

Mrs. MURRAY. I ask for 1 additional minute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mrs. MURRAY. By objecting to going to conference right now, what Senate Republicans who are objecting are doing is pushing us to a place where the debt limit, by virtue of timing, may be a part of the discussion. I ask the Senators to think about what they are doing by their objection, in forcing us into that position, and suggest that by allowing us to go to conference—we will have a better chance of not—

AGRICULTURE REFORM, FOOD, AND JOBS ACT OF 2013—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The hour of 5:30 having arrived, the Chair recognizes the Senator from Michigan.

AMENDMENT NO. 998

Ms. STABENOW. I call for regular order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. S. 954 is the pending business.

Ms. STABENOW. On behalf of Senator LEAHY, I call up amendment No. 998.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Michigan [Ms. STABENOW], for Mr. LEAHY, proposes an amendment numbered 998.

Ms. STABENOW. I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

(The text of the amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, we have made great progress today. I thank colleagues for their work today bringing forth amendments. We will continue to work with Members as we go forward tomorrow, putting together a number of votes to bring before the body. We are working hard to do everything possible to complete this legislation by the end of the week. I think we are on a good track.

I announce on behalf of the two leaders that there will be no more votes this evening.

MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. STABENOW. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business until 6:30, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

The Senator from Louisiana.

TRAGEDY IN OKLAHOMA

Ms. LANDRIEU. Madam President, I really appreciate the hard work of the Senators from Michigan and Mississippi, moving a farm bill through

the Senate. It is one of the most important bills we will take up this year. Action on this bill is long overdue. I am very hopeful we can continue to make progress and produce a bill that is excellent for every region of our country. Of course, representing the South, we always like to have special attention given to our agricultural needs. The Senator from Michigan certainly has been attuned to the farmers in rural communities in Louisiana. We appreciate her leadership.

I come to the floor today, though, just for a few moments to speak about the tragedy unfolding in Oklahoma, in Moore, OK, a city that was devastated—portions of the city in the suburban areas—by a horrible tornado, one of the largest to hit our Nation in quite some time. While I do not know all of the details, I understand that it was a very high level tornado that stayed on the ground for almost 40 minutes. This was miles wide and created a terrible path of destruction. There are, of course, adults and children who lost their lives. Recovery and rescue is still underway as I speak. I am certain that the delegations—both the Senate and House Members from Oklahoma—are doing everything they can, working with the Governor and local officials, to provide as much support as they will need.

I come to the floor as the chair of the Subcommittee on Homeland Security and I come to the floor as a Senator who unfortunately has had a lot of experience in disasters to say how proud I am that there is about \$11 billion available, without the requirement or necessity of an offset, for the people of Oklahoma. This was a battle that was fought over a year ago, led by Senator HARRY REID and me and others. This arrangement was made in the Budget Control Act so that there would be a significant pot of money set aside in the event that disasters such as this happened, whether it was a tornado or an earthquake or a fire or a flood. It has happened again.

We don't know exactly when these disasters are going to happen. We don't know the exact nature of them. But we most certainly know from past experience and everything that our science tells us about the changes in the atmosphere that they are going to happen and that they are likely going to get worse. That is why I have been very focused on this issue.

I am proud of this Senate, Republicans and Democrats, but I am very proud of the support of the Democratic leaders on this bill to say now is not the time—not this afternoon, not tomorrow morning, not Friday, not Monday—to be debating offsets for victims of the Oklahoma tornado. After a disaster, our citizens do not need or want a debate on funding. What they want is help, and they are going to get it from the committee I chair.

Our people suffered so much in Katrina, Rita, and Gustav. I have watched the east coast have to recover

from Irene and from Sandy. I have seen horrible tornadoes in Missouri. The last thing people want when they are digging their loved ones out of rubble and preparing, unfortunately, for funerals that are going to have to occur after what happened—the last thing they want to see Congress do is debate about how and when we are going to pay for this disaster. We are going to send them the money they need to recover.

