

They see Washington bouncing from one manufactured fiscal crisis to the next but never addressing the real and ongoing crisis of our disappearing middle class.

The truth is, while we hear a lot about the wide distance between Democrats and Republicans, the widest and most important distance in our political system is between the content of the debate in Washington and the concerns of hard-working people in places such as Wisconsin. That distance parallels the large and growing gaps between rich and poor, between rising costs and the stagnant incomes, between our Nation and our competitors when it comes to education and innovation—and it is truly hurting people.

When my grandparents were raising me, I learned that if you worked hard and played by the rules, one can get ahead. The Wisconsinites I talked to grew up learning that very same thing. They are working as hard as ever to get ahead, but many are finding they are hardly getting by. People are still working for that middle-class dream: a job that pays the bills, health coverage they can rely on, a home they can call their own, a chance to save for their kid's college education, and a secure retirement. But, instead, too many are finding that even two jobs are not enough to make ends meet, and those jobs are hard to find and hard to keep. They are finding the homes they worked so hard to own are not even worth what still remains on their mortgage. They are finding that the cost of college is going up, and they are worried they might never be able to retire comfortably.

That is the biggest gap of all, the gap between the economic security Wisconsinites worked so hard to achieve and the economic uncertainty they are asked to settle for.

If we cannot close that gap, we might someday talk about the middle class as something we used to have, not something each generation can aspire to. We all get it. We all see this happening. While Wisconsinites do not agree about what we should do, they want to see us working together to find a solution, even if it takes some spirited debate.

But when they look across that yawning divide to Washington, they see us advancing talking points and playing politics instead of putting our varying experiences and talents to work solving these problems.

But I am optimistic. I did not run for the Senate just because I agree with those complaints. I ran for the Senate because I think we can do better. I know I have a great example to follow in the people of Wisconsin. These are particularly tough times for my State. Even as the National economy is rebounding, businesses in Wisconsin and middle-class families in my State remain stuck in neutral.

The manufacturing sector that sustained our prosperity for generations has taken a lot of hits—some that could have been prevented and others

that are simply a factor of our changing economy and our changing world. But we do not see Wisconsin workers and business owners wallowing in crisis or looking for someone to blame. Our State motto is one word, "Forward." That is the only thing we know.

In the short time I have been here, I have made it my mission to fight to make sure Wisconsinites have the tools and skills they need to succeed in a "Made in Wisconsin" economy that revitalizes our manufacturing sector and rebuilds our prosperity—and this means respecting our labor.

It means investing in regional hubs of collaborative research and development, supporting the technical colleges that are working to provide a skilled workforce, and encouraging public and private partnerships to revitalize our manufacturing sector. But it all relies on the talent of individuals who are working hard to help our communities move forward.

Years ago John Miller, a disabled Marine Corps veteran who lives near Milwaukee, invented a new kind of motorcycle windshield that uses LED lights embedded in acrylic. For years he has been working hard to find investors to bring his idea to market. He has been testing different acrylics, showing off his work at trade shows, and spending months trying to get approvals from the Department of Transportation. Investors are lining up at John's door. Harley-Davidson even wanted to buy his patent. But he doesn't just want to make a profit, he wants to make a difference. He is holding out until he knows that everything in his product will be made and manufactured in the United States—hopefully by other disabled veterans, who often have a hard time finding work when they come home.

Wisconsin is full of John Millers—ordinary people with ingenuity, determination, and civic spirit to become not just successful but engines of economic opportunity for their whole communities, committed to the common good.

I am so proud of all the remarkable potential I have seen in Wisconsin: the Global Water Center in Milwaukee, which will open this summer as an incubator for water technology businesses; the partnership of Johnson Controls and UW-Milwaukee for the Innovation Campus research park in Wauwatosa; the advances in energy-efficiency technology being realized at Orion Energy Systems in Manitowoc, WI; the work on sustainable biofuels at the Great Lakes Bioenergy Research Center in Madison; and small business incubators at technical colleges across our State helping to build the dreams of entrepreneurs.

These stories of innovation and cooperation and these exciting opportunities to build an economy made to last are happening all over our country.

I am going to let people in on a little secret. We here in the Senate can be innovative too. We can cooperate. We can

get excited by these opportunities. It is true of Democrats and Republicans alike because none of us came here just to audition for cable news or to win our next election before the bumper stickers from the last one even come off the cars.

I have already had the great joy of working with colleagues from both parties, and I know neither party has a monopoly on compassion or common sense. There is nothing liberal or conservative about wanting to help our manufacturers compete and win on the world stage. There is not a Senator in this body whose heart has not broken when listening to a constituent who cannot seem to get ahead. We cannot fix all of those gaps in our economy with one bill. Not even "Fighting Bob" La Follette could close that divide in our political system with one speech.

I am using this speech, my first here on the Senate floor, to say that I am ready to work hard and work with anyone to make progress on these challenges and help move this great country forward.

I yield the floor.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, before the Senator from Wisconsin leaves the floor, I would like to indicate how thrilled I am to have another Great Lakes Senator with us in the Senate. Senator BALDWIN is an invaluable member of the Budget Committee. She is fighting hard for Wisconsin agriculture. Now that we are in the middle of the efforts on the farm bill, I know she is deeply involved and concerned about our men and women who provide the food we put on our tables every day.

We thank the Senator for her leadership. We are so pleased to have Senator BALDWIN in the Senate.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

AGRICULTURE REFORM, FOOD, AND JOBS ACT OF 2013

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 954, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 954) to reauthorize agricultural programs through 2018.

Pending:

Stabenow (for Leahy) amendment No. 998, to establish a pilot program for gigabit Internet projects in rural areas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

AMENDMENT NO. 960

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up Senate amendment No. 960 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to setting aside the pending amendment?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Oklahoma [Mr. INHOFE], for himself and Mr. GRAHAM, proposes an amendment numbered 960.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To repeal the nutrition entitlement programs and establish a nutrition assistance block grant program)

On page 351, between lines 12 and 13, insert the following:

PART I—REAUTHORIZATION OF THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

On page 390, between line 17 and 18, insert the following:

PART II—NUTRITION ASSISTANCE BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM

SEC. 4001A. NUTRITION ASSISTANCE BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM.

(a) IN GENERAL.—For each of fiscal years 2015 through 2022, the Secretary shall establish a nutrition assistance block grant program under which the Secretary shall make annual grants to each participating State that establishes a nutrition assistance program in the State and submits to the Secretary annual reports under subsection (d).

(b) REQUIREMENTS.—As a requirement of receiving grants under this section, the Governor of each participating State shall certify that the State nutrition assistance program includes—

- (1) work requirements;
- (2) mandatory drug testing;
- (3) verification of citizenship or proof of lawful permanent residency of the United States; and
- (4) limitations on the eligible uses of benefits that are at least as restrictive as the limitations in place for the supplemental nutrition assistance program established under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011 et seq.) as of May 31, 2013.

(c) AMOUNT OF GRANT.—For each fiscal year, the Secretary shall make a grant to each participating State in an amount equal to the product of—

- (1) the amount made available under section 4002A for the applicable fiscal year; and
- (2) the proportion that—

(A) the number of legal residents in the State whose income does not exceed 100 percent of the poverty line (as defined in section 673(2) of the Community Services Block Grant Act (42 U.S.C. 9902(2)), including any revision required by such section) applicable to a family of the size involved; bears to

(B) the number of such individuals in all participating States for the applicable fiscal year, based on data for the most recent fiscal year for which data is available.

(d) ANNUAL REPORT REQUIREMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than January 1 of each year, each State that receives a grant under this section shall submit to the Secretary a report that shall include, for the year covered by the report—

(A) a description of the structure and design of the nutrition assistance program of the State, including the manner in which residents of the State qualify for the program;

(B) the cost the State incurs to administer the program;

(C) whether the State has established a rainy day fund for the nutrition assistance program of the State; and

(D) general statistics about participation in the nutrition assistance program.

(2) AUDIT.—Each year, the Comptroller General of the United States shall—

(A) conduct an audit on the effectiveness of the nutritional assistance block grant pro-

gram and the manner in which each participating State is implementing the program; and

(B) not later than June 30, submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report describing—

- (i) the results of the audit; and
- (ii) the manner in which the State will carry out the supplemental nutrition assistance program in the State, including eligibility and fraud prevention requirements.

(e) USE OF FUNDS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—A State that receives a grant under this section may use the grant in any manner determined to be appropriate by the State to provide nutrition assistance to the legal residents of the State.

(2) AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS.—Grant funds made available to a State under this section shall—

(A) remain available to the State for a period of 5 years; and

(B) after that period, shall—

(i) revert to the Federal Government to be deposited in the Treasury and used for Federal budget deficit reduction; or

(ii) if there is no Federal budget deficit, be used to reduce the Federal debt in such manner as the Secretary of the Treasury considers appropriate.

SEC. 4002A. FUNDING.

(a) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this part—

- (1) for fiscal year 2015, \$45,500,000,000;
- (2) for fiscal year 2016, \$46,600,000,000;
- (3) for fiscal year 2017, \$47,800,000,000;
- (4) for fiscal year 2018, \$49,000,000,000;
- (5) for fiscal year 2019, \$50,200,000,000;
- (6) for fiscal year 2020, \$51,500,000,000;
- (7) for fiscal year 2021, \$52,800,000,000; and
- (8) for fiscal year 2022, \$54,100,000,000.

(b) ADJUSTMENTS TO DISCRETIONARY SPENDING LIMITS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 251(c) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (2 U.S.C. 901(c)) is amended by striking paragraphs (5) through (10) and inserting the following:

“(5) with respect to fiscal year 2016, for the discretionary category, \$1,131,500,000,000 in new budget authority;

“(6) with respect to fiscal year 2017, for the discretionary category, \$1,178,800,000,000 in new budget authority;

“(7) with respect to fiscal year 2018, for the discretionary category, \$1,205,000,000,000 in new budget authority;

“(8) with respect to fiscal year 2019, for the discretionary category, \$1,232,200,000,000 in new budget authority;

“(9) with respect to fiscal year 2020, for the discretionary category, \$1,259,500,000,000 in new budget authority; and

“(10) with respect to fiscal year 2021, for the discretionary category, \$1,286,800,000,000 in new budget authority.”

(2) TECHNICAL AND CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Section 251A of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (2 U.S.C. 901A) is amended—

(A) by striking the matter preceding paragraph (1) and inserting the following: “Discretionary appropriations and direct spending accounts shall be reduced in accordance with this section as follows:”;

(B) by striking paragraphs (1) and (2);

(C) by redesignating paragraphs (3) through (11) as paragraphs (1) through (9), respectively;

(D) in paragraph (2), as redesignated, by striking “paragraph (3)” and inserting “paragraph (1)”;

(E) in paragraph (3), as redesignated, by striking “paragraph (4)” each place it appears and inserting “paragraph (2)”;

(F) in paragraph (4), as redesignated, by striking “paragraph (4)” each place it appears and inserting “paragraph (2)”;

(G) in paragraph (5), as redesignated—

(i) by striking “paragraph (5)” each place it appears and inserting “paragraph (3)”;

(ii) by striking “paragraph (6)” each place it appears and inserting “paragraph (4)”;

(H) in paragraph (6), as redesignated—

(i) by striking “paragraph (4)” and inserting “paragraph (2)”;

(ii) by striking “paragraphs (5) and (6)” and inserting “paragraphs (3) and (4)”;

(I) in paragraph (7), as redesignated—

(i) by striking “paragraph (8)” and inserting “paragraph (6)”;

(ii) by striking “paragraph (6)” each place it appears and inserting “paragraph (4)”;

(J) in paragraph (9), as redesignated, by striking “paragraph (4)” and inserting “paragraph (2)”.

SEC. 4003A. REPEALS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Effective September 30, 2014, the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011 et seq.) is repealed.

(b) REPEAL OF MANDATORY FUNDING.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, effective September 30, 2014, the supplemental nutrition assistance program established under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011 et seq.) (as in effect prior to that date) shall cease to be a program funded through direct spending (as defined in section 250(c) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (2 U.S.C. 900(c)) prior to the amendment made by paragraph (2)).

(2) DIRECT SPENDING.—Effective September 30, 2014, section 250(c)(8) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (2 U.S.C. 900(c)(8)) is amended—

(A) in subparagraph (A), by adding “and” at the end;

(B) in subparagraph (B), by striking “; and” at the end and inserting a period; and

(C) by striking subparagraph (C).

(3) ENTITLEMENT AUTHORITY.—Effective September 30, 2014, section 3(9) of the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974 (2 U.S.C. 622(9)) is amended—

(A) by striking “means—” and all that follows through “the authority to make” and inserting “means the authority to make”;

(B) by striking “; and” and inserting a period; and

(C) by striking subparagraph (B).

(c) RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAW.—Any reference in this Act, an amendment made by this Act, or any other Act to the supplemental nutrition assistance program shall be considered to be a reference to the nutrition assistance block grant program under this part.

SEC. 4004A. BASELINE.

Notwithstanding section 257 of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (2 U.S.C. 907), the baseline shall assume that, on and after September 30, 2014, no benefits shall be provided under the supplemental nutrition assistance program established under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011 et seq.) (as in effect prior to that date).

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, I say to my distinguished colleague from Oklahoma, if I might ask, before he proceeds on his amendment, if I could enter a unanimous consent about the vote.

Mr. INHOFE. I have no objection.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that at 12 noon today, the Senate proceed to vote in relation to the Inhofe amendment No.

960; that the time until noon be equally divided between Senators INHOFE and STABENOW or their designees; further, that no second-degree amendment be in order to the amendment prior to the vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. INHOFE. I thank the gentlelady. We will be prepared to vote on the amendment at noon today.

I find it kind of interesting that when I go back to Oklahoma—I know this is offensive to some people—I am back where normal people are. I was giving a speech, I say to the gentlelady who is managing this bill. Ironically, it was Duncan, OK, where they had the first hydraulic fracturing in 1949. I was there talking to them, and this was Democrats and Republicans. When they asked about the farm bill, I said: What farm bill, because 80 percent of the farm bill is not a farm bill, it is a welfare bill. We are talking about the food stamp program.

This is a shocker to people. They don't understand this. Why would they call this a farm bill if 80 percent of it is talking about the food stamp program? It is now at \$800 billion over 10 years. In the first 5 years, enrollment in the food stamp program has grown by 70 percent. It has gone from 28 million families to 47 million families, and that is almost doubling in a period of 4 years. I don't say this critically. There are some people who are very liberal and feel government should have a greater involvement in our lives, and certainly that is what this system is all about. We sort of weigh these things and see. I cannot think of anyone who could rationally say that this program of food stamps could justify being increased by 100 percent in a period of 4 years.

It reminds me of a time many years ago when most of us had gone through elementary school. At that time we heard about Alexis De Tocqueville, a guy who came to this country. He looked at the wealth of America, and in the last paragraph of the last chapter of his book, he says: Once the people of this country finally vote themselves money out of the public trust, the system will fail. What he talked about there is that it gets to the point where 50 percent of the people are on the receiving end of government. I know we all remember that, and maybe a lot of people think that times have changed, but we have to stop somewhere.

I think this amendment is the most important amendment on the farm bill because it actually turns this into a farm bill. I would think that people who are as concerned with agriculture as I am—my State of Oklahoma is a big agriculture State, and I am very concerned about agriculture. I cannot find anyone in my State who says this should be part of a program that would be a charity bill and could be voted on on its own merits and not thrown in with the farm bill.

So over the same time period in the last 4 years, this has grown. It has increased by 100 percent. The cost has gone from \$37 billion to \$75 billion. That is a 100-percent increase in one program.

Enrollment in the program has even increased as the employment rate has declined. In 2010, when the average unemployment rate was 9.6 percent across the country, enrollment was 40.3 million people or families. In 2012, when the unemployment rate was 8 percent, which is 1.5 percent lower than it was in 2010, enrollment had increased to 46 million people. Unfortunately, as the farm bill is written, it only makes a 4-percent cut in the program over 10 years, which is a cut of less than 0.5 percent. I think those who say: Wait a minute, we are cutting that program—when it is cut by 0.5 percent, that is not really a cut.

The amendment is very straightforward and very simple. It converts the program into a block grant so that the States will have all the authority they need to ensure the program prevents the impoverished from going hungry. The funding provided is sufficient to provide benefits to the same number of participants as were enrolled in the mid-2000s. Money would be divided among the States proportionately based on the number of individuals who are living below the Federal poverty line. It would have to be fair. It is not going to go according to population, it is not going to go according to size or wealth, but to those who are living below the poverty line.

The new program would give States the ability to keep the money they received for 5 years so they can build flexibility into their programs which will allow their programs to shrink and grow as the economy changes. After 5 years, any unused money would return to the Treasury for deficit reduction.

While the amendment is careful to give States maximum control over the design and implementation of their own programs—which is what we want to happen—it does require them to include work requirements, mandatory drug testing, and verification of citizenship prior to qualifying anyone to participate in the program.

If we go out in the street in any of the towns of any of the States in this country and ask people if it is unreasonable to require people to have work requirements—certainly the last time when President Clinton was in office, we enacted some major reforms that included work requirements, and most of the Democrats were very supportive of that. Certainly people should not be concerned about mandatory drug testing and verification of citizenship. The citizenship issue is something we hear quite often. Further, States would not be allowed to authorize users to purchase alcohol, tobacco, dog food, and items like that.

In total, I expect this amendment to save some \$300 billion over 10 years relative to the current funding baseline.

I feel very strongly about this. This is one of those issues people are talking about all over the country. I know when my wife comes back and she talks about how people who are perfectly capable of working are buying items such as beer, among other things, with their food stamps—this is something that offends Democrats, Republicans, liberals, and conservatives alike throughout America.

That amendment is going to come up at noon, 15 minutes from now, and I encourage my colleagues to vote for this amendment and turn the farm bill into a farm bill instead of a charity bill.

If no one else wants to speak, I would like to make one comment about what happened in Oklahoma.

I came back yesterday from my State of Oklahoma. We have all seen on the media the disaster and the heart-wrenching things happening in Moore, OK. I remember so well that 14 years ago, in 1999, another tornado came through. If we look at it, it was on the same path as this tornado which came through 2 days ago, and it was just about the same devastation. I stood there and recalled what I saw in 1999. It breaks my heart when we see these people. They were trying to match missing parents with missing kids. Think about that.

We had two schools. When we looked at the rubbish, we felt that all the kids could have been killed in there. It was hard to imagine that anyone could have survived. Yet some did survive.

The early reports of the deaths were a lot higher, and the deaths are very important, but that is not the only thing. There are people in the hospitals right now who are trying—one of the hospitals had to evacuate every bed in that hospital when they saw it coming, and it is a miracle that not one person—not one of the people who was in that hospital—was killed. No one can understand how that could have happened.

We watched this going on and we saw parents—I have 20 kids and grandkids and I can't imagine what it would be like to go through something like that. I have to say the Federal Government, the State government, the county government, the city of Oklahoma City, the city of Moore, and all the private sector have joined in together. I have never seen any effort, including the 1999 effort, that drew people together the way this has. We have seen companies represented by people who are builders and developers who have heavy equipment and trucks and things such as that and they are donating them to this cause to help these people.

