we are technically still talking about our reauthorization of the SBIR and STTR Programs. Senator SNOWE and I have been working through the week to manage this bill on the floor, and I wish to again say how pleased I am with the progress we made this week. I know we have had about three or four votes on amendments, and there are others that are pending, but we have made progress. I truly appreciate the cooperation of all the Members.

This is a very important program. We have struggled, as I have said, for 6 years to get this program reauthorized. While everybody is running around fussing about programs that do not work, it is important for us to focus on those programs that do work, particularly those programs that work to create private sector jobs.

It is important for us to stay focused on reducing and, hopefully, eliminating our Federal debt and reducing annual deficits. That is going to be done when we do a couple of things all at one time. It is not going to be done by standing on the sidelines, slashing and

burning discretionary domestic spending only, particularly some of the best programs in America. It is going to be done by thoughtful cuts and eliminations of some programs that don't work, some thoughtful eliminations and cuts to the Defense budget. It is going to be done by raising revenues where appropriate to close some of the gaps and taking back some of the excessive grants to high-end taxpayers, particularly those making over \$1 million a year, in the view of this Senator. It is going to take some investments that can actually save taxpayer money in the long run, and cutting some mandatory programs.

We know—and I think it is becoming very clear to the American people—as this debate over the House CR and the debate over deficits and debt goes on, people are understanding this better and better. So one of the reasons I am personally happy to be on the floor this week is because I know the bill I am supporting and offering here to the Senate—hopefully getting to the House and then eventually to the President's desk—will create private sector jobs and close this deficit gap and begin to chip away, in a substantial way, at the debt. We need to grow our economy.

I have a chart I will put up in just a minute, but before I do that, I wish to show again a specific example of a program I am talking about so people will be very clear. Projects such as this were won by iRobot. This is just one example of the hundreds and thousands of small businesses that received either a contract or an award through this very important program.

DOD has the largest—over \$1 billion—portion of their research and development budget. Prior to this program, almost 100 percent of that money went to big businesses or to universities and big businesses. Small businesses were summarily overlooked. Regardless of whether they had good technology, they really weren't let in the front door. This program we are talking about reauthorizing for 8 years creates that door and opens it for the small businesses in Louisiana, in Colorado, in New Mexico, in New York, and that is why we are going to fight hard for this program, to get it reauthorized and to the President's desk.

Let me give one example. The DOD needed more reliable, cost-effective robotic devices for going into caves, checking and diffusing IEDs.

I don't think I have to explain to anyone listening or any Member of this Senate the challenges our soldiers face in Afghanistan. I have been to Afghanistan. I have not been in caves in Afghanistan, but I have visited our troops there. I have heard their stories. I have seen pictures and read enough books to know the frightening thousands of miles of caves and crevices our soldiers are having to go into to hunt down Osama bin Laden, who still has not been found and captured, and to protect our forces overseas.

We have been in some ways as a nation kind of caught off guard about the