I want to say this to Senator COBURN, my good friend who is not on the floor—I do respect his consistency on this issue. Even when a tornado hit his State, he is still calling for offsets. He has been consistent, but in my view he has been consistently wrong. There will be no offsets. There is no need for offsets. I will not support offsets. The majority of Democrats, if not the entire Democratic caucus, will not support offsets for Americans in need in disasters. What we are going to do is support appropriate help and sufficient help for them.

Let me say for the record that because of the Sandy supplemental—which I also fought for with my colleagues from the Northeast—we were able to put some reforms in that bill. It was not just "send the money and do what you will with it." We sent money to the Northeast. We also sent them new tools in a bigger, stronger toolbox to help them with a better recovery.

We have a lot more to do in the Northeast. That is a subject for another day. I realize they are in lots of difficulty. But we did send some new tools that will help, even with Oklahoma.

First, we sent them the ability to quickly establish mutually agreed upon estimates for project costs. That has been a real problem with recovery in the past, with local governments arguing one thing, the Feds offering something else. We now have a better, quicker process to agree on what the project costs to get it built more quickly. The project cost will be validated by an independent panel of experts protecting the taxpayer, which is important. Applicants are now allowed to consolidate projects in a common-sense way to build back smarter, reducing future recovery costs.

Most important for this disaster—we fought hard for this in Sandy—finally, there are some provisions in the recovery bill that will allow children to be the center of attention. Sadly, we have lost some children in this disaster. Sadly, many children were injured and probably thousands of children have been traumatized. But because of the new bill we passed under Sandy, there are some provisions to help.

In addition, families can receive daycare now through their supplemental, so the parents who are going to have to figure out a way to get back to work and rebuild their businesses and their communities and their houses can have some additional Federal childcare, which will help.

In addition, I think there are going to be more counselors on the ground helping children than in past disasters.

I see colleagues on the floor, so let me finish quickly.

We have implemented an automated family reunification database to ensure children are returned to parents. This is a relatively small place, well known. We do not believe there are any children whose whereabouts are unknown to their parents. All of the statistics, however, are not in of people missing, et cetera. But there are provisions right now at work with FEMA helping with family reunification. Coordinators are already on the ground specialized in looking out for the specific needs of children in disasters. I thank the coalition that worked with me for years to put that into place.

Again, there will be no offset. There is no reason to need an offset. We have the \$11 billion, thanks to the good work of many people in this Chamber and on the other side of this Capitol, to provide this funding for these disasters. I know FEMA is on the ground. They will do the best they can.

In this case, with tornado insurance, which is carried by many people in this area—I am doing a little bit more research into whether it is mandatory or voluntary—with a combination of local help and State help and Federal help and private insurance and, of course, the great spirit of voluntarism, I am confident that after we finish this very sad recovery and shock this community is going through, that we will be able to help them build a stronger and more vibrant community of Moore, OK, in the future.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

BUDGET CONFERENCE

Mr. LEE. Madam President, earlier today we were asked to give our consent to go to conference on the budget resolution. This is an important matter because we have now gone more than 4 years without a budget. This has been of great concern to many of us. I do not think there is one Member of this body who would not want Congress to pass a budget this year. We would like to see that happen. We need that.

We do, however, have a concern—some of us—with the request that we go to conference without certain assurances. Most important, we want a very simple assurance that any conference report that results from this conference will not be used to raise the debt limit. The reason for this is simple. This is an important matter. At a time when we have racked up about \$17 trillion in debt, we want some assurances that this important decision will be made under the regular order of the Senate; that the normal rules of the Senate will apply; that this will not be negotiated behind closed doors in a backroom deal. The American people deserve more. They demand more.