I want everyone to pray for these people, for the families, and for us to pull together and make this thing survivable. I know Oklahoma is in the tornado belt. Everybody reminds me of that all the time, and it is true. I remember being closely involved, either at the time of or right after, in almost every tornado in the last 25 or 30 years. A little town called Picher, OK, had a

tiny tornado, but it wiped out everything. That is the thing that is characteristic about tornadoes: No one survived, with one exception. They are now talking about accelerating the number of safe rooms and tornado shelters.

This is a program that started in 1999, and I can't tell my colleagues—we are trying to evaluate right now how many more people in Oklahoma are alive today because they were taking advantage of that program and I am sure many more will as well.

I know others wish to speak on this bill, but I want to say that we in Oklahoma appreciate the love and the help on all government levels as well as the private sector levels and ask sincerely for the prayers of everyone within earshot.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, before speaking on the amendment, I wish to share—and I know everyone in the Senate wishes to share—their thoughts and prayers with the people of Oklahoma.

As the distinguished Senator from Oklahoma knows, I have a strong connection with Oklahoma. My mom grew up on a farm picking cotton in Oklahoma, and we have talked before about my grandparents, until they passed away, being there. It was a wonderful trip for my family to go to Ponca City, OK, in later years to my grandparents to visit every summer. I will never forget that in the backyard my grandparents had a tornado shelter, basically. It was on a little mound of dirt. We opened the door and it was just like Dorothy and the Wizard of Oz, opening the door and going down into the cellar. A couple of times in the middle of the night we had to get up and go use the cellar, and I know how frightening it was for me as a child to experience that.

I know the storms have gotten more and more intense with more and more devastation. We all hope for the very best in the recovery for all the families involved.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, if I could quickly respond, I recall the Senator from Michigan speaking about her family background in Oklahoma. The only thing I disagree with is we have always had these. Statistics show they are not any more intense; they are not showing that they are getting more intense, and worse, they are just bad. The storm shelters the Senator from Michigan is speaking about, you drive through Oklahoma in the rural areas, everybody has them. We have dug them, because we have been using them for many years.

The major difference here is in the major cities; they don't have them as we do. I would say 95 percent of people in the rural areas have them, but in the city, maybe half of 1 percent, so that will be getting some attention from us.

I thank the Senator from Michigan for her thoughts.

Ms. STABENOW. I thank the Senator from Oklahoma.

Madam President, I rise in opposition to the amendment. I appreciate the concerns raised by the Senator, but I rise in strong opposition to block granting and cutting the food assistance program called SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, for our country.

I have always viewed, as chair of the Agriculture Committee, two programs very similarly. The first is crop insurance, which is there when there is a disaster for a farmer. The second one is SNAP or the Supplemental Food Assistance Program, which is there when there is a disaster for a family. They both go up when the disasters go up, and they go down when things get better. So when we have droughts, when we have what has been happening to our farmers over the last year and before, we see costs go up for crop insurance. We don't cap that arbitrarily saying, We don't like these droughts, we don't like these breezes, we don't like all this stuff, so even though it is real important to the farmers, we are going to cap how much we will help them. The crop insurance is there.

The same thing is true for a family. It wasn't that long ago—in fact, the beginning of 2009—when we in Michigan had the highest unemployment rate in the country. I believe it hit 15.7 percent unemployment at that time. We had an awful lot of people at that time—and many who have continued although things are getting a lot better—who have paid taxes all of their lives; never thought in their wildest dreams they would ever need help putting food on the table for their families, but they did. It was temporary. The average length of time someone needs help is 10 months. But I consider that to be a point of pride for our country, that we have a value system which says we are going to make sure when families are hit with hard times through no fault of their own, they are not going to starve; they are going to be able to put food on the table for their children. I think that is the best about us.

Now that things are getting better and the unemployment rate is coming down, the cost of these programs is coming down. Our farm bill shows a cut in spending not because we have decided we are only going to help some people and not other people—some children, not other children—but because people are going back to work. They didn't need the help anymore, so we are seeing those lines go down. By the way, as crop insurance goes up because disasters and weather events have gone up, we are seeing family disasters going down, which is where we want it to go.

Unfortunately, this amendment would cap the amount of help we would give on supplemental nutrition. It would cap it for 2014 at just over half of the current levels, so we would say we

don't care how many families have a problem, we don't care what happens; we don't care what happens because of weather that wipes out a business and suddenly folks who have worked hard all of their lives find they need some help they never thought they would need. This would arbitrarily cap at just over half the current levels needed to maintain the current help. It would mean absolutely devastating results for millions of families who are trying to feed their children.

If we consider the fact that about 47 percent of those who get help right now are children—almost half of the food help in this country is for children—and then we add to that another 17 percent for senior citizens and the disabled, and we put that together, we find this amendment would be insufficient to even cover those individuals, let alone the other 37 percent of men and women who get help right now. Unfortunately, block granting this program would not only—and capping it and cutting it—would not only hurt families who are counting on us for temporary help but it would create a situation where we couldn't respond during an economic recession as we can right now.

Again, crop insurance means we respond. When there is a disaster, costs and spending go up. I support that. But in this area, if we are capping and block granting and sending it back to the States, there would be no ability to be able to do that.

The other thing that I think is absolutely true for many of our States—and certainly, unfortunately, I regret to say, in my own State right now; it is a fact—is that by block granting and not requiring that the dollars be used for food assistance for families, there is no guarantee it will go to food assistance. None. When we look at the pressures on budgets and other areas for critical needs or things people feel are important, we have absolutely no guarantee that this would go to food for families.

We have a very efficient program right now. It has one of the best error rates of any Federal program right now—maybe the lowest—and we are able to efficiently support families and do it in a way that guarantees they actually get the nutritious food they need.

I am deeply concerned about the amendment. I do not support it. I think it takes us in exactly the wrong direction as a country. It leaves a whole lot of families high and dry in an economic disaster, or any kind of disaster that could occur for them. At their most vulnerable point, when they are trying to figure out what to do to get back on their feet, we create a situation where they don't even have enough food for their families to be able to feed them during their economic crisis.

I strongly urge colleagues to vote no on the amendment.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, would the Senator yield for a question?

Ms. STABENOW. I would be happy to.

Mr. INHOFE. In listening to the comments of the Senator from Michigan in opposition to this amendment, this occurred to me: Does the Senator from Michigan see that there is anything wrong with the fact that this program has increased by 100 percent in the last 4 years? And, secondly, does the Senator from Michigan see nothing objectionable about projecting this for another 4 years to be another 100-percent increase in costs?

Ms. STABENOW. First, to my friend from Oklahoma, I would say the budget office has indicated it will not only not go up another 100 percent, it is going down. So they have projected about an \$11.5 billion reduction which we have put into our farm bill. It is going down because the economy is getting better.

We know that with food assistance, as the unemployment rate goes up, one of the lagging indicators, the things that aren't affected as quickly in coming down, is food assistance for families. So it is now coming down. In my judgment, it is coming down the way it should come down, which is the fact that people are going back to work; that is why it is coming down.

Again, to arbitrarily cap something as basic as food going on the table for a family is something that I, with all due respect, can't support.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, if I may ask my colleague one last question. The Senator from Michigan believes it is going to be going down, but it did not go down when the unemployment rate went down between the 2 years of 2010 and 2011. What would be different about this time?

Ms. STABENOW. Here is what we are finding—and it is not my belief, it is the CBO scoring. The Congressional Budget Office, which we rely on, provides objective scoring—not my judgment—and it is telling us it is going down. The Senator is correct that it is slow to go down. As unemployment goes down, it takes a little longer before food help goes down, because we provide some help to people as they are getting back to work even if they are not at full speed back to work. So it does go down more slowly, but they have adjusted it over the next 10 years showing that, in fact, the spending on food assistance is going down because the economy is getting better. That comes from the CBO and is built into the dollars we have in the bill.

Mr. INHOFE. One last question. Even though I disagree with the answer of the Senator from Michigan for the second question, the first question is whether the Senator from Michigan finds it objectionable that it increased by 100 percent over the past 4 years from 2010?

Ms. STABENOW. What I find objectionable is so many people lost their jobs. The reason it went up is because people were out of work. So I find that objectionable because a lot of those folks were in my State.

I have worked very hard to do everything I can to support the private sec-

tor, and the good news is that manufacturing is coming back and agriculture is strong and moving forward. So in my judgment, yes, I find it very concerning that more people needed help putting food on their table. The good news is that less of them are going to in the next decade, and that is because people are going to be getting back to work.

I believe our time has expired. I don't know if we have others who wish to speak at this point.

Madam President, I ask for the yeas and nays on the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. LAUTENBERG), the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ), the Senator from Washington (Mrs. MURRAY), and the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. ROCKEFELLER) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 36, nays 60, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 132 Leg.]

YEAS—36

Alexander	Fischer	McConnell
Ayotte	Flake	Moran
Barrasso	Graham	Paul
Blunt	Grassley	Risch
Boozman	Hatch	Rubio
Burr	Heller	Scott
Coats	Inhofe	Sessions
Coburn	Johanns	Shelby
Cornyn	Johnson (WI)	Thune
Crapo	Kirk	Toomey
Cruz	Lee	Vitter
Enzi	McCain	Wicker

NAYS—60

Baldwin	Franken	Murkowski
Baucus	Gillibrand	Murphy
Begich	Hagan	Nelson
Bennet	Harkin	Portman
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Pryor
Boxer	Heitkamp	Reed
Brown	Hirono	Reid
Cantwell	Hoeven	Roberts
Cardin	Isakson	Sanders
Carper	Johnson (SD)	Schatz
Casey	Kaine	Schumer
Chambliss	King	Shaheen
Cochran	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Collins	Landrieu	Tester
Coons	Leahy	Udall (CO)
Corker	Levin	Udall (NM)
Cowan	Manchin	Warner
Donnelly	McCaskill	Warren
Durbin	Merkley	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Mikulski	Wyden

NOT VOTING—4

Lautenberg	Murray
Menendez	Rockefeller

The amendment (No. 960) was rejected.

Mr. REID. I move to reconsider the vote and to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. 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. STABENOW. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

AMENDMENTS NOS. 992 AND 1056

Ms. STABENOW. I ask unanimous consent that the following amendments be considered and agreed to: Franken amendment No. 992 and Vitter amendment No. 1056.

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

The amendments were agreed to, as follows:

AMENDMENT NO. 992

(Purpose: To provide access to grocery delivery for homebound seniors and individuals with disabilities eligible for supplemental nutrition assistance benefits)

On page 351, between lines 12 and 13, insert the following:

SEC. 4001. ACCESS TO GROCERY DELIVERY FOR HOMEBOUND SENIORS AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES ELIGIBLE FOR SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE BENEFITS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3(p) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2012(p)) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (3), by striking “and” at the end;

(2) in paragraph (4), by striking the period at the end and inserting “; and”; and

(3) by inserting after paragraph (4) the following:

“(5) a public or private nonprofit food purchasing and delivery service that—

“(A) purchases food for, and delivers the food to, individuals who are—

“(i) unable to shop for food; and

“(ii)(I) not less than 60 years of age; or

“(II) individuals with disabilities;

“(B) clearly notifies the participating household at the time the household places a food order—

“(i) of any delivery fee associated with the food purchase and delivery provided to the household by the service; and

“(ii) that a delivery fee cannot be paid with benefits provided under the supplemental nutrition assistance program; and

“(C) sells food purchased for the household at the price paid by the service for the food without any additional cost markup.”.

(b) ISSUANCE OF REGULATIONS.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall issue regulations that—

(1) establish criteria to identify a food purchasing and delivery service described in section 3(p)(5) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (as added by subsection (a)(3)); and

(2) establish procedures to ensure that the service—

(A) does not charge more for a food item than the price paid by the service for the food item;

(B) offers food delivery service at no or low cost to households under that Act;

(C) ensures that benefits provided under the supplemental nutrition assistance program are used only to purchase food, as defined in section 3 of that Act (7 U.S.C. 2012);

(D) limits the purchase of food, and the delivery of the food, to households eligible to receive services described in section 3(p)(5) of that Act (as added by subsection (a)(3));

(E) has established adequate safeguards against fraudulent activities, including unauthorized use of electronic benefit cards issued under that Act; and

(F) such other requirements as the Secretary considers appropriate.

(c) LIMITATION.—Before the issuance of regulations under subsection (b), the Secretary may not approve more than 20 food purchasing and delivery services described in section 3(p)(5) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (as added by subsection (a)(3)) to participate as retail food stores under the supplemental nutrition assistance program.

(d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—This section and the amendments made by this section take effect on the date that is 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

AMENDMENT NO. 1056

(Purpose: To end food stamp eligibility for convicted violent rapists, pedophiles, and murderers)

At the end of subtitle A of title IV, insert the following:

SEC. 4019. ELIGIBILITY DISQUALIFICATIONS FOR CERTAIN CONVICTED FELONS.

Section 6 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015) (as amended by section 4004) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(s) DISQUALIFICATION FOR CERTAIN CONVICTED FELONS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—An individual shall not be eligible for benefits under this Act if the individual is convicted of—

“(A) aggravated sexual abuse under section 2241 of title 18, United States Code;

“(B) murder under section 1111 of title 18, United States Code;

“(C) an offense under chapter 110 of title 18, United States Code;

“(D) a Federal or State offense involving sexual assault, as defined in 40002(a) of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (42 U.S.C. 13925(a)); or

“(E) an offense under State law determined by the Attorney General to be substantially similar to an offense described in subparagraph (A), (B), or (C).

“(2) EFFECTS ON ASSISTANCE AND BENEFITS FOR OTHERS.—The amount of benefits otherwise required to be provided to an eligible household under this Act shall be determined by considering the individual to whom paragraph (1) applies not to be a member of such household, except that the income and resources of the individual shall be considered to be income and resources of the household.

“(3) ENFORCEMENT.—Each State shall require each individual applying for benefits under this Act, during the application process, to state, in writing, whether the individual, or any member of the household of the individual, has been convicted of a crime described in paragraph (1).”

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H. CON. RES. 25

Mr. KAINE. Madam President, I rise to speak briefly about the Senate budget. At the close of my comments, I will make yet another motion to put the Senate budget into conference with the House.

As we all know, we were here until 5 a.m. on March 23 to pass the first Senate budget through regular budgetary order in 4 years. It was a full, open process both in committee, with numerous amendments, and then on the Senate floor, with over 100 amendments voted on and over 70 passed.

It is now past time, many days past time, for us to begin a budget conference process. This will enable the Senate to return to normal budgetary order, and it is what our voters, both Democratic and Republican, in all of our States expect us to do to have a

meaningful conference about this budget with the House.

Good news. We are seeing some recent examples of normal compromise in this body that I think is worthy of some attention: the appropriations bill we passed through a regular order process for the remainder of 2013 in March; the marketplace fairness bill we passed, the problem that had been searching for a solution for 15 to 20 years; the WRDA bill we passed last week; and the debates we are having about the farm bill today. All have involved significant open processes in a committee, significant open processes on the Senate floor. The Senate action then moves in a regular order action into discussion with the House.

I think it is up to this body to show the public we don't just embrace regular order and normal processes on these important issues, but that we also embrace them on something as critically important as the Federal budget.

For that reason, I would ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 33, H. Con. Res. 25; that the amendment which is at the desk, the text of S. Con. Res. 8, the budget resolution passed by the Senate, be inserted in lieu thereof; that H. Con. Res. 25, as amended, be agreed to, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the Senate insist on its amendment, request a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses, and that the Chair be authorized to appoint conferees on the part of the Senate; that following the authorization, two motions to instruct conferees be in order: motion to instruct relative to the debt limit and motion to instruct relative to taxes/revenue; that there be 2 hours of debate equally divided between the two leaders or their designees prior to votes in relation to those motions; further, that no amendments be in order to either of the motions prior to the votes; and all of the above occurring with no intervening action or debate.

I make that motion.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection by the Senator from Florida?

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, reserving the right to object, I would ask the Senator from Virginia if he would consider adding—I would ask consent that the Senator modify his request that it not be in order for the Senate to consider a conference report that includes reconciliation instructions to raise the debt limit.

The reason I make that is as follows: First of all, I do respect regular order tremendously. In fact, I want to take this brief opportunity to congratulate the Judiciary Committee on the lengthy process with regard to the immigration bill, which I think will help us in the process of having a better product.

Obviously, also, although we disagree with the outcome because of the way it was constructed, I also disagree with

the way this budget is constructed. This issue of the debt limit is an extraordinary measure. That is why I would ask the Senator from Virginia to modify his request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator still modify his request?

Mr. KAINE. I do not agree to the modification because I think that would be modifying the budget that was passed by this body on March 23.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Is there objection to the original request?

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Madam President, I rise again in regret. The normal regular order of this body after both sides of the Capitol have agreed on a budget is to meet and that we have a proper process to instruct conferees to have a budget. A motion to appoint conferees to be bound by a requirement, no matter how worthy it is, is not the way the regular order functions in this body, and that is a fact.

For 4 years I sat here and beat up on the majority leader for his failure to bring a budget to the floor of this Senate. We brought a budget to the floor. We spent many hours on all kinds of amendments, and now we can't go to conference unless we agree not to raise the debt limit.

Does my colleague from Florida believe the House of Representatives, dominated by Republicans, is going to raise the debt limit? Does my colleague from Florida believe any conferees who are appointed, where we have to place certain restrictions on those conferees, that would apply to the other body as well? I don't think so.

I don't think that is the way this body is supposed to function. We are in a gridlock. Here we are, 4 years without a budget. We finally get a budget, we stay up all night, and because somebody doesn't want to raise the debt limit we are not going to go to conference. That is not how this body should function.

The American people deserve better. They deserve a budget. Every family in America has to live on a budget. Here we are objecting because there is a concern about raising the debt limit.

All I can say to my friend from Florida is that the American people don't like it, and I don't like it. Most of his colleagues and the Republicans in this Senate don't like it that we are blocking budget conferees from going forward and doing what conferees are supposed to do. I would imagine the majority leader will continue to raise this motion to move forward.

By the way, it is the regular order to have motions to instruct the conferees. A motion to instruct the conferees on the debt limit should be in order. A motion to instruct relative to taxes and revenue should be in order. That is

the regular order to do it. It is not the regular order to demand certain conditions on the conferees. We instruct the conferees.

The conferees are appointed by both the majority and Republican leader, and we place our confidence in those conferees to reflect the will of the majority.

I have to say I am disappointed in the Senator from Florida, in his objection and his demand that we do something that is not in the regular order.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, thank you. To the Senator from Arizona, for whom I have great respect, I would point out two things: The first is in his argument when stating the issue of the debt limit is a nonissue. Hence, I don't understand the objection to having language in this motion that says there will not be a raising of the debt limit. There should be a discussion of the debt limit in the context of the broader issues this country is facing. As a result, I don't understand why we can't just put it in that we are not going to raise the debt limit.

I would also further say that I do respect this institution tremendously, and I do believe in regular order to the extent that we are talking about procedure. The problem is that the regular order of Washington has given us a \$17 trillion debt. In fact, that is one of the reasons I ran for the Senate. I would submit to you, with all due respect to all of my colleagues who serve here, I don't think we can run up a \$17 trillion debt without some bipartisan cooperation.

To some extent what I am concerned about is the regular order of doing things in this city, where the debt limit has been raised consistently without any conversation about the fact that this government borrows 40 cents out of every dollar it spends. Never in the history of this country and of this Republic has a generation of leadership robbed a future generation like this generation of leadership has done.