Those who may have questioned our motives in connection with this, I ask them a very simple question: Will you give us an assurance that you are not going to use the conference report to raise the debt limit? If they can answer that question to our satisfaction, if they can simply give me an assurance that is not what they are going to use it for, then I will gladly give my consent. So I invite that to be the topic of discussion.

All this begs the question. Why would they not give that assurance? What on Earth is wrong with the regular order? What on Earth is wrong with giving an assurance that, in connection with a conference report on a budget resolution, they would not be willing to say: If we are going to raise the debt limit, we are going to do it under the regular order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Madam President, I was going to talk about the tornadoes, but I will take a moment to respond to my colleague from Utah.

There are Members objecting to going to regular order on the budget, and he is one of them. The Senator from Utah himself is objecting to regular order, which would allow us to go to conference on the budget. He was one of the critics when he was running for office. He made numerous statements while he was on his way to becoming a Senator by saying that the Senate and the House needed to have a budget.

Well, the House has passed a budget, the Senate has passed a budget. Yet the Senator from Utah is the one—along with the Senator from Kentucky, and I understand earlier today, the Senator from Arizona, Senator McCAIN—objecting to going to conference to resolve the differences.

I know the Senator from Utah has read the Constitution, just as I have. The Constitution and the laws that created the Senate of the United States give great strength to the minority—and he is in the minority. However, nowhere in the Constitution does it say one Senator from one State has the right to write the rules and laws for the whole country. I read it lots of times, and I have never seen that. Evidently that is what the Senator from Utah wants. He said if we would just do what he wants, we could proceed.

Well, I have news for him and the Senators who are objecting. It is not about what they individually want. It is collectively what we want. We represent all the people of our country: Republicans, Democrats, conservatives, and liberals.

For 4 years this same group yelled and screamed about not having a budget. Now that we have a budget, they are yelling and screaming that they don't want to work out the differences. I honestly don't know how to please colleagues like this. We had to literally listen to them ranting and raving for years about how we didn't have a budg-

et. We worked extra hard. At the time we said—and I was one of them—that technically they're right, we did not have a budget. As the Presiding Officer knows, we had something that was stronger than a budget. We had spending limits that had the real teeth of law.

What people might not realize is budgets are aspirations. Just as when someone does a budget at home, they can say: My budget this year is going to be set at \$25,000. It is an aspiration. They might spend a little more or a little less. There is no mechanism for control; it is just an outline, and that is important.

We thought what we had, as the Democratic leadership, is better than a budget. We had actual spending controls, but that wasn't enough for the Republicans. They knew we had spending controls, but they still went on "Fox News" and everywhere else explaining to people that we had no budget and inferred there were no controls. And that is patently false. We had spending controls. We have spending controls now. We have spending limits which are agreed to by Republicans and Democrats, except there are a handful of Republicans who don't agree with those limits. They decided because they represent half of four States that they want their way or the highway, and now the whole Congress cannot go to a conference on a budget.

I don't understand this. I understand minority rights need to be protected. I understand it is important to make sure everyone's voice is heard. I understand everybody cannot get everything they want. I don't understand when my colleagues—the Senator from Utah, the Senator from Kentucky, and the Senator from Arizona—say: No, we can't go to a conference to work out the differences on the budget so the United States can move more quickly to a balanced budget. They have complained year after year that we didn't have a budget. It is the height of hypocrisy, and their position is completely unexplainable and unacceptable.

I am glad I was on the floor. I came to talk about the tornado, but I am glad I had a chance to make a statement for the RECORD about why not many—but there are a few—Republican leaders have stopped the entire budget process until they get their way exactly the way they want it. That is not the way our government works. We don't have kings anymore. We don't have dictators anymore. We don't have people with special powers. We are all humans, and we are all on equal footing. We are all elected to represent our constituents. No one in this Chamber is entitled to write the budget exactly the way they want it.

If I wanted to do something, I could say just as easily as he could: Well, I am going to object unless you promise me that X, Y, and Z are going to be in the budget. I could say that, as could