That is my concern. My concern is that I do not have trust in Washington, DC. I do not have trust—I don't care who is in charge—that we will not recklessly, once again, raise the debt limit of the greatest country on Earth without any consideration for limiting the way we spend money in the future so that we do not bankrupt this extraordinary Nation, and the implications that could have on our children.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. I will yield to the Senator from Tennessee in just 1 second.

The Senator from Florida is saying, if he has an issue he feels strongly about, then that has to be included in any conference that is convened over any bill that is passed by the Senate, the House, and goes to conference. That is not a precedent I believe should be established in the Senate.

I think I share the concern of the Senator from Florida about the debt and the deficit. I will match my record against anybody's as far as trying to eliminate the debt and the deficit, including that of the Senator from Florida.

We are about to establish a precedent that if any conferees are appointed on bills that are passed by the House and the Senate, that we are free then to put certain restrictions on those conferees. If the Senator from Florida believes that is the right way this body should function, then I would suggest to him that most people would disagree with this kind of violation of the regular order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I am reluctant to break up this conversation among my fellow Republican Senators because they seem to be at odds, but I do want to remind all of the Senators—and I think the Senator from Arizona has alluded to this—we were slapped around unmercifully for not passing a Senate budget resolution.

Mr. MCCAIN. And deservedly so.

Mr. DURBIN. I expected that. I would say to the Senator from Arizona there were answers, and I thought good answers, but not good enough. We passed a budget resolution. The Senator was here. It passed by one vote. We stayed until early in the morning hours to get it done.

Senator PATTY MURRAY did a masterful job in putting this together. Of course, our passing the resolution is only half of the story. The way this is supposed to work is the so-called regular order, if it differs between the Senate and the House, is we come together in a conference to work out the differences. How long have we been trying—how many weeks have we been trying?

Mr. REID. Sixty-one days.

Mr. DURBIN. Sixty-one days we have been begging the Republicans—we have been begging the Republicans, not all of them, to give us an opportunity to go to conference and work out our differences, if we can.

That is the regular order. And each time we have asked, as Senator KAINE of Virginia did this morning, there has been a condition to it: No, you can't sit down to try to work out your differences unless you agree ahead of time to take certain things off the table. That is not reasonable. It is not reasonable if you are serious about the deficit, if you are serious about the debt of the United States.

I could dream up a half dozen things. All right, I won't allow us to go to conference if it in any way is going to touch Social Security benefits. All right? I think I would need a lot of support for that, and we wouldn't go to conference. But at the end of the day, if we are serious about the deficit, we are supposed to sit down and work out our differences, House and Senate, Democrats and Republicans. When Sen-

ator KAINE makes this unanimous consent request to go to a conference committee, he is asking for the regular order of business around here.

Mr. CRUZ. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. MCCAIN. May I ask my friend from Illinois, isn't that what the regular order is, that makes it perfectly applicable, if we instruct the conferees, which is what we are asking for in this unanimous consent agreement?

Mr. DURBIN. Yes. The Senate majority leader is on the floor, and he has said if there is to be a motion to instruct conferees on the debt ceiling, for example, then we can have a vote on the floor of the Senate. That is the regular order.

Mr. CRUZ. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. DURBIN. But to condition the granting of the unanimous consent request to go to conference on the concern du jour of whichever Senator comes to the floor is unproductive.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I haven't yielded the floor as yet, and I think the Senator from Texas had a question for me.

Mr. CRUZ. I thank my friend from Illinois, and I would ask him, if the position he is championing is the regular order, then why is it the Democrats are asking unanimous consent to set aside the regular order to go to conference?

The only reason unanimous consent is needed is because you are endeavoring to circumvent the regular order, and by doing so opening the door for a procedural trick to raise the debt ceiling with 50 votes rather than 60.

Mr. DURBIN. I just checked with the majority leader to make sure my memory is correct. The Senator from Texas will learn that when we go to a conference committee, we are subjected to a possibility of a filibuster. Does that ring a note of familiarity on your side of the aisle? If we are going to face a filibuster and 60 votes, it is not going to happen.

What we are trying to do is to establish ahead of time we are going to a conference. So if we go through the so-called regular order to go to conference, we will reach the same impasse with the Republicans objecting and the Republicans potentially raising the issue of a filibuster. That is why we are trying for this unanimous consent, which I would think, from the Republican side, we would have bipartisan agreement that we move to a conference committee.

Mr. CRUZ. Would the Senator yield for another question?

Mr. DURBIN. I am sorry, I am mistaken, and, thankfully, have been corrected. It is not a filibuster. It would call for using the House resolution of 50 hours of debate and another vote-arama to go through the regular order of things. It is not a filibuster. I stand corrected on that.

But the net result of it is to drag out as long, if not longer, than the earlier

debate on the Senate budget resolution. That is why the unanimous consent request has been made.

Mr. CRUZ. Will the Senator yield for an additional question?

Mr. DURBIN. I am happy to yield.

Mr. CRUZ. So if I understand correctly, we are agreed now this is not the regular order. The Senate is not following the regular order that would have been taking up the House budget resolution and voting on that. That is not what is being pursued here, which is why the majority is seeking unanimous consent to set aside the rules.

But let me ask the question, if I might—

Mr. DURBIN. I yielded for a question, and I will respond. Then you may ask another, if you wish.

It is the regular order of things to ask for unanimous consent, and it is the usual and customary way the Senate works so that we don't have to repeat all over again the debate on the budget resolution to take up the House version. So it is not unusual. It is the regular order.

Mr. CRUZ. I would suggest that unanimous consent is used to circumvent the regular order—

Mr. DURBIN. No.

Mr. CRUZ. And in particular the debt ceiling was not contained in the budget, it was not debated in the budget, it is not part of the budget, and the only question here—we could have gone to conference 60 days ago if the Democrats had simply agreed not to use reconciliation as a backdoor trick to raise the debt ceiling, which has happened three times in the past. So this is not a hypothetical risk. This is, I believe, the intention of the majority, and it is why we are objecting to raising the debt ceiling—to issuing an unlimited credit card—and digging the hole deeper without actually fixing the problem.

Mr. DURBIN. To respond to the Senator from Texas, we have been through this before. In the House of Representatives they threatened not to extend the debt ceiling of the United States and caused severe damage to our economy. Business leaders, labor leaders, families across America asked: How could the Congress do something so irresponsible as to not extend the debt ceiling of the United States? The President said he is not going to get into a political bargain over the debt ceiling of the United States. He is right. This ought to be something both parties take very seriously, as to whether we would jeopardize the full faith and credit of the United States of America, whether we—

Mr. MCCAIN. Will the Senator yield for a further question?

Mr. DURBIN. I will in one moment, as soon as I finish replying to the Senator from Texas.

So the notion this debt ceiling is something we can casually say whether it is approved and extended makes no difference—it makes a big difference. And whether it is included in this, in terms of the budget resolution, re-

mains to be seen. But we could have a motion to instruct the conferees relative to the debt ceiling. I think that has already been discussed.

What I am saying is: Why in the world aren't we sitting at a table this day, Democrats and Republicans, House and Senate, trying to work out our differences? I think most American people would ask: Isn't that why we sent you to Washington? Yet we run into these objections to unanimous consent requests.

I yield to the Senator from Arizona for a question.

Mr. MCCAIN. Isn't it a little bizarre, this whole exercise we are going through, when some of us are asking to go to conference with a body that is dominated by the Members of our own party? We don't have, apparently, enough confidence the majority of the conference appointed by the other side of the Capitol will be a majority of Republicans and not Democrats? Isn't that a little bizarre?

And really, what we are talking about here, I will be very honest with my colleague from Illinois, is a minority within a minority. Because the majority of my colleagues in the Senate on this side of the aisle, with motions to instruct the conferees, want to move forward and appoint these conferees and do what every American family has to do in America and that is to have a budget.

Mr. DURBIN. I will yield the floor, because others wish to speak, but I will say that at this point in time we have passed a Senate budget resolution. We were challenged by the Republicans to do it, and we did it. It wasn't easy. It was a close vote, but we did it. Now we want to move to the next logical step and sit down with the House, resolve our differences and move on so we can reduce the debt of this United States in a responsible and orderly way.

The objection on the other side of the aisle for 61 days should come to an end. I salute my friend from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. I would ask my friend again, basically what we are saying here on this side of the aisle is that we don't trust our colleagues on the other side of the Capitol who are, in the majority, Republicans. I guess that is the lesson that can be learned here.

But far more importantly than that—far more importantly than that—in a recent poll I saw, 16 percent of the American people approve of Congress. When I go home and have town-hall meetings and I say: You know what, my friends, we don't even have a budget. We can't even agree, Republicans and Democrats—Republicans and Republicans in this case—to have a budget, the same as every American family does. Does that contribute to the approval and the respect the people of this country have for us? The answer is obviously no.

So I urge my colleagues again, let's put some confidence in, if not the conferees appointed here, the conferees who will be appointed on the other side

of the Capitol who are from our party, who are fiscal conservatives just as we are, instead of this blocking by what I assure my colleagues—all three of them here—is a minority of the minority of Republicans in the Senate who do not want to move forward with a budget that we spent so many hours and so much effort in achieving. Do not block it from going forward.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I salute the Senator from Arizona for his intuitive, wise analysis of this situation. I am sorry we still have an objection from the Republican side of the aisle to go to a conference committee with Republican House Members dominating that conference on their side. Apparently, they do not have confidence those House Members can speak for them, but I think it is important we do move to this conference committee as soon as possible.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. KAIN. Madam President, I rise to associate myself briefly with the comments of both Senators MCCAIN and DURBIN. This is not primarily about the budget. This is not primarily about Senate rules. This is about compromise. In Congress, a bicameral body, the Framers established compromise was necessary to take action. Will we allow processes to go forward so we can listen to each other, dialog, and find compromise, or will we use procedural mechanisms to block processes of dialog and compromise even from starting?

The Senate budget is a very different budget than the House budget. We are all free to have our preferred option. But the way we get to a final budget is to have Senate and House conferees sit down together, in what no doubt will be a difficult discussion, and to compare budgets and debate and dialog and find compromise.

The Senate acted on the 23rd of March by a majority vote in accord with the rules of this body to pass a Senate budget after 4 years. The effort to object to the beginning of a conference, make no mistake about it, is fundamentally an effort to block processes of compromise. In the living organism of government that was established by our Framers, compromise is the blood that keeps the organism alive. Efforts to block compromise are fundamentally efforts that are destructive of this institution.

So I stand by the motion I have made. I ask my colleagues to allow processes of compromise to go forward.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, the senior Senator from Arizona urged this body to trust the Republicans. Let me be clear: I don't trust the Republicans and I don't trust the Democrats. I think a whole lot of Americans likewise don't trust Republicans and the Democrats because it is leadership in

both parties that has gotten us in this mess.

My wife and I have two little girls at home. They are 5 and 2. When Caroline was born, our national debt was \$10 trillion. Today it is nearly \$17 trillion. In her short 5 years of life, the national debt has grown by over 60 percent. What we are doing to our kids and grandkids is immoral.

I commend the Democrats in this body for their candor. The Democrats and President Obama have been very explicit. It is their intention to raise the debt ceiling, and to do so with no conditions whatsoever—to keep borrowing and borrowing and borrowing money without any structural reforms to fix the problems. That is an intellectually consistent position. I think it is a dangerous position but it is at least candid. That is the reason why every day, for 60 days, the Democrats have opposed taking the debt ceiling off the table in this discussion.

Unfortunately, one of the reasons we got into this mess is because a lot of Republicans were complicit in this spending spree. That is why so many Americans are disgusted with both sides of this body, because we need leaders on both sides to do as my friend from Virginia said, to roll up our sleeves, to compromise and to work together and fix the problem—fix the enormous fiscal and economic problems and stop bankrupting our country.

What this issue is all about is very simple: Will we allow the debt ceiling to be raised in an unlimited amount with a 50-vote threshold? And if the answer to that is yes, we have, in effect, just voted to raise the debt ceiling because the Democrats hold a majority of this body—55 seats—and the Democrats are explicit that they want to raise the debt ceiling. If we go to conference without the debt ceiling being taken off the plate, it is a 100-percent certainty the debt ceiling will be raised. It has been done three times in recent history. Every Republican who stands against holding the line here is saying: Let's give the Democrats a blank check to borrow any money they want, with no reforms, no leadership to fix the problem. I don't think that is consistent with any of our responsibilities.

A final point. Much has been said about the budget was debated, the budget was considered, and that is surely true. But the budget contains nothing about the debt ceiling. The budget did not consider the debt ceiling. When all of us were here all night debating the budget, we didn't debate the debt ceiling. The question here is whether the majority of the Senate will be able to bootstrap the debt ceiling—a totally different issue—onto the budget. And the reason for doing it is to use a political trick. It would allow the majority to pass a debt ceiling increase on just 50 votes.

I think it would be profoundly irresponsible for this body to raise the debt ceiling without fixing the problem—

without getting the economy going, without getting jobs back, and without stopping the path we are on of bankrupting this country. That is what this fight is about.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Madam President, I want to follow up on some of the comments made by my friend and colleague, the junior Senator from Virginia. I agree wholeheartedly that we need to have this debate. We need a budget. The American people want it, they deserve it, they have been without it for 4 years.

It is because we want this debate and it is because we want this issue debated in public that we have this concern. In other words, as the Senator from Texas pointed out a moment ago, there are a lot of issues that were discussed and debated and voted on when we were addressing the budget resolution a couple of months ago. We were here until 5 in the morning making sure we could get through all the amendments.

At no point during that very lengthy discussion in connection with the budget resolution did we discuss or address or have a vote on or in any way make a decision regarding the debt ceiling. That is a separate debate, one that did not come up in connection with the budget resolution. It is a debate that needs to happen. Just as the discussion of the budget resolution needs to move forward, we do need to have a public debate and ultimately a vote with regard to the debt ceiling. The American people expect us to have this debate. They expect us to have it in the light of day and not under cover of darkness behind closed doors, resulting in one of those infamous backroom deals that have given Washington its often much-deserved bad name.

The debt ceiling was not in the bill. It was not in the budget resolution. We have not debated it. All we are asking for is that the other side agree that they will not use budget reconciliation as a mechanism for working a backroom deal to raise the debt limit. The American people expect us to debate this, not in secret but in public. That is what we are trying to do.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, since I raised the objection today, I wanted to close my comments by accurately describing to the people at home or in the gallery or elsewhere what is happening here. Maybe some folks are wondering what this is all about. It is pretty straightforward. In fact, for over 1,000 days the Senate did not pass a budget under the leadership of the current majority, and we did complain about that because that was problematic. Ultimately, this year, they finally passed a budget—one which, quite frankly, doesn't deal with our debt and doesn't help grow our economy, but they passed a budget.

The House has passed its budget. The Senate has passed a budget. The way it works is that now both sides are supposed to sit down and negotiate. What is happening is that a motion is being made to start these negotiations. Nobody here is objecting to these negotiations. That can begin today. This process they want can happen right this very moment. The only thing we are asking is that it be clear that as part of that negotiation—an increase in the debt limit not be part of it. Here is why it is so important that it not be part of it: because we have not discussed it. As the Senator from Texas pointed out, when we debated the budget we did not debate the debt limit.

Let me tell you what the debt limit is. It is the credit line of the United States. It is how much money the government is allowed to borrow. This is not a trivial matter. I heard people stand here today, my fellow Senators, and say: You can raise any objection to any issue you want to stop the whole process. This is not a trivial objection. I am not asking that key lime pie be made the official pie of the United States or some ridiculous thing. This is the debt limit, something that has been called the single greatest national security problem facing the United States of America by a national security official.

All we are saying is that you cannot come back from that conference with an increase in the debt limit because if that happens, it will be a 51-vote majority here to do it as a matter of routine.

Frankly, the problem is that the debt limit increases have become a matter of routine, and that is how we get from \$10 trillion to \$16.5 trillion in such a short period of time.

Ultimately, you are right. We should not treat the debt limit casually. That means we should not just casually and cavalierly say we will never raise it no matter what, no matter you do, but we also should not just casually raise it as a matter of routine, and that is the fundamental problem. The impact this is having on our economy is serious.

I deeply respect this institution. One of the reasons I ran for the Senate is I thought I could make a difference because in this Senate even a minority within the minority can make a difference.

Let me tell you, one day in the future I will not serve here anymore, and someday in the future my children, who today are very young, will have to deal with the consequences of the decisions we make or fail to make in my time in the Senate. If what they inherit is an economy crippled by the horrifying decisions that have been made here now and in the past, I am going to have to answer for that. I am going to have to explain to them.

What did you do or what did you not do when you were in the Senate? How could you have allowed this debt to go forward? What did you do to do something about this debt issue?

My answer to them cannot be, well, I followed the regular order. I played along to get along. I went ahead and acquiesced to what my colleagues wanted.

That cannot be my answer. That will not be my answer.

The bottom line is that we can move to conference right now, we can begin negotiating with the House this very day. All we are asking—all we are asking is that as part of that negotiation, they cannot come back here with a debt limit as part of it. The debt limit is an important issue. It should be discussed on its own as it relates to the entire economy, not simply the 1-year budget of the United States of America. That is the basis of our objection.

If the majority would reconsider their position and come to the floor and offer the same motion but with language that clearly says it cannot include reconciliation instructions to raise the debt limit, we will be in conference with the House this very day. But if they fail to do that, we cannot move forward because what we cannot do is continue to routinely raise the debt limit of this country without any serious conversation about how we are going to begin to put our fiscal House in order because the impact it is having on our economy is disastrous.

Our economy is not growing. There are people in America right now who are unemployed or underemployed because the debt is scaring people away from investing in our economy and in our future. If we do nothing about that, then, my colleagues, we will be the first generation of Americans to leave the next generation worse off. That has never happened in our history.

I hope we can come together to prevent that from happening because I think that if we do some simple but important things for our country, including bringing our debt under control, I believe that if we do that, this new century, this 21st century, can also be an American century.

My hope is that at some point today or tomorrow or the next few days we come to this floor and make a motion to go to conference with very simple and straightforward language that says the conference report cannot include reconciliation instructions to raise the debt limit.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. I would like to speak as in morning business.

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

TRAGEDY IN OKLAHOMA

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, I want to talk about the tragedy this week in Oklahoma. This is the 2-year anniversary of the Joplin tornado we had 90 miles from my home, a district that I represented for a long time before I came to the Senate and still get to represent now as part of our State. But I want to be sure we take time yet again today to let people in Oklahoma

know that our thoughts are with them, our prayers are with them.

First responders are continuing to search and rescue. Their recovery efforts are happening. Words clearly cannot describe the loss these communities and the community particularly of Moore, OK, have had in the last few days. I know the Nation is praying for them. I am too—for the people who lost children at the local elementary schools. The thought of sending somebody to school in the morning and them not coming home that day is a tragedy that will affect people's lives forever. The friends who are lost, the family members who are lost will always be part of the ongoing impact that they have on that family and that community.

In Joplin, MO, 2 years ago we had 161 people die. The community has come back in incredible ways, but you never want to minimize in any way the loss of those 161 lives. Every one of them had a story to tell, just as every one of the people lost in Moore, OK, and in other places in Oklahoma in recent days has a story to tell.

It was a big storm. It affected people. Pretty quickly you figure out that while you regret the property you lost, the property you lost is not really all that important, but the lives that were lost are. In addition to the 161 people killed in Joplin, MO, on May 22, 2011, 7,000 homes were gone. I was there the next day or the day after. They were gone. It was like a nuclear blast. The pictures from Moore, OK, remind me of that. Five hundred businesses were gone.

I will say for the people in Joplin, they immediately began to think about Joplin tomorrow instead of Joplin yesterday. Two years later it is still a community dealing with loss, but it is a community that is building new schools and new businesses, and houses are under construction. I talked to someone just yesterday. Their family member was about to get into a house that Habitat helped them build.

One of the things I found out that I had never really thought about even though I had a lot of experience with storm loss—never anything like 7,000 homes at one time—the people who are the least likely to have insurance are the people who have their house paid for. In that group, they are the least likely, or the people who may have inherited the house from their parents, because there is no banker to tell them they have to have an insurance policy. Maybe it was just kind of a seamless moving back home or staying home and suddenly that house is gone.

By the way, this is something the Federal Government—really probably rightly—does not have a role in. If you do not have insurance, you made that choice not to have insurance. When we talk about Federal aid, we are almost always talking about cleaning up the streets, the water systems, the power facilities, getting the community back in order. There are some programs for

public buildings that are available. It is not that we are going to go in and help you rebuild your house if you chose not to have insurance. That is not what happens.

But volunteers immediately show up. The first volunteers are your neighbors. The first responders are your neighbors. It happened this week in Oklahoma. It happened 2 years ago in Joplin. As soon as people had brushed themselves off and found their own family members, they began to look up and down the street to see whom they could help, whom they could help dig out of rubble or whom they could help secure something they were concerned about. Those are the first responders.

Then your neighbors from not too far away—in fact, Oklahoma is right on the edge of our State. They are our neighbors. There were people from—public officials, fire and water and police from Joplin who were there within 12 hours, and they will be back when they are needed.

There is a lot to be done. The one thing I would advise people who want to know what they can personally do to help—there are places to send money, there are charities to help. They are helping. All those things are important and good. My personal advice if you want to help, if you can at all, find out before you go what it is you are going to be doing. The last thing communities in this kind of situation need is a lot of people wandering around, wondering what they can do to help. There are plenty of people wandering around already. But if you come through your church, your civic club, through some organization you have helped in the past, through Habitat for Humanity, through a group you have worked with before that does this—link up with them and go. That is probably the better thing to do.

There is a lot to be done. First responders, as I said, are your neighbors. By the way, they are also the last responders. The people still there 2 years later helping build a Habitat for Humanity house are probably at that point your neighbors. They are probably not Habitat for Humanity from 1,000 miles away. They are local people who have finally found another family who needs help, and they are helping them.

This disaster, by all recent standards, deserves Federal assistance. FEMA is there, but beyond that, the Federal assistance that we give when a disaster is too big for a community to handle on its own and too big for the community and the State they are in to handle on their own, that is where the Federal Government should step in and does and will.

There are people all over the country who want to help, but they also are going to be helping as taxpayers. It appears that the resources to do that are in the current pipeline. As I said, FEMA is there. We are going to be there, I am sure, working in this body with our colleagues, Senator COBURN

and Senator INHOFE, to do our best to reach out to our fellow Americans who have a real tragedy, and that is a tragedy where all the American people can step up and help by doing what we do when these disasters strike.

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I would like to associate myself with the wise words of my colleague from Missouri, whose State has experienced so much tragedy last year much like the devastation in Oklahoma. On behalf of the State of Minnesota, our hearts and thoughts are with the people of Oklahoma.

I would also like to thank Senator BLUNT for cosponsoring an amendment in the farm bill which will make it easier for seniors and those with disabilities to receive groceries in their homes that is delivered by volunteers. They pay for it with their SNAP dollars.

I am grateful to the whole Senate for adopting the farm bill package by unanimous consent. I am very grateful for that.

I am very pleased the Senate has taken up the farm bill, and I hope we can pass this in the Senate and the House so our Nation's farmers have the certainty they need to provide food for the rest of us.

There are so many important pieces to this bill which will be great for Minnesota and Wisconsin. For example, it contains provisions to support beginning and young farmers to help them start farming operations. I think the average age of a farmer in Minnesota is about 58. We need young and beginning farmers.

The farm bill also contains important conservation measures so farmers can better protect their land. It also contains a comprehensive energy title—that I helped to write—in order to make our agriculture sector and our Nation more energy independent.

Above all, the farm bill provides a safety net for farmers, and that safety net is the centerpiece of this bill. The reason it is there is because agriculture is inherently risky. Just last year we witnessed a historic drought which devastated the Nation's corn and soybean crops and forced ranchers to cull their livestock. Agriculture is prone to weather disruption such as drought, flood, hail, pests, disease, and global market forces which can drastically disrupt prices, and that is why the farm bill safety net is so essential and important.

The farm bill safety net provides disaster assurance for livestock producers, and it contains crop insurance so farmers have certainty over their planting decisions. It also contains a dairy program to make sure we have a healthy dairy economy in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Vermont, New York, and other States.

That is why we have the Sugar Program, to help protect our sugar growers. The program is important to Minnesota's sugar growers and to growers across the Nation. In addition to pro-

tecting farmers, these programs enhance the domestic supply of food that is so important to our Nation. Unfortunately, some of my colleagues don't support a strong farm safety net, and they have decided to go after the Sugar Program in the farm bill this year.

Let's be clear about one thing: By attacking the Sugar Program, or any other farm safety net, they are helping to send jobs overseas. Ironically, this attack comes just a week after 60 Senators supported a provision to make sure some of the funds used in water infrastructure projects are used to purchase U.S. iron and U.S. steel. Some of the very same Senators who are fighting for a domestic steel industry are now turning their backs on our farmers by pulling the plug on our Sugar Program. I also heard some argue that we should just let the free market work.

Madam President, did you know that the government of Mexico is Mexico's biggest producer and exporter of sugar? That is not much of a free market.

Brazil, the world's largest sugarcane producer, spends billions of dollars to subsidize its Sugar Program. Let's be clear: Removing the protections we have for our domestic sugar producers will do nothing but kill an American industry and outsource jobs to our competitors.

Some have depicted the amendment of Senator SHAHEEN and TOOMEY as nothing more than a rollback of U.S. policy to the pre-2008 policy.

Let's be clear: The reason Congress modified the U.S. sugar policy in the 2008 farm bill was primarily because the provision in NAFTA, which allows subsidized Mexican sugar unfettered access to U.S. markets, kicked in in 2008. The reason the bill changed in 2008 is because the Sugar Program changed. Let's be clear: Eliminating or weakening the Sugar Program is going to kill rural jobs in America.

I urge my colleagues to stand for agriculture and American jobs. I ask that my colleagues oppose the amendment of Senator SHAHEEN and Senator TOOMEY.

I see the Senator from Illinois is here and about to join us on the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. The tragedy that hit Oklahoma earlier this week—killing innocent people and children and destroying homes, businesses, and schools—just reminds us of how vulnerable we are to the forces of nature. It wasn't the first time the wind blew in Oklahoma. In fact, that same community had been victimized by a tornado years ago.

If we go back in history to the 1920s, the State of Oklahoma faced what we have now characterized as the Dust Bowl. I didn't know much about that, but I read about it. I kind of knew it destroyed lives, farms, and many people had to pick up and leave. They moved to California and other places.

I ran across an excellent book written by a man named Tim Egan. Tim is

from Seattle, WA. I don't know him personally, but Senator MURRAY and Senator CANTWELL know him. He writes for the New York Times and also writes excellent books. He wrote a book called "The Worst Hard Time," which tells the story about the Dust Bowl.

What happened, as I understand it, was there was speculation on wheat during World War I. There was a scarcity of wheat because of the war in Europe. People in the United States saw the prices of wheat going high, so they started planting. They planted on fragile ground. As a consequence, they were churning up the ground to plant the wheat and were not mindful of some serious possibilities that the topsoil would blow away.

One thing led to another and it became a natural disaster—the Dust Bowl. As a consequence, many people left Oklahoma and many people saw their lives change forever. Tim Egan's book, "The Worst Hard Time," tells about that in detail.

As a result of that experience in the 1920s, a couple of things happened. First, we started taking conservation seriously; for example, how to conserve the topsoil of our land so it doesn't blow away. Ultimately, this gift from God is what gives us such fertile soil.

Secondly, because we know a farmer is at the mercy of nature, we started to think of ways—under President Franklin Roosevelt—to make sure the farmers could get through hard times, such as a bad year, a bad crop, or low prices.

Starting in the 1930s with the New Deal, we started dreaming up farm programs, and there were many of them. I can recall when I was elected to Congress in 1982, I represented an agricultural district. At the time I knew little or nothing about farming. I was trying to learn as fast as I could as to the options and history of these programs. I learned some things, but I am certainly not an expert.

Over the years we have tried a lot of different ways of protecting farmers from the vagaries of nature and the market. Not that long ago—10 or 15 years—we had a situation where we were seeing these natural disasters—such as floods, droughts, and disease—that claimed crops. Many of the farmers affected by those came to Congress and asked for help. We were giving them disaster payments, we called them, to get them through another year.

Well, the decision was made about 10 years ago that it would be better for us to deal with that unpredictability of nature and move away from disaster payments to a program which is known as the Crop Insurance Program. It speaks for itself. It is a program where a farmer can buy insurance and with that insurance protect that farm from a bad productive season or low prices in the market.

More and more farmers started looking for that protection, but they were not that happy with crop insurance as

it was too expensive. So what we did was make a calculation that if we subsidized the crop insurance premiums and if the Federal taxpayers kept them low, more farmers would buy it and we would pay less in natural disaster payments since the insurance program would take care of that exposure.

That is basically what we decided 10 years ago, and since then there has been a decrease in the cost of premiums and an increase in farmer participation and crop insurance, which is a good thing.

I might also say that during the same period of time we had some income protection for farmers in what was known as direct support payments. Unfortunately, those payments were guaranteed even in good times, and they became indefensible. We had some farmers with record profits on their farms and still getting a direct Federal support payment check.

We have the farm bill pending on the floor. Senator STABENOW of Michigan has done a remarkable job—again, for the second time—in writing a farm bill. She wrote a farm bill last year, which we sent to the House of Representatives after we passed it with a strong bipartisan vote, and they basically ignored it. They didn't want to call it so it could be considered on the floor of the House, but they could not come up with their own farm bill.

We are hoping for a better outcome this time. Once again, Senator STABENOW sat down with the agriculture committee in the Senate and produced this farm bill which is before us.

I am here today to describe an amendment which Senator TOM COBURN of Oklahoma and I are offering. Senator COBURN, a very fiscally conservative Republican, and I have come to an agreement on an amendment which we are offering to the Senate—a Republican and a Democrat.

Here is what it comes down to: Our amendment would reduce the level of premium subsidy for crop insurance policies by 15 percentage points for farmers with an adjusted gross income of over \$750,000.

Let me explain what is behind this. Crop insurance is not a real insurance program by private sector standards. In other words, the premiums being paid by the farmers do not create a reserve large enough to cover the amounts that are paid off or paid out for losses each year, so the Federal Government makes up the difference.

Currently, on average, when it comes to crop insurance policies, the Federal taxpayers—not the farmers—pay 62 percent of the premiums and the farmers pay 38 percent, so it is a heavily subsidized program. That is understandable because we want to keep the premium costs low so there is more participation, but it is also the reality. So we are dealing with a program that is important to our farmers and important to our Nation with a heavy Federal subsidy.

Last year farmers put in \$4 billion in the purchase of crop insurance across

America. The Federal taxpayers put in \$7.1 billion in subsidies to the same Crop Insurance Program. So this is not a traditional insurance program, it is one that is heavily subsidized and heavily leveraged by the Federal Treasury.

I might also add the taxpayers are on the line for the cost of administering the program, which recently was \$1.3 billion in a year, so \$7.1 billion in premium subsidies and \$1.3 billion in administrative expenses. We are basically saying the taxpayers, by a margin of 2 to 1, are putting more money in the crop insurance program than the farmers who are protected.

Going back to the Dust Bowl story, remember that one of the things we decided to do was to protect fragile lands from wind and water and the type of erosion that reduces their value. Over the years we had these conservation programs saying to farmers, if you have a wetland or a land that is particularly fragile or vulnerable, set it aside; don't plant on it. This bill Senator STABENOW brings to the floor makes this conservation practice a condition for buying crop insurance. I think that is a good thing, and I totally support that. And, from the viewpoint of the Federal taxpayers, I don't think it is too much to ask that the farmers participating in the crop insurance program also participate in conservation practices to protect farmland across this country. That is included.

Four percent of the most profitable farmers in America account for nearly 33 percent of all the premium support by the Federal Government. In other words, there are a lot of small farmers with crop insurance who don't have much exposure, don't pay much in premiums, but there are a lot of large operations that are quite different.

This is a GAO study that was put out in March of 2012. They analyzed the crop insurance program. Interesting reading. "Savings would result from program changes and greater use of data mining." That was their conclusion, after investigating this program last year.

What they are talking about when they say "data mining" is taking a look at the farmers who are buying crop insurance. Who are these people? Well, they came up with some interesting examples, if I can find them. In the year 2010, according to the GAO, the average value of the premium subsidy received by participating farmers was \$5,339. Thirty-seven participating farmers each received more than \$500,000 in premium subsidies—that is subsidies from taxpayers—37. The participating farmer receiving the most in premium subsidies, a total of \$1.8 million in Federal subsidies for one farmer—was a farming operation organized as a corporation that insured cotton, tomatoes, and wheat across two counties in one State.

There is another one here. Another of the 37 participating farmers was an individual who insured corn, forage, po-

tatoes, soybeans, sugar beets, and wheat across 23 counties in 6 States for a total of \$1.6 million in taxpayer subsidies for his crop insurance. In addition, the cost of the administrative expense subsidies the government spent on behalf of this farmer—one farmer—administrative expenses: \$443,000. This is a farmer farming in 23 counties across 6 States.

The point I am trying to get to is this: When we think of farmers and the struggles they face, we shouldn't ignore the obvious. For the wealthiest 1 percent of the farmers in America, they are doing quite well. I think—and Senator COBURN agrees—the Federal subsidy in crop insurance to those farmers should be diminished some to save money for the program and to reduce the deficit. That is what our amendment is all about.

What we are suggesting, as I said at the outset, is that instead of 62 percent of the premium being paid by taxpayers for the richest farmers in America, it be 47 percent of the premium. That is still pretty generous, is it not, for someone who is getting \$1.8 million in subsidies already and \$400,000 plus in administrative expenses? We are helping that farmer in 23 counties over 6 States with over \$2 million in Federal subsidies. I think he can afford to pay a little more. That is what this amendment says.

This farm bill is a good bill. It eliminates direct payments. I salute Senator STABENOW for doing that. Eliminating direct payments made regardless of need saves about \$4.5 billion a year, \$40.8 billion over 10 years. Hats off to Senator STABENOW. She is reducing the deficit with this farm bill.

I think crop insurance is a much better safety net than direct support payments and much more defensible. But Senators who are concerned about the growth of government and its costs ignore the fact that this heavily subsidized crop insurance program cost the Federal Government more than \$14 billion last year. While this growth is mostly due to costs associated with drought, we have to find commonsense ways for savings in the program. That is why we have suggested that farmers with an adjusted gross income of over \$750,000 pay 15 percent more when it comes to their premiums for crop insurance.

Let me add something which is not a very well-kept secret: Many of these very large farming operations divide up their farms and their income between husband and wife. So when we are saying \$750,000 adjusted gross income, it is actually from a couple that is making over \$1.5 million in adjusted gross income in many instances. Our amendment says if the adjusted gross income; that is, after deducting business expenses, health care costs, and other deductions, is at \$750,000, premium support is reduced by 15 percentage points. The amendment is roughly estimated to impact the wealthiest 1 percent of farmers. Who is going to pay this? Who

is going to pay the extra premium? Twenty thousand farmers across America will pay the extra premium. I just described a couple of them. Twenty thousand out of two million. Twenty thousand. Well, what is it worth to those 20,000 farmers to pay 15 percent more? It is worth \$1 billion over ten years; \$1 billion coming into our Treasury.

When I think of the ways we are cutting spending to reduce our deficit, which include taking 70,000 children out of Head Start as an example, how can we possibly justify, for the wealthiest multimillionaire farmers in America, not asking them to pay a little more when it comes to their crop insurance premium? How can we excuse them and say, No, no, no, these very rich farmers absolutely deserve the maximum when it comes to the Federal taxpayer subsidy? I don't think that is acceptable.

The amendment may sound familiar to some of my colleagues. It was adopted before by a vote of 66 to 33 in the Senate. Of the 33 who voted against the amendment, 29 voted for a nearly identical amendment that only varied in the scope of the study. This is a study associated with our amendment.

Some may come to the floor and say that following last year's drought, we shouldn't change crop insurance at all. Last year was the worst drought in over a decade. Eighty percent of agricultural production felt it and my State of Illinois certainly did. The USDA declared 2,245 counties in 39 States disaster areas. Crop insurance worked for those covered and has allowed those producers to plant again this year without missing a beat. Our change in the law would not change that circumstance at all.

I recognize the importance of crop insurance. It is far preferable to disaster payments. But for goodness sake, if we can't say to 1 percent of farmers—the wealthiest in this country—that they are going to take a slightly diminished Federal tax subsidy for their crop insurance, then we aren't very good as budget cutters. We say to a lot of people who have a lot less to work with in life, You are going to have to face up to the reality of the deficit. Can't we say it to 1 percent of the farmers, that they are going to have to face up to the same basic reality? That is what this amendment is all about.

I asked my staff to come up with a couple of examples of farmers and the premiums they pay for the RECORD. One example: An Illinois corn and soybean grower received \$740,000 in premium subsidies to cover the crops he planted in 18 counties in Illinois. This is no small mom-and-pop farmer; this is a big operator. And while I love my Illinois farmers, I can't justify this kind of a subsidy of \$740,000 to one farmer in my State. While his exact additional costs are impossible to calculate without knowing all the circumstances, even if he is caught by this amendment and purchased the

same policy, instead of a \$740,000 taxpayer subsidy he would have a \$639,000 Federal taxpayer subsidy.

Another example: A South Dakota corn and soybean farmer received \$1.4 million in premium subsidies to cover crops in eight different counties; \$1.4 million Federal taxpayer subsidy for his crop insurance. This producer would only receive \$1.19 million in premium support under this amendment. Would he stop participating in the program? Of course not. If he is that large a producer he needs this program and the subsidy is still very generous.

This is an issue which I know is a little complex, but when I listen to the speeches on the floor about the deficit—and we have heard plenty of them today and we will hear plenty of them tomorrow—I have to ask myself, Will Senators on both sides of the aisle stand with Senator COBURN and myself and say the wealthiest 1 percent of farmers in America should have their Federal subsidy for crop insurance reduced by 15 percent? Not unreasonable. They will still make a lot of money and the taxpayers will see \$1 billion more coming into the Treasury.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Madam President, would the Senator allow me to propound a unanimous consent to be allowed to speak for 10 minutes as in morning business following the Senator from Connecticut?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I have absolutely no objection.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. I make that unanimous consent request.

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

The Senator from Connecticut.

SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MILITARY

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, in the past couple of weeks we have seen some major encouraging efforts in the Senate to rid our military of sexual assault, to punish it more aggressively and effectively, to deter it, and to aid victims who may suffer from sexual assault—victims of both sexes who may be survivors of this spreading scourge. Last year alone, an estimated 26,000 cases of unwanted sexual contact; only about 3,300 of them reported. So the key to more effective prosecution and deterrence is more reporting as well as swifter, surer punishment and a better program within the military to deal with it.

I will be proposing over the next few weeks additional measures. I have already cosponsored the Military Justice Improvement Act, a very important measure sponsored by our colleagues Senators GILLIBRAND and COLLINS that would transfer prosecuting and charging authority from military com-

manders to a separate, trained, experienced cadre of prosecutors in the military.

I have also cosponsored the Combating Sexual Assault in the Military Act proposed by my colleague Senator MURRAY and Senator AYOTTE; again, very important legislation providing special victims counseling to survivors or victims of sexual assault, and the Ruth Moore Act sponsored by my colleague Senator TESTER, that provides aid for disabled veterans who suffer from this problem.

Today I rise to praise Secretary of Defense Hagel for his decision and his leadership in avoiding furloughs of any of the civilian sexual assault prevention personnel as a result of the sequester. As we know, the sequester has caused furloughs of many civilian employees at the Department of Defense as well as some similar personnel decisions across the Federal Government. I wish to say that all of us who are advocating this cause did express appreciation to our Secretary of Defense for his leadership as well as to the military leadership at all levels for their focus on this issue. These measures are good, their intention is commendable, but it is not yet enough, as many of them would acknowledge very candidly and have done so to all of us in the Senate who are interested in this issue.

We need to hire more civilians trained and qualified to help victims, not just avoid the furloughs of the advocates and sexual assault response coordinators we have in place right now, but to hire more of them.

I raise this issue because—and here is the statistic everyone should keep in mind—the U.S. Army has hired only 80 out of the 446 whom it should have in place right now among the sexual assault prevention personnel—80 out of 446.

Let me give a little bit of the history. At the end of 2011, Congress set in Public Law 112-81 that new requirements should be expanded in the provision of victims advocates and that they either be in uniform or civilian employees who have the proper training and qualifications to perform this important service. The Army announced in June of last year—almost a year ago—that it would have 829 victims advocates. Of those, 446 would be civilians. As a result, each brigade and equivalent-sized unit would be covered by a full-time victims advocate and below that level have the role of victims advocate performed as a collateral duty.

So I was troubled to hear in April of this year, just a couple months ago, when Secretary McHugh testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee, that the Army's Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program—known as SHARP—had hired only 63 of that number; in other words, 63 out of 446. I understand the most updated number is 80 out of 446.

These civilian sexual assault prevention personnel, very simply, are needed

today. The military and our leadership know that this problem is a scourge that is a direct threat to the good order and discipline of our military personnel. It has confronted this problem in many commendable ways. But hiring victims advocates and sexual assault response coordinators is vital to the effort. It is vital to encouraging both men and women victims to come forward and have the courage and strength to report these incidents when they occur.

These incidents are more than just disciplinary infractions. They are vicious, predatory criminal acts. They should be punished as vicious, predatory criminal acts. Victims of them need advocates and counselors to have that strength and courage to come forward and participate in the grueling and often painful process of supporting a successful prosecution. Without successful prosecutions, there can be no punishment, and successful prosecutions require witnesses and cooperation and support from the victim.

My hope is that the Army will swiftly stand up this force, that it will do more than just avoid furloughs, that it will, in fact, recruit actively and successfully. Other branches of our military service should also be asked: How are you doing in this process? And if you are doing better, what are the keys to your success?

All across the military there must be a robust SHARP program, Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program. It is a mouthful. It is a long term, but it stands for a program that must be successfully and carefully built and sustained.

I will be introducing legislation tomorrow focusing on victims' rights and what can be done to bolster not only the substance of those rights but the remedies to make those rights real.

For today, I say thank you to the Secretary of Defense for the step he has taken and hope we can count on additional steps to make these rights real, to guarantee successful prosecution, to make sure our military rules and remedies against sexual assault and abuse are worthy of the greatest, strongest, best military in the world, staffed by men and women second to none in their training and dedication. The system of military justice must be worthy of their service and sacrifice.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Madam President, I rise to speak on S. 954, the legislation to reauthorize agricultural programs.

As a former chairman and ranking member of the Agriculture Committee, I recognize how difficult it is to combine all the diverse interests into a single piece of legislation that meets the needs of all crops, all regions, and all rural and urban communities the farm bill impacts.

I thank Chairwoman STABENOW and Ranking Member COCHRAN for the work they have done to craft a reform-mind-

ed bill that not only saves \$24 billion with sequestration cuts included but also provides an effective safety net for farmers and ranchers all across the country to rely on in times of need.

This bill embodies reforms, streamlining, and consolidation, and with the biggest issue facing our country today being our growing debt and deficit, I commend the members of the Agriculture Committee for stepping up and doing the work necessary to find savings. While we take these essential steps, we must also do it in an equitable and a fair manner.

Agricultural producers face a combination of challenges such as unpredictable weather, variable input costs, and market volatility that all combine to determine profit or loss in any given year. The 2008 farm bill provided a strong safety net for producers, and successor legislation must adhere to and honor the same commitment we made 5 years ago. It is also important to note that this bill must not only work to protect producers in times of need, but it must responsibly serve as the Nation's safety net for the nutritional well-being of low-income Americans.

Last year, when we went through this process, I was unable to support the bill. However, I appreciate the chairwoman and ranking member for making improvements to last year's bill. While the bill before us is not perfect, I believe everyone who is involved in agriculture understands that it addresses the needs of U.S. agriculture, which is what the policy coming out of this body should address.

While I understand there are different ideas about what safety net is best, I urge my colleagues to recognize that one program does not work for all crops. The bill before us attempts to provide producers with options to find what works best for them, and that is a step in the right direction.

A new program known as Adverse Market Protection seeks to serve the needs of those who are not protected by the Agriculture Risk Coverage—ARC—and Crop Insurance Programs. It is imperative that the farm safety net provide protection for multiyear declines, especially for southern crops such as rice and peanuts, since the protection provided by ARC and crop insurance is not sufficient.

Also, I would like to recognize that the upland cotton policies contained in the chairwoman's mark represent fundamental reform in the support provided to cotton farmers—reforms that contribute \$2.8 billion toward savings in the committee's budget target. The legislation eliminates or changes all title I programs providing direct support to those involved in cotton production and puts us down the path to resolving our WTO dispute with Brazil.

Further, I would like to express my support for a provision in this bill that ties conservation compliance to crop insurance. My amendment last year on the floor relinked the two, and since

then 32 leading agricultural, conservation, and crop insurance groups have come to support this provision and have come together with ideas to form a compromise on details of this linkage. The compromise will provide a strong safety net for our farmers and natural resources, while allowing them to be wise stewards of the taxpayer resources.

For those of us who enjoy hunting and fishing and the outdoors, this provision will provide for future generations of Americans the same opportunity we have to hunt and fish today.

There is another provision that did not come up in the discussion in the Agriculture Committee that I would like to briefly comment on, and that is the dairy program. The dairy program is always an integral part of every farm bill, and I am not anywhere near an expert on the dairy program. In fact, I kind of leave that to States where it has a more significant impact. But in my State, when I came to Congress almost 20 years ago, we had in excess of 700 dairies in Georgia. Today we have less than 300. In fact, it is closer to 250.

I do not know what the problem is, but I do think, as we move this bill off the floor and into conference—particularly with what has been going on in the House relative to dairy and the discussion over there—we need to be mindful of the fact that we need to address this program long term. If the way it is designed now is the best we can do, so be it. But I do think it is going to merit a significant discussion on dairy once we get to conference and have our ideas shared with the House and the House ideas shared with us.

This will be my fourth and final farm bill as a Member of Congress. As a member of the Agriculture Committee and as a strong supporter of Georgia agriculture for my nearly 20 years in Congress, I have witnessed several disputes, especially regional disputes. However, I am confident we can balance the needs and interests between commodities and regions to reach our common goal of getting a farm bill across the line.

Ultimately, the reason we are here is to represent those who work the land each and every day to provide the highest quality agricultural products and the safest agricultural products of any country in the world. We have the opportunity to write a bill that is equal to their commitment to provide the food, feed, and fiber that allow America to be the greatest Nation on Earth.

Madam President, I thank you, and I look forward to the forthcoming debate on the remaining amendments.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, I came here today first of all to talk about the farm bill. I am a member of the Agriculture Committee. We are very proud of this bill. It is a strong bill. As Senator CHAMBLISS just pointed

out, it enjoys broad bipartisan support. Of particular importance to the State of Minnesota is the safety net that is in the bill; the focus on ag research, which the Presiding Officer from the State of Wisconsin, with her great universities, knows is very important; and the work we have done with dairy in trying to improve the dairy program.

The dairy farmers have been the hardest hit in our State of any of the agricultural groups. I have done some new things for new and beginning farmers.

Then, of course, there is the Sugar Program—something that has been a topic today, as some of our colleagues are trying to strip the Sugar Program out of the bill. I would argue that this is 30,000 jobs in the Red River Valley of Minnesota and North Dakota. American sugar is actually much less expensive than you see in the price on the global marketplace. The Sugar Program works. It works for workers, it works for America, and we need to continue it.

THE BUDGET

I would like to turn to the focus of my remarks today, which is, first of all, on the budget. I thank Senator MURRAY for her leadership on the Budget Committee and for all her hard work in advancing a smart, balanced budget to meet our country's fiscal challenges.

This is not the first time I have come to the Senate floor in the last year or in the last several years to stress the critical need for Democrats and Republicans to come together and focus on smart solutions to reducing our debt. I think it is a good sign that both the House and the Senate have passed budgets and that the President introduced his budget last month.

I see this time as a real opportunity to come together to work through this budget process and get a deal done. That is why we must take the next step in the process, which is to move forward under regular order and have the House and Senate conference on a budget deal.

For years we have been hearing from our colleagues across the aisle about how the Senate did not have a budget. Well, the Senate passed a budget, and all we want to do is to move this into conference committee so that the House and the Senate can work together so that we can get a budget for this country.

There is growing bipartisan support for going to conference and starting the conversation so that we can come to an agreement on a long-term budget. Last night Senators MCCAIN and COLLINS came to the floor and talked about how we need to return to regular order in the Senate, and regular order means going to conference to come to a budget deal.

Doing so will allow us to stop lurching from crisis to crisis and address our fiscal challenges in an open, bipartisan way. I believe this is what folks outside of Washington, especially the people I

talk to in Minnesota, want; for us to put politics aside for the good of the country and come together on a budget deal that reduces our deficit in a balanced way but also lays a foundation for sustained economic growth.

In the past 2 years Congress has made some progress in reducing the deficit. We have already achieved \$2.4 trillion in deficit reduction, with a goal of a \$4 trillion reduction in 10 years within our grasp. Last week the Congressional Budget Office reported that deficit will fall to \$642 billion this year, \$200 billion less than what the CBO projected just 3 months ago. The better numbers reflect good news in housing and larger than expected increases in tax revenue.

But I believe that resting on those numbers would be a mistake. If we are to get closer to reaching a new deficit agreement, it is only going to happen if we work in a bipartisan way through regular order to get a deal done. Along with addressing our fiscal challenges, working through the budget process and coming to agreement will create a stronger, more resilient framework for economic renewal.

We certainly see how we got a major bill done through the Judiciary Committee last night when we were able to get the immigration bill done. There is no reason a conference committee should not be at work right now taking the Senate budget that we have heard for years needs to be done and paring it up with the House budget and coming together. In the bigger picture, this presents an opportunity for us to reinforce our role as a world leader in innovation, entrepreneurship, exporting, education; in other words, that which we have always taken pride in. We want to be a nation that produces, that invents, that exports to the world. Part of that is showing the world we have our fiscal house in order.

I believe the Senate proposal is the right blueprint for moving us forward. On the most immediate front, it will allow us to build on the progress we are already seeing in the economy. Last month, the national unemployment rate dropped to 7.5 percent, the lowest level in 4 years. Our housing market is turning around. Consumer spending has picked up in the first months of the year as has private business investment. The unemployment rate in my State of Minnesota is at 5.4 percent.

But even with this progress, our economy remains vulnerable to headwinds. We should keep this good economic momentum going but only if we are willing to find common ground on a budget plan that also moves our economy forward.

We need to take a balanced approach to deficit reduction. You do not have to take my word for it. Nearly every commission that has offered ideas for reducing our debt has stressed the importance of balance. This includes the original Bowles-Simpson plan, the Rivlin-Domenici plan, and even the revised Bowles-Simpson plan, which calls for another \$2.4 trillion in deficit re-

duction, one-quarter of which would come from new revenue totaling \$600 billion.

We do not just need a balanced budget; we need a budget that is in balance. I believe the Senate's budget achieves that goal. It includes an equal mix of responsible spending cuts and new revenue from closing loopholes and ending wasteful spending in the Tax Code. Our budget builds on the \$2.4 trillion in deficit reduction we have already achieved in the last 2 years, with an additional \$975 billion in targeted cuts and \$975 billion in new revenue, surpassing the bipartisan goal of \$4 trillion.

Just this morning I was at the Joint Economic Committee—I am the Senate chair of that committee—where Chairman Bernanke testified. He warned us about the negative impact—that cuts solely focused in the short term can negatively impact economic growth. He noted that policies such as sequestration are creating headwinds against short-term economic growth and that Congress needs to take a broader, long-term view toward our debt and deficit.

That is what this conference committee is about. That is what regular order is about. We have a Senate budget. We have a House budget. We have that opportunity to bring those budgets together in a conference committee. Some of the most important points in the Senate budget include the fact that it replaces the sequester with smart targeted cuts while also making critical investment in areas such as education, workforce training, and infrastructure.

It produces savings in Medicare and Medicaid by eliminating waste and fraud, promoting efficiency, and emphasizing cost alignment. Our budget also recognizes there is a massive amount of spending that takes place through the Tax Code, to the tune of over \$1 trillion per year in tax expenditures. The Senate budget eliminates wasteful tax loopholes and subsidies.

All told, the Senate budget cuts the deficit by approximately \$2 trillion. This continues us on a downward path where our debt-to-GDP ratio will be about 70 percent by 2023. Getting the Federal budget on a sustainable path will only promote growth and stability. The American people want us to get this done. They want us to compromise. They want us to work together to get the economy on the right track.

I urge my colleagues to support moving to conference so we can begin the work of finding solutions to a very important matter.

GAS PRICES

I wish to speak briefly on one other topic that is an important economic issue for families and businesses in Minnesota; that is, the recent spike in gas prices. We do have some good things in the farm bill that will help us, including the promotion of energy and biofuels, but I came to discuss the recent spike in gas prices in Minnesota,

a problem that is disrupting commerce and hurting consumers, small businesses, and farmers across the State and throughout our region.

In Minnesota, the average gas price is \$4.25, 40 cents higher than 1 week ago and over 80 cents more than only 1 month ago. In fact, a few days ago it was the highest in the country, higher than Honolulu. It happened all of a sudden, in literally a 2-week period. That is a significant increase which puts family budgets under severe pressure.

I am focused on immediate relief. I am taking actions now so we can avoid similar gas price spikes in the future. With Memorial Day around the corner and the start of the summer driving season upon us, this kind of price spike is simply outrageous. To cut back on costs, some families are already putting off family trips and scaling back vacations. I have already heard from families who have canceled or scaled back their plans.

But there are some things people cannot put off, such as driving to work, such as going to the doctor's office. More money to fill the tank means less money for food, housing, and everything else families need. Families in Minnesota cannot afford an 80-cent spike in the price of a gallon of gas, neither can business owners who need to ship their goods to market or farmers who rely on diesel fuel to keep their equipment running.

We know what is causing the price increase—supply shortages resulting from the simultaneous closing of several oil refineries in the Midwest. We also know what is not causing the price increase. The price of crude oil has not moved. We are about \$96 a barrel, similar to where prices were 1 month ago. In fact, the national trend in gas prices, which tracks the price of crude, has not moved much either. OPEC has not been jacking up their prices. We did not have a hurricane or even a blizzard that would affect supplies or prices. The increase has not been caused by a pipeline rupture or geopolitical threats.

Rather, the price spike has resulted largely from the combination of a number of refineries going offline for scheduled and unscheduled maintenance which serve the upper Midwest to prepare for the summer fuel blend. I understand that refineries need to adjust their blends and occasionally perform upgrades to protect worker safety and repair equipment.

But scheduled routine maintenance should not be an excuse for major gasoline shortages and price spikes. Three refineries in Indiana, Illinois, and Flint Hills, MN, currently are shut down for maintenance or upgrade. A fourth refinery in Wisconsin is currently offline as they turn their productions over to summer fuel blend. A fifth refinery in St. Paul Park, MN, remained down longer than expected, but I understand that refinery is again operational.

The result of all these closures is Minnesota and other parts of the Upper

Midwest simply did not have enough refined gasoline to make it to the market right now. In this day when we have a surplus of fuel, when we are drilling record amounts in North Dakota, when we do not see a huge increase in the price of oil, this just should not be happening. That is why last Thursday I called on the Department of Energy to thoroughly review the timing of scheduled maintenance operations and to take action to address future supply problems that are preventable. I have also spoken with the Department of Energy about ways to resolve the issue quickly and prevent disruptions down the road. I am working with DOE and industry partners on legislation that addresses known scheduled closures of refineries for maintenance.

Having improved information could serve as an early warning system to protect consumers from production problems within the refinery industry. With more transparency and more lead time, fuel retailers will have the opportunity to purchase fuel at prices that better reflect the underlying cost of crude oil and better reflect supply and demand across the country.

I also believe refineries should give immediate notification of any unplanned outages. I am working to address this as well. I am also working with the Secretary of Energy to look at the potential for additional refined fuel storage capacity in our region. Minnesota has less storage capacity for refined products than other parts of the country, making us more vulnerable to the kinds of refinery outages we have experienced this year, both planned and unplanned.

If we had additional storage in place, we could better ensure fair and consistent prices for our consumers. This week I talked to all of the major oil companies that own these refineries. It looks as though additional shipments from another pipeline are helping to increase supplies. This should provide some relief.

Petroleum markets in Minnesota have reported the spot prices in the wholesale markets were down by 30 cents, but that drop has not yet reached our consumers. I believe we need an all-of-the-above plan to get serious about building a new energy agenda for America. This, of course, means less dependence on foreign oil, more domestic production of oil as we are seeing in North Dakota, natural gas, and, of course, biofuels. It also means tougher vehicle efficiency standards that help cars to go farther on a tank of gas.

But my focus is on our immediate problem. We need to get refineries up and running and get gas prices down so we can all begin to enjoy this summer. I look forward to continuing to work with the Department of Energy and my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to address the recent and unnecessary spike in gas prices and prevent this from happening again.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HEINRICH). The Senator from Michigan.

AMENDMENT NO. 925

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator SHAHEEN, I called up her amendment No. 925.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Michigan [Ms. STABENOW], for Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mr. KIRK, Mr. TOOMEY, Mr. DURBIN, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. ALEXANDER, Ms. AYOTTE, Mr. CORKER, Mr. LAUTENBERG, Mr. PORTMAN, Mr. COATS, Mr. MCCAIN, Mr. COONS, Mr. COBURN, Mr. WARNER, Mr. JOHNSON of Wisconsin, Mr. KAINE, and Mr. HELLER, proposes an amendment numbered 925.

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

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To reform the Federal sugar program, and for other purposes)

In title I, strike subtitle C and insert the following:

Subtitle C—Sugar Reform

SEC. 1301. SUGAR PROGRAM.

(a) SUGARCANE.—Section 156(a) of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (7 U.S.C. 7272(a)) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (4), by striking “and” after the semicolon at the end;

(2) in paragraph (5), by striking the period at the end and inserting “; and”; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

“(6) 18 cents per pound for raw cane sugar for each of the 2014 through 2018 crop years.”.

(b) SUGAR BEETS.—Section 156(b)(2) of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (7 U.S.C. 7272(b)(2)) is amended by striking “2012” and inserting “2018”.

(c) EFFECTIVE PERIOD.—Section 156(i) of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (7 U.S.C. 7272(i)) is amended by striking “2012” and inserting “2018”.

SEC. 1302. FLEXIBLE MARKETING ALLOTMENTS FOR SUGAR.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 359b of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 (7 U.S.C. 1359bb) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)(1)—

(A) in the matter before subparagraph (A), by striking “2012” and inserting “2018”; and

(B) in subparagraph (B), by inserting “at reasonable prices” after “stocks”; and

(2) in subsection (b)(1)—

(A) in subparagraph (A), by striking “but” after the semicolon at the end and inserting “and”; and

(B) by striking subparagraph (B) and inserting the following:

“(B) appropriate to maintain adequate domestic supplies at reasonable prices, taking into account all sources of domestic supply, including imports.”.

(b) ESTABLISHMENT OF FLEXIBLE MARKETING ALLOTMENTS.—Section 359c of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 (7 U.S.C. 1359cc) is amended—

(1) in subsection (b)—

(A) in paragraph (1)—

(i) in subparagraph (A), by striking “but” after the semicolon at the end and inserting “and”; and

(ii) by striking subparagraph (B) and inserting the following:

“(B) appropriate to maintain adequate supplies at reasonable prices, taking into account all sources of domestic supply, including imports.”; and

(B) in paragraph (2)(B), by inserting “at reasonable prices” after “market”; and

(2) in subsection (g)(1)—

(A) by striking “ADJUSTMENTS.—” and all that follows through “Subject to subparagraph (B), the” and inserting “ADJUSTMENTS.—The”; and

(B) by striking subparagraph (B).

(C) SUSPENSION OR MODIFICATION OF PROVISIONS.—Section 359j of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 (7 U.S.C. 1359jj) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(C) SUSPENSION OR MODIFICATION OF PROVISIONS.—Notwithstanding any other provision of this part, the Secretary may suspend or modify, in whole or in part, the application of any provision of this part if the Secretary determines that the action is appropriate, taking into account—

“(1) the interests of consumers, workers in the food industry, businesses (including small businesses), and agricultural producers; and

“(2) the relative competitiveness of domestically produced and imported foods containing sugar.”.

(D) ADMINISTRATION OF TARIFF RATE QUOTAS.—Section 359k of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 (7 U.S.C. 1359kk) is amended to read as follows:

“SEC. 359k. ADMINISTRATION OF TARIFF RATE QUOTAS.

“(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, at the beginning of the quota year, the Secretary shall establish the tariff-rate quotas for raw cane sugar and refined sugar at no less than the minimum level necessary to comply with obligations under international trade agreements that have been approved by Congress.

“(b) ADJUSTMENT.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subsection (a), the Secretary shall adjust the tariff-rate quotas for raw cane sugar and refined sugar to provide adequate supplies of sugar at reasonable prices in the domestic market.

“(2) ENDING STOCKS.—Subject to paragraphs (1) and (3), the Secretary shall establish and adjust tariff-rate quotas in such a manner that the ratio of sugar stocks to total sugar use at the end of the quota year will be approximately 15.5 percent.

“(3) MAINTENANCE OF REASONABLE PRICES AND AVOIDANCE OF FORFEITURES.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may establish a different target for the ratio of ending stocks to total use if, in the judgment of the Secretary, the different target is necessary to prevent—

“(i) unreasonably high prices; or

“(ii) forfeitures of sugar pledged as collateral for a loan under section 156 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (7 U.S.C. 7272).

“(B) ANNOUNCEMENT.—The Secretary shall publicly announce any establishment of a target under this paragraph.

“(4) CONSIDERATIONS.—In establishing tariff-rate quotas under subsection (a) and making adjustments under this subsection, the Secretary shall consider the impact of the quotas on consumers, workers, businesses (including small businesses), and agricultural producers.

“(C) TEMPORARY TRANSFER OF QUOTAS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—To promote full use of the tariff-rate quotas for raw cane sugar and refined sugar, notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary shall promulgate regulations that provide that any country that has been allocated a share of the quotas may temporarily transfer all or part of the share to any other country that has also been allocated a share of the quotas.

“(2) TRANSFERS VOLUNTARY.—Any transfer under this subsection shall be valid only on voluntary agreement between the transferor and the transferee, consistent with procedures established by the Secretary.

“(3) TRANSFERS TEMPORARY.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—Any transfer under this subsection shall be valid only for the duration of the quota year during which the transfer is made.

“(B) FOLLOWING QUOTA YEAR.—No transfer under this subsection shall affect the share of the quota allocated to the transferor or transferee for the following quota year.”.

(E) EFFECTIVE PERIOD.—Section 359l(a) of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 (7 U.S.C. 1359ll(a)) is amended by striking “2012” and inserting “2018”.

Strike section 9008 and insert the following:

SEC. 9008. REPEAL OF FEEDSTOCK FLEXIBILITY PROGRAM FOR BIOENERGY PRODUCERS.

(A) IN GENERAL.—Section 9010 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (7 U.S.C. 8110) is repealed.

(B) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

(1) Section 359a(3)(B) of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 (7 U.S.C. 1359aa(3)(B)) is amended—

(A) in clause (i), by inserting “and” after the semicolon at the end;

(B) in clause (ii), by striking “; and” at the end and inserting a period; and

(C) by striking clause (iii).

(2) Section 359b(c)(2)(C) of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 (7 U.S.C. 1359bb(c)(2)(C)) is amended by striking “, except for” and all that follows through “ of 2002”.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, for the information of Members, we are working to set up a vote later this afternoon on this particular amendment. I am working with Senator COCHRAN and his Republican colleagues in order to set up that vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 15 minutes.

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

IMMIGRATION REFORM

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I come to the floor to discuss a very important topic and one that itself is coming to the Senate floor soon. That is the problem of illegal immigration and proposals for so-called comprehensive immigration reform. Specifically, of course, the Gang of 8 bill, as it has been dubbed, is being reported out of the Judiciary Committee. We will be debating that bill, and hopefully a lot of important amendments to it soon, in June, on the floor.

Let me say at the outset, I think there are at least a couple of things we can all agree on. No. 1, I think we can all agree that the United States is an immigrant nation with a proud history of immigration—legal immigration. It is absolutely one of the core features of our Nation that makes us unique and that makes us strong. So I wish to say that upfront, very proudly, very strongly. I support that tradition, that history of being an immigrant nation. All of us are the children of immigrants—not a question of if, it is just a question of when, because that is the nature of America. That goes to the core of our strength.

No. 2, the other thing I think we can all agree with is our present immigra-

tion system is broken. In fact, it is badly broken, and we need to fix the system.

As I said a minute ago, we have a proud history of immigration, legal immigration. That is the tradition, the history we need to get back to. Unfortunately, right now we have a system of wide open illegal immigration, almost open borders in some cases and some areas, and that desperately needs to be fixed.

Having said that, I have real and fundamental concerns with the so-called Gang of 8 bill, and they fall into five or six big categories. I want to talk about each of those important categories in turn.

First and foremost, my biggest and my most fundamental concern, I think the so-called Gang of 8 bill repeats mistakes of the past because, at its core, it is amnesty now, enforcement later, and maybe never. We have tried that model before. We have tried it several times before, and it has never worked.

The most clear example is the 1986 immigration overhaul. That bill, at its core, was the same model, amnesty now and enforcement later, and maybe never. In fact, much of that enforcement was never. That is why it didn't work. The amnesty kicked in immediately, the millisecond the bill was signed into law. That was a powerful message to invite more and more illegal crossings across the border, more and more illegal immigrants into the country. That part of the bill, that part of the message, was heard loudly and clearly. The promises of enforcement never fully materialized. Many of them never materialized at all.

What happened when you had that combination of immediate amnesty with promises of enforcement that never materialized? Again, you attracted more illegal crossings, and you had no capability or will to do anything about them.

The promise then was we are going to have to do this once; the system will be fixed; we will never have to look back. We will never have to look in the rear-view mirror. The problem will be solved.

What happened? Well, we all know the problem wasn't solved. In fact, the problem simply wasn't continued, the problem was quadrupled. What were 3 million illegal immigrants then were mostly made legal. But that number 3 million quadrupled, and now today we have 11, 12 million illegal immigrants, some think more.

That, at its core, is the Gang of 8 bill, and immediate amnesty, promises of enforcement. That is not good enough, particularly when we have decades—decades—the Federal Government, Republicans and Democrats, who have promised us before and have never ever delivered. The American people say we will trust but we want to verify. Trust but verify. We need to see this enforcement in action before we move on to anything else.

In fact, in some ways this Gang of 8 bill is worse in terms of that basic

model than previous versions such as 1986. If you look at page 70 of the bill, it actually has a period of an enforcement holiday, so 2½ years of a pure enforcement holiday. Not only is this amnesty now and enforcement later, it may never apply to folks who are in the country illegally now. They can keep coming. The message will be sent out, and they can come the day after the bill passes, the week after the bill passes, the year after the bill passes, 2 years after the bill passes, and it is part of the same amnesty. They would get the benefits of that amnesty as well. That enforcement holiday, 2½ years, makes that combination of a big amnesty now, with promises of an enforcement later, even more potentially disastrous.

The second big problem I have with the bill as it is currently put together is it doesn't enforce the law, and it doesn't enforce the border, particularly the troublesome southern border with Mexico. It doesn't enforce other enforcement provisions. It doesn't actually guarantee that those are put into place and executed in an effective way.

The proponents of the bill talk about so-called triggers in the bill before the amnesty, before the new legal status is granted. When you look hard at what the triggers are, they are triggers on a toy plastic gun, not real triggers in any meaningful sense of the term. The triggers basically narrow down to two things. First of all, the Secretary has to submit two reports, two plans. The Secretary of Homeland Security has to submit plans or reports, a so-called comprehensive "southern border security strategy," so she has to submit a strategy. Great. This was promised for three decades but now she has to submit a strategy, a piece of paper and a southern border fencing strategy, so that is one trigger.

The other triggers are certification that the border strategy is "substantially deployed" and "substantially operational."

What is the problem with that? Two things. Who the heck knows what "substantially deployed" means and, No. 2, even more troublesome, do you know who has to certify that? The Secretary of Homeland Security, who has not been effective at enforcement to date in any way, shape, or form. Those so-called triggers are absolutely meaningless.

The bill doesn't require a fence, as is actually required under present law, so we are weakening that. We are walking away from that. It weakens current law regarding border security. Operational control is the standard now, and that is being weakened, changed to effective control. It doesn't require a biometric data system for entry and exit screening. That has been pushed by Congress since 1996. Congress started mandating this in 1996, and it was one of the prime recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, full deployment of the US-VISIT system. The 9/11 Commission said that needs to be a high

priority. That is exactly how the 9/11 terrorists got into our country and overstayed their visas. It doesn't do any of that. Again, there is an enforcement holiday for 2½ years and no border security now before the amnesty kicks in.

No. 3, I am very concerned that we will continue the present status quo, which is significant benefits being available to these immigrants, which act as a magnet to incent other illegal immigrants to come into the country. The so-called Gang of 8 made all sorts of promises about certain promises not kicking in until full citizenship is granted down the road. Many benefits would kick in immediately, certainly participation in the Social Security system, certainly all those Social Security benefits, and their loopholes about these benefits. I think many illegal immigrants will clearly gain access to public benefits far sooner than any 13 years as advertised. That is another serious weakness of the bill.

Fourth, I am very concerned about the cost of this bill. Authors of this bill have been very clever. They saw that cost issue coming, and they devised the bill so the big costs of the bill are outside the 10-year budget window. Why is that important? Well, not to get into the weeds, but it is very important because CBO scores legislation primarily on its impact on taxes and spending in the first 10 years. The authors of the bill were very careful, very clever in devising a bill that would look OK in the first 10 years with regard to cost. After that first 10-year window, the costs explode and none of that will be reflected by this CBO score.

We have seen this movie before, because this is exactly the same approach to CBO scoring and costs of legislation, exactly the same approach the proponents of ObamaCare put forward. They were very clever to push many of the costs in the outyears beyond the first initial scoring window, and that is why they were able to wave CBO scores around to somehow suggest this would help lessen the deficit. It is perfectly clear now, ObamaCare is not going to make our fiscal situation better, it is going to make it far worse and far more onerous.

I believe exactly the same thing is true with this bill in terms of the costs, and I believe the proponents of the bill, quite frankly, have gamed the system in the same way to hide those costs, given the way CBO scores legislation.

In contrast to that, there is an objective study of the full costs of the bill, and that is a study by Robert Rector of the Heritage Foundation. He went into extreme detail tracking the full costs and fiscal benefits of the bill. His conclusion was that the full costs of the bill are \$6.3 trillion over the full life and the full impact of the bill, \$6.3 trillion, with a T. He concluded that the bill, because of all the folks it would legalize, would kick in \$9.4 trillion in benefits. There are more government

benefits we are going to have to pay out, \$9.4 trillion.

These folks being legalized would pay some taxes into the system, which they do not pay now, and that would be \$3.1 trillion. When you subtract 3.1 from 9.4, that obviously doesn't net out to zero. That is a net increase in the deficit, increased cost to the government, to society, to the taxpayer, of \$6.3 trillion net. That is a serious impact on these budget and fiscal issues we are already very concerned about.

The Robert Rector study is very credible, it is very detailed. I have seen no comparable study in terms of the detail of the analysis. I would challenge anyone who cares about this issue, wherever they are coming from, to put up any other study that can compete with the Rector study in terms of detail and analysis. I think currently that is the last and final word on costs of the bill.

Two final points. A fifth big concern I have about the bill is I believe this bill is very unfair to legal immigrants and folks who are waiting in line in the legal immigration system now. It puts some people—not everybody who would be made legal, but some people—ahead of them in line and dishonors the fact that these would-be legal immigrants are following the rules now and following the law now.

Sixth and finally—and this is no trivial matter—I am very concerned that this would depress wages in the United States for many hard-working Americans, legal immigrants, others who have followed the law who are working hard in a very tough economy now. I think it would depress the general wage situation and make that more difficult for them to deal with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. VITTER. In closing, I urge all my colleagues to look carefully at these and other concerns and try to address them fully, directly, completely, on the Senate floor.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, as we continue debate on the Agricultural Reform, Food and Jobs Act, I want to remind my colleagues how important this bill is for our economy and for the 16 million people whose jobs rely on agriculture. When we go home at night and sit down at the dinner table, it is because those 16 million people have worked hard to make sure we had safe, affordable food on the table. They are the men and women who farmed the land. They are also the people who manufacture and sell the farm equipment, the people who ship the crops from one place to another, the people who own the farmers markets and the local food hubs, the people who work in processing and crop fertility, not to mention the researchers and the scientists who work hard every day to fight pests and diseases that threaten our food supply.

I want to talk specifically for a few moments about the work we are doing in the conservation title of the farm bill. Our farm bill improves 1.9 million acres for fish and wildlife habitat. This is about jobs as well. Healthy wildlife habitats, clean fishable waters, are not only good for our environment, but they also support hunting, fishing, and all of our other outdoor recreation that benefits our economy and creates jobs. In fact, outdoor recreation supports over 6 million jobs in our United States.

In this farm bill we are including a new historic agreement around conservation—the most powerful conservation work in decades. It is truly amazing what can happen when people actually sit down and listen to one another and work together. If farmers want to participate in title I commodity programs, including the current Direct Payments Program, they must take steps to use best conservation practices on their land when it comes to highly eroded soil and wetlands. This has been the case for many years.

Of course, the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act we are debating now eliminates those subsidies.

Instead, we are strengthening crop insurance, which farmers need to purchase, and we are making market-oriented reforms to the commodity programs. But here is the issue: If we eliminate direct payment subsidies, we don't want to create unintended consequences by not having that link any longer. It is important for all of us that sensitive lands be managed in the best possible way. That is how we avoided having a dust bowl during the droughts. It is important for us to continue protecting wetlands, which help prevent flooding and are important to wildlife habitats for ducks and other waterfowl.

Commodity groups and conservation groups were on different sides of this issue for a long time. They looked at the issue from vastly different viewpoints, and they didn't agree on the best approach. They could have followed the very typical Washington playbook. They could have gone to their corners, fired off e-mails and press releases, brought the lobbyists in and demonized each other. But that is not what happened.

Like farmers and families across the country, they sat down together around a table and did something we don't do enough. They listened to each other. They listened and tried to see the other's viewpoint and they came to understand one another. It turned out their differences weren't so great after all. With a little compromise and a lot of hard work these groups were able to come together with a plan that conserves soil and water resources for generations to come and protects the safety net on which our farmers rely.

This has been called the greatest advancement in conservation in three decades. I want to underscore for my colleagues that this is an important

historic agreement, and others deserve credit. As much as I certainly would like to take credit for this, or I am sure Senator COCHRAN would—and we certainly were very supportive in encouraging this—the agreement came about from a group of people working together.

I know a number of my colleagues are planning to talk about amendments on crop insurance. Some have already been on the floor talking about amendments. I know a number of colleagues voted for some of those amendments the last time around, but this conservation agreement puts us in a very different situation this year. For one thing, we want to make sure the biggest landowners who control the most acres are using crop insurance.

Crop insurance is voluntary. Prior to crop insurance, there were subsidies and then ad hoc disaster assistance. Now we are encouraging them to purchase crop insurance, and we want them to have it, which means now they would need to use conservation practices to preserve sensitive lands and wetlands on those largest tracts as well as small tracts.

So amendments that weaken crop insurance would reduce the number of farmers participating in crop insurance, raising premiums for family farmers and reducing the environmental impact and the environmental benefits of this historic conservation agreement. With this new agreement, the math is very simple: The more acres that are in crop insurance, the more we have environmental and conservation benefits.

My dear friend from Illinois came to the floor a while ago and said: The majority of crop insurance is with a small number of farmers. Well, that is true. The larger the farm, the more one would use crop insurance. It is just like saying anybody who buys insurance for a bigger home has more insurance than the smaller home. Bigger businesses—manufacturers—probably buy the biggest part of insurance rather than small businesses. I am not sure what the point is of saying that. Of course, we have large farmers buying more crop insurance than small farmers. We want to make sure we have the environmental and conservation benefits on those large farms just as on smaller farms.

Here is another reason my colleagues should reevaluate these amendments, and I would encourage, as they come before us, that we vote no. This chart shows the counties that were declared disaster areas last year. An awful lot of red. And 2012 was one of the worst droughts on record ever in the United States.

In the past, in situations such as this we would have passed ad hoc disaster assistance for the corn growers, the wheat growers, the soybean growers, and the other crop farmers. But we didn't have to do that because crop insurance works.

Crop insurance is not a subsidy. When people have crop insurance they

get a bill to pay. We share in that cost to make sure there is a discount so they can afford the bill, but they get a bill. They do not get a check. The only farmers last year who needed disaster assistance were the ones who can't participate in crop insurance, which we fix in this farm bill.

We address permanent livestock disaster assistance. They do not have access to the same crop insurance. We address farmers, such as my cherry growers, who were wiped out when it got warm in the spring and then froze again and completely wiped out the cherries. They do not have crop insurance now. They need some extra help. In this farm bill we are giving them access to crop insurance, which is the primary risk management tool for farmers.

Producers purchase crop insurance so they are protected when there is a disaster, but if we weaken crop insurance, resulting in premium hikes of as much as 40 percent on small farmers, we are going to be going back to the days of ad hoc disaster assistance, something we cannot afford in today's tight budget climate.

Finally, we need to keep this historic agreement in place through the conference committee. We owe that to the folks who sat down and worked out this agreement. So I ask colleagues to stand with the 34 different organizations that came together—and I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the names of the groups in the coalition that put this together.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

GROUPS IN CONSERVATION COMPLIANCE
COALITION

American Association of Crop Insurers, American Farm Bureau Federation, American Farmland Trust, American Society of Agronomy, American Soybean Association, American Sugar Alliance, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Audubon, Crop Insurance and Reinsurance Bureau, Crop Science Society of America, Ducks Unlimited, Environmental Defense Fund, Land Improvement Contractors of America, National Association of State Conservation Agencies, National Association of Conservation Districts, National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils, National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative.

National Conservation District Employees Association, National Corn Growers Association, National Cotton Council, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, National Farmers Union, National Wildlife Federation, Pheasants Forever, Pollinator Partnership, Quail Forever, Soil and Water Conservation Society, Soil Science Society of America, Southern Peanut Farmers Federation, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, The Nature Conservancy, USA Rice Federation, Wildlife Mississippi, World Wildlife Fund.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, we need to make sure our colleagues in the House, as well as in the Senate, stand with all of these groups who worked hard to compromise and forge this very historic constructive agreement. If we want to preserve conservation wins we have in this farm bill, we

need to support the farmers, the environmentalists, and the conservationists who have made it very clear this agreement is something they stand behind. We should not be weakening crop insurance or making it harder for large producers, who have the majority of the land we want to conserve, to have less of an incentive to participate in the program.

Let me just say—and I know my colleague from Vermont is here to speak as well—that I want to thank again the 34 organizations—everyone from the American Farm Bureau Federation, the American Soybean Association, the Audubon Society, Ducks Unlimited, the Environmental Defense Fund, National Wildlife Federation, National Cotton Council—and right on down the line—the National Farmers Union, Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, and USA Rice Federation.

This is an incredible coalition, and it speaks very loudly both to the fact we need to keep in place the No. 1 risk management tool for our growers but that we need to also make sure they are providing the conservation practices to protect our soil and our water which is so critical for the future—for our children and grandchildren.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, let me begin by congratulating Senators STABENOW and COCHRAN for their hard work on this very important piece of legislation, especially for rural States such as Vermont, but I guess for everybody who eats, which is the majority of the people in our country, I would imagine.

I want to spend a few minutes talking about some important amendments I am offering. I think one of them—the amendment I will talk about first—will be coming up for a vote either later tonight or tomorrow, and that deals with the right of States to label genetically engineered food. That is amendment No. 965.

This year, the Vermont State House of Representatives passed a bill by a vote of 99 to 42 requiring that genetically engineered food be labeled. I can tell you with absolute certainty the people of Vermont want to know what is in their food and are extremely supportive of what the State legislature has done. But this is an issue certainly not just limited to Vermont.

Yesterday, as I understand it, the Connecticut State Senate, by an overwhelming vote of 35 to 1, also passed legislation to require labeling of genetically engineered food. In California, our largest State, where the issue was on the ballot last November, 47 percent of the people there voted for labeling, despite the biotech industry spending over \$47 million in a campaign in opposition to that proposition. That is an enormous sum of money, and yet 47 percent of the people voted for labeling of GMOs.

In the State of Washington, some 350,000 people signed a petition in sup-

port of initiative 522 to label genetically engineered foods in that State. In fact, according to a recent poll done earlier this year, approximately 82 percent of the American people believe labeling should take place with regard to genetically engineered ingredients.

All over this country people are increasingly concerned about the quality of the food they are ingesting and the food they are giving to their kids. People want to know what is in their food, and I believe that is a very reasonable request.

What I am proposing today—the amendment I am offering—is certainly not a radical concept. In fact, the requirement of labeling genetically modified food exists today in dozens and dozens of countries throughout the world, including our closest allies in the European Union, including Russia, Australia, South Korea, Japan, Brazil, China, New Zealand, and other countries. So this is not some kind of new and crazy idea. In fact, it exists all over the world.

At a time when many of my colleagues express their strong conviction about States rights and that States should be allowed to have increased responsibilities, this amendment should be supported by those people who, in fact, believe in States rights. The reason for that is when the State of Vermont and other States go forward in passing legislation to label genetically modified food, they have been threatened by Monsanto and other large biotech companies with costly lawsuits. So States are going forward, doing what they think is proper for their own people, and then Monsanto and other very large biotech companies are coming forward and saying: We are going to sue you.

Now, Monsanto is arguing, as one of the major grounds for their lawsuit—which I believe is absolutely incorrect—that States do not have the right to pass legislation such as this; that it is, in fact, a Federal prerogative and not something a State can legally do.

I believe very strongly that Monsanto is wrong, but that is precisely what this amendment clarifies.

Today we have an opportunity with this amendment to affirm once and for all that States do have the right to label food that contains genetically engineered ingredients.

Let me briefly tell you what is in this amendment. This amendment finds that the 10th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States clearly reserves powers in the system of federalism to the States or to the people. This amendment finds that States have the authority to require the labeling of foods produced through genetically engineering or derived from organisms that have been genetically engineered.

Furthermore, this amendment requires that 1 year after the enactment of this act, the Commissioner of the FDA and the Secretary of Agriculture shall undertake the necessary regulations to carry out this amendment.

There is strong precedent for labeling GMOs. The FDA already required the labeling of over 3,000 ingredients and additives. If you want to know if your food contained gluten, aspartame, high-fructose corn syrup, trans fats or MSG, you simply read the ingredient label. Millions of people every day look at labels: How many calories are there in the food? What are the ingredients in the food? This simply does what we have been doing as a nation for many years, only right now Americans are not afforded the same right for GE foods.

Monsanto and other companies claim there is nothing to be concerned about with genetically engineered food. Yet FDA scientists and doctors have warned us that GE foods could have new and different risks, such as hidden allergens, increased plant toxin levels, and the potential to hasten the spread of antibiotic-resistant disease.

This is a pretty simple amendment. It basically says the American people have a right to know what they are eating. This is legislation I know the people of Vermont, I gather the people of Connecticut, and I think people all over this country would like to see agreed to. I ask for its support.

There are a couple of other amendments I would like to briefly discuss, having to do with SNAP. One of them deals with the need for seniors to be better able to access SNAP. It is no secret that in our country today, millions of seniors are struggling to get by on limited incomes. The result of that is that after they pay their prescription drug costs or their rent or their utilities, they do not have enough money to spend on food. It is estimated that some 1 million seniors are going hungry in the United States of America. That is something we should be embarrassed about and an issue we should address as soon as possible.

Clearly, the toll that inadequate nutrition has for seniors impacts their overall health. My strong guess is that this amendment will end up saving us money because when seniors get good nutrition, they are less likely to fall, break their hips, end up in the emergency room, end up in the hospital.

I think from a moral perspective, from a cost perspective, we want to make sure all seniors in this country, regardless of their income, have the nutrition they need.

SNAP plays a crucial role in our country in reducing hunger. In 2011, SNAP raised nearly 5 million people out of poverty. But here is the main point I wish to make: Only 35 percent of eligible individuals over age 60 participated in SNAP in 2010. In other words, there are many seniors out there who could benefit from SNAP but for a variety of reasons, one of which I am addressing right now, they do not participate.

As you may well know, the SNAP application process can be confusing and cumbersome for many households, especially for seniors. Individuals apply

for SNAP sometimes by visiting an application center, which is a challenge for people with mobility issues. If you are a senior and not able to get out of your home, if you cannot afford transportation, getting to that center can be very difficult.

It is also challenging when dealing with an application over the telephone if you are hard of hearing—which clearly many seniors are. At the same time, the complicated interview process costs local, State, tribal, and Federal governments additional administrative dollars.

The SNAP amendment I am offering is pretty simple. It will help alleviate hunger by allowing seniors to more easily apply for and access SNAP benefits in order to reduce barriers for seniors applying for SNAP.

This amendment proposes to do the following. It allows States to deputize, which in this case means to certify nonprofit organizations and area agencies on aging that are meeting with seniors directly and helping them with their SNAP application to conduct the interview on behalf of the State. The State agency would still determine eligibility.

Further, States would have the flexibility to deputize only the agencies that have the capacity to fulfill the State's interview requirements on their behalf. This amendment does not waive any documentation requirements or ease any other requirements. Eligibility for the benefits must still be verified. What it does do is reduce duplication of effort and ease the burden on vulnerable families and seniors for whom it is a challenge to travel to a State office or wait for days at a friend's house who has a phone to make a call.

All this is doing is saying: If we want to make sure seniors stay healthy, get the nutrition they need, stay out of the emergency room, stay out of the hospital, let us make it easier for them to take advantage of the programs that are currently available. In this case, the SNAP eligibility process for seniors is pretty complicated and sometimes people who want to be in the program simply are unable to do that. I hope we could have support for that amendment.

The other SNAP amendment deals with an equally important issue of people who are wrongfully dropped from the SNAP, often due to an administrative error. The current system is inefficient. We are spending government money that should be going to help people buy food and instead we are spending it on paperwork and bureaucracy. Improvements I am proposing will help alleviate hunger as fewer people will go without the benefits they need, and State and Federal resources will be used more effectively.

My amendment requires the USDA to track information from States on the problem of churn. That is the term used when eligible people are dropped from the program and then must re-

apply. The USDA and advocacy groups have identified children as a key problem in the administration of SNAP benefits. Having people reapply who never should have been dropped from the benefit in the first place adds to the caseload burden.

Tracking the information is only a first step. Then we must find solutions to reduce the problem so people do not lose their benefits, whether that be improved training, clearer forms and notices or simpler recertification processes. These improvements will reduce hunger by making sure people get the benefits for which they are eligible and which they so desperately need.

The last issue I briefly wish to touch on deals with the need for the USDA to help us understand, through a study, the impact that global warming is having on agriculture. We all know we are looking at record-setting droughts in Australia, Brazil, and locations in America. U.S. cities matched or broke at least 29,000 high-temperature records last year. Ice-free Arctic summers will be with us within a couple of years. That is the reality of the moment.

The impact of global warming clearly will be felt far and wide, but farmers across the country are among those who will suffer the most. Warmer temperatures, water shortages and droughts and other extreme weather disturbances will force producers to alter practices, change crops, and spend more money to sustain their operations.

This amendment simply asks the USDA to do a study to provide us with a better understanding of how changing climate will impact agriculture across the country and help farmers plan and adapt to those changes. It will help local communities and States make critical adjustments now, and it will reduce the vulnerability of the entire agriculture sector to the damaging consequences of climate change.

We think this is an important amendment. State farmers need to have the information about what scientists believe will be happening, the work they are doing for years to come. I ask for support for that amendment.

In the past we have successfully offered an amendment on community gardens. In Vermont, now schools, communities are working on gardens all over the State. We had a national program passed last year as well. This would simply expand that program to allow schools and communities to engage with limited help from the Federal Government in community gardens, teaching kids about the foods they are eating and about agriculture. It is a very inexpensive concept, which has been working very successfully and I think needs to be expanded.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I rise to offer my support for the sugar reform amendment being offered on the farm

bill by Senator SHAHEEN. This important amendment would begin a reform process that deals with a complicated and burdensome program that artificially raises sugar prices in the United States. For nearly three-quarters of a century now, American businesses and consumers have paid a premium price for sugar. This inflated price is due to a tangled web of price manipulation, stringent import quotas and tariffs. The net effect has been that Americans are paying as much as twice the world market base price for sugar.

We all realize the amount of sugar that is used in a number of products across the United States, but let me bring this down specifically to what impact it has on some of the confectioners in my home State. Albanese Confectionary Group, Inc, is a renowned Indiana-based manufacturer of a number of products that use a lot of sugars, including chocolates and Gummi bears—they call it the World's Best Gummies—and a lot of other confections. Their estimate is that they would save \$3 trillion annually if they were able to buy sugar at the world price.

Lewis Bakeries, headquartered in Evansville, IN, is one of the few remaining independent bakeries in our State and in the Midwest and is the largest wholesale bakery we have. Artificially high prices for Lewis Bakeries contributes directly to higher food and beverage costs that weigh down family budgets. Even larger companies such as Kraft Foods, which has a marshmallow and caramel plant in Kendallville, IN, knows that phasing out the Sugar Program would enhance the competitiveness of U.S. sugar manufacturers.

Why is that important? Because these sugar prices for those in this business of using large quantities of sugar is driving them offshore. They are moving to Canada, they are moving to Mexico, they are moving to other places where they then can buy the most important ingredient for their product at world market prices and save a great deal of money.

I encourage my colleagues to support the Shaheen amendment. It promotes jobs, fights consumer price inflation. It reduces the level of government interference in private markets. I think we should be pursuing policies that allow the free market to determine the cost of sugar rather than this complicated web of tariffs and regulations and others that protect that price.

This amendment does not accomplish all of that, but it goes a long way toward beginning the process of unwinding this and making our companies more competitive around the world.

I would like to take a moment to address another issue with the farm bill. Senator DONNELLY and I are cosponsors of a bill called planting flexibility. We are hoping this provision we have offered will be included in the managers' amendment. I appreciate all the work that has been done behind the scenes to

address this important issue. Planting flexibility simply allows farmers to respond to market signals when making their planting decisions, rather than following requirements to grow a particular crop to participate in government programs.

For example, Hoosier tomato farmers were restricted on where they could plant their crop. Red Gold, a family-owned and operated tomato business in Elwood, IN, estimates that roughly 50 percent of its tomatoes are now grown on flexible acres. Red Gold produces a whole number of tomato products that are sold all over the United States and, in fact, all over the world.

Allowing this flexibility, again, is a free-market-based choice which producers can follow based on supply and demand. It gives them the flexibility they need to address crops outside the coverage of this particular bill.

I think both of these measures are commonsense, market-driven reforms that I hope will be included in the farm bill, and I ask that my colleagues support them.

Mr. President, unless the ranking member on the Agriculture Committee needs the time, and since no one else is on the floor, I would be remiss in not speaking a little longer.

If I could speak as if in morning business, I wish to do so.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COONS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

OKLAHOMA TRAGEDY

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, the first thing I want to do is extend our sincere regrets over the tragedy which occurred in Oklahoma. Sincere thoughts and prayers are coming from many Hoosiers for those people who have suffered greatly.

Last year we had a serious tornado roar through southern Indiana along a 50-mile path. Fortunately, we didn't have the level of destruction they had in Oklahoma City. But having been there and viewed the destruction of that tornado in Indiana and the impact it had on the lives of so many people and then comparing it with what happened in Oklahoma, it certainly brings home the nature of this tragedy. Whenever Mother Nature's vicious wrath strikes, it not only tears apart homes but families.

During these times of tragedy—such as what I witnessed in southern Indiana and what we are witnessing on television as we watch what is happening in Oklahoma—we see the extraordinary heroism, generosity, volunteerism, and resolve of the American people to pitch in and help.

I ask all Hoosiers to keep our friends in Oklahoma in their hearts and prayers and to help wherever we can.

JOBS AND DEBT

Mr. President, in the last few weeks there has been scandal after scandal unfolding in Washington. Obviously this is a difficult period for the current administration, but more importantly, it has resulted in a difficult time for our Nation.

What we saw last week is further justification for the American people's deeply disturbing distrust of government. Under this current administration, there has been a pattern of misleading the American people and there has been a culture of intimidation toward those who disagree with their policies.

We saw it when the administration misled the American people with the events in Benghazi, and we saw it when the administration avoided letting people know about the IRS targeting conservative groups. Whether it is the IRS, Benghazi, or other issues we have become aware of in the last few weeks and months, they call into question the integrity of this administration. The American people deserve straight talk and the truth as to what happened rather than the mischaracterization or lack of revelation of what has happened.

Through calls, emails, and letters, I am hearing from concerned Hoosiers who are outraged with what they see taking place in Washington. Given the headlines they have seen in the last few weeks, they have every right to be concerned.

The only way to eliminate this current trust deficit in Washington is to hold people accountable, get complete answers, and make changes to ensure this abuse of power and misinformation which is coming out of this administration will not continue. We need to continue with these ongoing investigations until we get answers and determine who is responsible.

In the midst of these investigations, let me state there is another scandal we must not overlook, and that is the ongoing chronic debt and unemployment crisis.

Four-and-a-half years after the end of an admittedly deep recession, the fact that 22 million Americans are either unemployed or underemployed is a scandal. More than \$16.8 trillion of debt, with its impact on future generations, is a scandal. Borrowing \$40,000 per second and saddling each child born today in America with over \$50,000 of debt is a scandal. These numbers are not partisan or political, they are the facts. Those are the facts that this body, as well as this administration, have to deal with because we are careening on an unstable fiscal path which will bankrupt the critical programs our seniors and retirees depend on and rob them of the benefits they have been promised.

We are seeing meager gains in jobs only to find out more and more Americans are being forced from full-time employment to part-time employment. In April alone, nearly 280,000 Americans involuntarily entered into part-time employment. At the same time, the average work week and weekly take-home pay continues to decline.

These two issues—our debt crisis and our jobs crisis—should consume the work of this Congress and this administration. Instead, we careen from drama

to drama. We wait for the fiscal cliff and debt limit deadlines, and then we enact far short from what we need to do with legislation that is often flawed, such as the across-the-board sequestration policy. None of this remotely solves the problem we face.

In a recent Gallup poll, when asked what they would like Congress and the President to address, 86 percent of the American people named creating jobs and growing the economy. From Fort Wayne to Evansville and from Gary to Jeffersonville, Hoosiers tell me they want Congress to bring growth and certainty to our economy and create meaningful jobs for the underemployed and unemployed.

As we address the issues before us, let's not forget about this major debt crisis which faces our country and impacts every American. Let's not forget about those Americans who are looking for work and cannot find it, or those who have been forced into part-time jobs which will not begin to be enough to support a family. Let's not become distracted and drop the ball on tackling these issues because the daily headlines are simply pointing to something else.

The best way we can restore the trust deficit in this country is to do our job here, make the tough decisions we know we need to make, and address our greatest challenge.

We must come together on a credible, long-term plan to reduce our debt and put our country back on a path toward growth and job creation. The future of our country depends upon it. Each of us, starting with the President, has a moral obligation to address this most critical issue. I hope we will be willing to stand up and do this.

Yes, we have other issues. We have the farm bill, which we need to address. We will be talking about immigration a week after we come back from the break. We will be holding investigations and looking into some of these scandals that have surfaced over the last few weeks, but we still have not focused on the real problem here.

While we have to do these other tasks, let us not forget what the real challenge is before us: restoring economic growth and creating jobs. We owe it to the American people.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—S. RES. 65

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding the previous order, the Senate begin consideration of S. Res. 65 at 3:45

p.m.; that there be 50 minutes for debate, that the Republicans control 30 minutes and the majority control 20 minutes, and that of the majority's time, Senator MENENDEZ control 15 minutes and Senator BLUMENTHAL control 5 minutes; that all other provisions under the previous order remain in effect; and that upon disposition of S. Res. 65 the Senate resume consideration of S. 954; that there be 2 minutes for debate equally divided in the usual form and the Senate immediately proceed to vote in relation to the Shaheen amendment No. 925; and that there be no second-degree amendments in order prior to the vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. STABENOW. Thank you, Mr. President. As a result of this agreement, if all time is used, at approximately 4:35 p.m. there will be two roll-call votes, the first on adoption of S. Res. 65, the Iran sanctions resolution, and then in relation to the Shaheen amendment on the Sugar Program.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

AMENDMENT NO. 925

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I rise to address the Shaheen amendment No. 925 the chairman of the committee just referred to. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment. I wish to start by thanking Senator SHAHEEN for her leadership, Senator KIRK for his leadership, and Senator DURBIN for his support and leadership. We have all worked together on this amendment. I wish to briefly explain why I think it is important and why this amendment deserves the support of this body.

First of all, people ought to understand we have an extensive and complicated system by which taxpayers and consumers are forced to prop up, to an artificially high price, the price of sugar in this country. We subsidize a handful of wealthy sugar growers at the expense of everybody in America because I can't think of any consumer who doesn't consume sugar. Everybody uses some amount of sugar. It is in virtually all processed food. It is obviously in any kind of confectionery or any kind of sweets. It is a staple, a fundamental staple. In fact, the poorest Americans spend the highest percentage of their limited income on sugar because that is the nature of this food staple that is sugar.

Well, what do we do through our agricultural policy? One of the things we do is we put a limit on how much we can bring in from overseas. It just so happens there are some places in the world that can grow sugar cheaper than we can, and rather than take advantage of the opportunity to have a lower cost staple for all Americans—including the poorest of Americans—instead we establish a quota and say there is only so much we are going to bring in without imposing a big, huge, expensive tariff on them, and since we

don't grow enough ourselves to meet the demand, when we hit that quota, we do, in fact, impose that huge tariff on the additional sugar we need to buy.

But that is not all we do to subsidize these handful of growers at the expense of American taxpayers and consumers. Another program we have is an extensive loan program where ultimately the taxpayer lends money to sugar producers, and it is a "heads-I-win, tails-you-lose" program for the sugar producer. If the price drops too low on sugar that the producer would actually have to reach into his own pocket to pay back the loan, guess what. He doesn't have to do that. He can say: Nevermind, I am not going to pay back the loan. I will just give you the sugar. This is classic "heads-they-win, tails-we-all-lose."

It goes beyond that because in an effort to prop up the price at artificially high levels so we are all paying more than we need to for sugar, we have a program that is called the Feedstock Flexibility Program. This program is one in which the USDA takes taxpayer money and buys up huge quantities of sugar in order to drive up the price for all of us. I know it is hard to believe this is true. I am not making this up. I am not creative enough to make this up. This is real.

Then what does the USDA do with the massive quantity of sugar it might buy? By the way, there was a front-page story in the Wall Street Journal just a few weeks ago about a huge purchase the USDA is seriously thinking about making, has the discretion to do it, and might very well make. If they don't use all of the sugar, they don't have anything to do with it, so they sell it at a huge loss. They sell it to somebody who is going to make ethanol or something with it. That is what we do with it. It is unbelievable, all the ways in which taxpayers or consumers are forced to subsidize a very wealthy group of sugar growers. So that is what we do as policy under existing law.

This amendment tries to push that back a little bit. That is all we are trying to do. What Senators SHAHEEN and KIRK and DURBIN and I have done with this amendment is say: Can we at least push back some of the most egregious features? Can we go back to the policy we had prior to the 2008 farm bill because prior to 2008, we did subsidize sugar, but at least not quite as much as we do today. So that is what we are trying to do. Let's just go back to the policies we had before 2008, and specifically let's eliminate this Feed Stock Program, this program whereby the USDA can go out and purchase huge quantities of sugar, driving up the price, and then turn around and sell it at a huge loss. Let's end that, and let's have a little bit more flexibility on this quota so American consumers can have the opportunity to buy more sugar at prices that are at least a little closer to the world prices.

Here are a few facts we ought to keep in mind. The net effect of all of these

programs on all of our consumers—and as I say, everybody consumes sugar—is that we pay, on average, about 30 percent more than the world market price for sugar. That is what we are doing to our consumers now. By the way, that is separate and apart from the cost to taxpayers. That is just what consumers are forced to pay.

Now, does that have the effect of maybe protecting a handful of jobs among sugar growers? It probably does. So the Commerce Department decided to take a look at this, and they did a study. They discovered, sure enough, there are a certain number of jobs among sugar producers that are protected by the fact that we don't allow a free market in sugar and we don't allow imports from more efficient producers. But here is what else they discovered. They discovered for every job we save among sugar producers, we lose three jobs among companies that manufacture with sugar—companies that make cakes and desserts and candies and all the other kinds of goods we manufacture that require sugar as an ingredient. The reason we lose those jobs is because those companies can't compete with foreign imports that don't have this crazy Sugar Program.

So, for instance, we have candy companies that have left America and have moved to Canada because Canada doesn't do this. When they relocate in Canada, they can buy sugar at a normal world price, the same as anyone else anywhere in the world outside of America—maybe not anybody, but lots of people outside of America can buy sugar that is much cheaper than what they have to pay for sugar when they are an American citizen, an American company, so they can make candy much cheaper.

So we lose American jobs, which we have lost, they go to Canada or somewhere else, and how can that possibly be a good outcome to lose three jobs for every one we protect. It doesn't make any sense.

This is a badly flawed policy. I would advocate that we completely repeal all of this. That would be my personal view. That is not what this amendment does. All we do in this amendment is say let's just go back to where we were before the farm bill of 2008 expanded this program and created this new liability for taxpayers.

So I urge my colleagues to support the Shaheen amendment No. 925 for some good, commonsense improvements to our existing sugar policy.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, yesterday I came to the floor of the Senate to talk not only about the farm bill, but specifically about the importance of the Sugar Program to the compromise that is the farm bill. I talked about growers getting protections in terms of crop insurance, I talked about the dairy program, I talked about specialty crops, and I

talked about the importance of protecting the domestic sugar industry and using a no-cost approach which has been the approach we have dealt with for years in the Sugar Program.

Today I don't want to repeat all of that discussion. What I would like to do, however, is respond directly to the Shaheen amendment and some of the information we have been hearing about the Shaheen amendment going forward. I think it is important because we have heard the Shaheen amendment would simply roll back the Sugar Program to the policies in place before the 2008 farm bill. In reality, this amendment would do far more than what was included in the program prior to 2008 and would, in fact, threaten 142,000 American sugar-producing jobs in 22 States.

I want to be very specific about the uniqueness of this compared to pre-2008. So, specifically, the amendment institutes two new policies beyond repealing the 2008 farm bill changes to the Sugar Program that are damaging to our farmers and sugar manufacturers in the United States.

First, the amendment would mandate for the first time a 15.5-percent stocks-to-use ratio. Sugar supplies in the United States are already at historically high surplus levels at a stocks-to-use ratio in the 18-to-20 percent range. This proposal would mandate artificially inflated increased inventories in order, really—realistically—to push down prices for food processing companies. At a stocks-to-use ratio of less than 15.5 percent earlier this year, sugar producer prices were collapsing below average levels of the 1980s and the 1990s.

We hear over and over again about how we have had this dramatic increase in sugar prices, and that has led to the loss of American processing jobs. Really, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we have seen historically low prices. In fact, sugar prices earlier this year were collapsing below the levels of the 1980s and 1990s.

Second, it would make U.S. sugar import quota rights tradable—tradable—on the open market, and I think that would risk potential fraud and abuse and denial of quota benefits to developing countries that count on the quotas. So if a country could not, in fact, meet their quota, that quota could be traded on the open market. I think that is a formula for interjecting a factor that has never been instituted before in the sugar bill.

I think U.S. policy provides access to developing world countries to our sugar market, one of the largest in the world. Allowing governments of developing nations to trade their quotas does nothing to empower those farmers in developing countries. Instead, the quota rights will be traded to subsidized industries in powerful sugar companies such as Brazil, which could lead to further excess supply in the American market.

Because everybody seems to believe that pre-2008 was a panacea for sugar,

and if we just went back there everything would once again be fine, I wish to set the stage for what the world was like before the 2008 farm bill. The 2008 farm bill updated the Sugar Program in response to a change in the relationship between the United States and Mexico regarding sugar. Under NAFTA, agricultural trade was liberalized between our two countries which removed barriers and allowed a more free flow of goods. The NAFTA provisions regarding sugar were fully realized in 2008.

If dropping the trade barriers resulted in a level playing field, this would have been no problem because our American farmers are the most efficient in the world, and we can win in a free market condition. However, a level playing field was not the case. Mexican sugar is highly subsidized. In fact, the government owns approximately 20 percent of their sugar industry.

Candy and major food-producing companies are having some of their most successful years in memory. When we hear the stories of lost jobs and additional burden, I think we need to look at reality, and I think reality is that nothing has—the price of sugar has not prevented them from achieving record profits, strong profits, and continued growth.

Another fact that doesn't get talked about much when we talk about the Sugar Program is that today the price of sugar is roughly the same as what it was in 1985. What product can we say that is true of? Sugar is the exact price as it was in 1985.

Additionally, the domestic price of sugar is often lower than the international price when factoring in transportation costs. To claim the Sugar Program is breaking the backs of American consumers, again, is not a fair or accurate statement.

The U.S. wholesale sugar price in April was 26 cents per pound. The internationally traded sugar price in April was 22 cents per pound. The transportation cost of bringing sugar to the United States from Brazil, the Dominican Republic, or the Philippines—three of the largest importers of sugar under the program—exceeds the 4 cents-per-pound difference.

So I think it is important that we at least have some response to this idea that, No. 1, things were good in 2008 so we should just roll back the program to 2008. If that were true, obviously, I do not think we would be standing here fighting this amendment. But I do not think it is true. Plus, I think there are provisions in this amendment that have not yet been revealed as provisions that were not included in the pre-2008 Sugar Program, and that concerns me.

It concerns me that this amendment has not had a discussion in committee. This amendment has not been something that the experts on the Agriculture Committee have deliberated.

Then I want to kind of pull back and look at a higher view, which is the

American farmer, American agriculture, and what the farm bill attempts to do to guarantee a sure and steady supply of food for our country and, arguably, for the world.

The farm bill is a compromise package. The farm bill represents, in each one of those elements, a different provision for different parts of our country: dairy, important in Wisconsin; dairy, important in Vermont; dairy, not so important in North Dakota. But sugar is critically important to the economy of North Dakota. Sugar is important to the economy of Minnesota, the economy of Florida, the economy of Hawaii.

All of us have come together to fashion a farm bill that responds to the need for certainty in American agricultural policy. The farm bill is critical not only to our farmers but to the 16 million jobs the farm bill supports, and we forget that. We forget that this is much bigger than a sugar program, it is much bigger than any one individual commodity. It is about food security, combined with an effort to do what we need to do to provide certainty and surety to American producers.

My concern is that when you single out one commodity—whether it is soybeans or corn or sugar or tobacco or rice—when you single out one commodity, you threaten the effectiveness of the overall farm bill. So I would urge my colleagues to work within the structure of the Agriculture Committee, understand that where you may have individual concerns about each piece of this—and I may have individual concerns about varying pieces of this farm bill, this ag bill, but it is critically important that we not single out one commodity on which to reduce our support. Sugar is too important to our economy, it is too important to our food processing to risk simply that we are going to have enough sugar on the international market, that we are not going to have a domestic supply because many of these provisions would drive the domestic producer out of the market, making us beholden to foreign sources of sugar. I do not think that is why we have a farm bill. I think we have a farm bill so we can guarantee that farm commodities and farm products that we are able to grow in this country are available and local.

So I urge a “no” vote on this amendment. I think it is extreme. This amendment, which has basically been reported to be a simple rollback to 2008, is not exactly as it appears. I believe it is critically important that we keep the compromise, which is the farm bill as reported out of the committee, essentially intact by recognizing the needs of all the commodity groups.

I yield the floor.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. HOEVEN. I want to take several minutes to respond to some of the comments that were made here in regard to the farm bill, and specifically the Sugar Program. We have got a vote coming up.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. We currently have an order to move to the consideration of S. Res. 65 at 3:45 p.m.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, that is my resolution with Senator MENENDEZ. I do not mind yielding a couple of minutes to the Senator to make his points.

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

Mr. HOEVEN. I thank my colleague. I do want to respond to some comments that were made in regard to the Sugar Program and the cost of sugar for American consumers. It is very important to understand that the price of sugar in the United States is actually less than the international price. So because of the Sugar Program we have, American consumers benefit. Again, I want to reiterate that point.

Also I want to express how important it is to understand that we have low-cost producers in this country who are precluded from selling their sugar in markets such as the European Union because of tariffs and restrictions. As an individual who strongly supports international commerce and trade, on many of these issues I am down here talking about how we want to continue to expand our ability to export. I believe that. But at the same time, we have to make sure our companies and our farmers, our ranchers and our producers, particularly when we are talking about a farm bill, are treated fairly.

We have a situation where they operate internationally and they are precluded from many markets throughout the world, even though they are low-cost producers. That is what our Sugar Program is designed to do, to try to level that playing field. It does so effectively. The Sugar Program has cost this country nothing over the last decade. In fact, consumers in this country benefit from lower sugar prices than the international price, not higher prices.

I yield the floor.

SUPPORTING SANCTIONS ON IRAN

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 65, which the clerk will report by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 65) strongly supporting the full implementation of the United States and international sanctions on Iran and urging the President to continue to strengthen enforcement of sanctions legislation.

The Senate proceeded to consider the resolution, which had been reported

from the Committee on Foreign Relations, with an amendment.

[Strike the part printed in boldface brackets and insert the part printed in italic.]

S. RES. 65

Whereas, on May 14, 1948, the people of Israel proclaimed the establishment of the sovereign and independent State of Israel;

Whereas, on March 28, 1949, the United States Government recognized the establishment of the new State of Israel and established full diplomatic relations;

Whereas, since its establishment nearly 65 years ago, the modern State of Israel has rebuilt a nation, forged a new and dynamic democratic society, and created a thriving economic, political, cultural, and intellectual life despite the heavy costs of war, terrorism, and unjustified diplomatic and economic boycotts against the people of Israel;

Whereas the people of Israel have established a vibrant, pluralistic, democratic political system, including freedom of speech, association, and religion; a vigorously free press; free, fair, and open elections; the rule of law; a fully independent judiciary; and other democratic principles and practices;

Whereas, since the 1979 revolution in Iran, the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran have repeatedly made threats against the existence of the State of Israel and sponsored acts of terrorism and violence against its citizens;

Whereas, on October 27, 2005, President of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called for a world without America and Zionism;

Whereas, in February 2012, Supreme Leader of Iran Ali Khamenei said of Israel, "The Zionist regime is a true cancer tumor on this region that should be cut off. And it definitely will be cut off.";

Whereas, in August 2012, Supreme Leader Khamenei said of Israel, "This bogus and fake Zionist outgrowth will disappear off the landscape of geography.";

Whereas, in August 2012, President Ahmadinejad said that "in the new Middle East . . . there will be no trace of the American presence and the Zionists";

Whereas the Department of State has designated the Islamic Republic of Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism since 1984 and has characterized the Islamic Republic of Iran as the "most active state sponsor of terrorism" in the world;

Whereas the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has provided weapons, training, funding, and direction to terrorist groups, including Hamas, Hizballah, and Shiite militias in Iraq that are responsible for the murder of hundreds of United States service members and innocent civilians;

Whereas the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has provided weapons, training, and funding to the regime of Bashar al Assad that has been used to suppress and murder its own people;

Whereas, since at least the late 1980s, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has engaged in a sustained and well-documented pattern of illicit and deceptive activities to acquire a nuclear weapons capability;

Whereas, since September 2005, the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has found the Islamic Republic of Iran to be in non-compliance with its safeguards agreement with the IAEA, which Iran is obligated to undertake as a non-nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, done at Washington, London, and Moscow July 1, 1968, and entered into force March 5, 1970 (NPT);

Whereas the United Nations Security Council has adopted multiple resolutions

since 2006 demanding of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran its full and sustained suspension of all uranium enrichment-related and reprocessing activities and its full cooperation with the IAEA on all outstanding issues related to its nuclear activities, particularly those concerning the possible military dimensions of its nuclear program;

Whereas the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has refused to comply with United Nations Security Council resolutions or to fully cooperate with the IAEA;

Whereas, in November 2011, the IAEA Director General issued a report that documented "serious concerns regarding possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme," and affirmed that information available to the IAEA indicates that "Iran has carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device" and that some activities may be ongoing;

Whereas the Government of Iran stands in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for denying its citizens basic freedoms, including the freedoms of expression, religion, peaceful assembly and movement, and for flagrantly abusing the rights of minorities and women;

Whereas in his State of the Union Address on January 24, 2012, President Barack Obama stated, "Let there be no doubt: America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will take no options off the table to achieve that goal.";

Whereas Congress has passed and the President has signed into law legislation imposing significant economic and diplomatic sanctions on Iran to encourage the Government of Iran to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons and end its support for terrorism;

Whereas these sanctions, while having significant effect, have yet to persuade Iran to abandon its illicit pursuits and comply with United Nations Security Council resolutions;

Whereas more stringent enforcement of sanctions legislation, including elements targeting oil exports and access to foreign exchange, could still lead the Government of Iran to change course;

Whereas, in his State of the Union Address on February 12, 2013, President Obama reiterated, "The leaders of Iran must recognize that now is the time for a diplomatic solution, because a coalition stands united in demanding that they meet their obligations. And we will do what is necessary to prevent them from getting a nuclear weapon.";

Whereas, on March 4, 2012, President Obama stated, "Iran's leaders should understand that I do not have a policy of containment; I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.";

Whereas, on October 22, 2012, President Obama said of Iran, "The clock is ticking . . . And we're going to make sure that if they do not meet the demands of the international community, then we are going to take all options necessary to make sure they don't have a nuclear weapon.";

Whereas, on May 19, 2011, President Obama stated, "Every state has the right to self-defense, and Israel must be able to defend itself, by itself, against any threat.";

Whereas, on September 21, 2011, President Obama stated, "America's commitment to Israel's security is unshakable. Our friendship with Israel is deep and enduring.";

Whereas, on March 4, 2012, President Obama stated, "And whenever an effort is made to delegitimize the state of Israel, my administration has opposed them. So there should not be a shred of doubt by now: when the chips are down, I have Israel's back.";

Whereas, on October 22, 2012, President Obama stated, "Israel is a true friend. And if Israel is attacked, America will stand with