

gave me the opportunity to travel all corners of our State. I went from southeast Kansas in Galena to northwest Kansas in Goodland, and almost every night while I was home weather was the topic of conversation.

Certainly, as Kansans who have experienced tornadoes in our own State over the last week and, certainly, over the life of our State, we extend our deepest sympathies and concerns to the people of Oklahoma. It is weather that I wanted to talk about on the Senate floor today in preparation for an amendment I will offer, which is being offered to the farm bill, and continued discussion of that farm bill throughout this week.

As I listened to Kansas farmers, the most prevalent request when it comes to farm policy, to a request for what ought to be in a farm bill is the request by Kansans that the Crop Insurance Program remain solid and viable. We live in a State in which weather is not always a friend to agriculture. Yet agriculture is our most significant creator of economic activity and generator of jobs and economic growth in our State.

We have the pleasure, in fact we are very proud, to feed, clothe, and provide energy to much of the world. At the moment the challenges are great because of the significant effect the drought has had on Kansas and much of the Midwest. That drought has been ongoing for more than 2 years, and it has had a significant impact on agricultural production. It is that point I want to make as we debate the farm bill, the importance of the Crop Insurance Program in response to those difficult times.

Despite the drought, our Nation remains the land of plenty, and Americans continue to enjoy the safest and most abundant food supply in the world. The reason we have so much is because of many factors: Prayers, the work ethic of American farmers and ranchers, the courage to persevere in spite of enormous challenges, and, among those things, finally, is the ability to manage risk.

Farming and ranching is a high-risk occupation. Producers can't manage the one thing that matters most to them, Mother Nature. Mother Nature is the one variable that can't be controlled. Mother Nature brings drought, rain, wind, and hail, the things a producer must face head on each year and each year to follow.

With the inability to control the weather, we must control what we can—the great risks associated with agriculture. This is required for the United States to remain that land of plenty.

The risk management tool of choice is crop insurance. Crop insurance gives producers a safety net so when there is a drought, a flood, a hailstorm, or windstorm, they can pick up the pieces and try again. This is what sets us apart from the rest of the world. We have the ability to manage our risks so

when Mother Nature gives us something bad, our Nation's farmers and ranchers can live to start again.

Crop insurance is a public-private partnership. The government helps the producers cover some of the costs of the policy, and the producer covers the rest. Consumers help the producer, and the producer helps the consumer.

To be clear, producers pay a significant part of the premium out of their own pocket. In 2012 they paid \$4.1 billion to buy insurance to manage their risks. When farmers take out a crop insurance policy, they get a bill, not a check.

Crop insurance has virtually replaced the need for ad hoc disaster measures for crops. During my time in the House of Representatives and now in the Senate, going back to 1989, 42 such pieces of legislation have cost the taxpayer more than \$70 billion. During my time in the House, and now the Senate, many times we have asked for ad hoc disaster assistance, a bill to pass the legislature to provide assistance at the moment. Crop insurance is the tool by which we can avoid those requests. When you manage risks with crop insurance, you save the taxpayers money and give the producers a better program.

Today, as we have scheduled votes, I have an amendment on the Senate floor dealing with a crop called alfalfa. Alfalfa is the Nation's fourth most valuable crop, and it plays a significant role in our daily lives.

Alfalfa is a building block for milk and meat. The hay that is grown in the fields of California, Idaho, South Dakota, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, Texas, Wisconsin, Kansas, and the rest of the 50 States is a driver of the cost of products on grocery store shelves. The Nation's fourth most valuable crop is vitally important.

The reality is producers are faced with risks, and there is no good way to manage them when it comes to this crop, alfalfa. The current Crop Insurance Program, Forage Production APH, is severely inadequate, as demonstrated by the fact that less than 10 percent of the acres are enrolled in the program—compared to corn, soybeans, and wheat, which are all more than 80 percent.

Producers are going back to the bank to borrow operating money and being told not to plant alfalfa because there is no good way to manage the risk. This is very troubling because of the impact that alfalfa has on the economy and our Nation's food supply.

The crop is important, and we need to figure out a way to manage its risks. Producers are being told to grow crops that have a safety net, crops that have some kind of guarantee when weather is bad. My amendment, No. 987, requires the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation to conduct research and development regarding the policy to insure alfalfa and a report describing the results of that study. There are no additional costs to the taxpayer with my amendment.

We need to take a good hard look at alfalfa and recognize its value to the Nation. We need to study and develop something that will work, save taxpayer money, and make certain the land of plenty remains the land of plenty. Alfalfa is a building block of milk and meat. With a risk management tool for alfalfa production, producers will enjoy lower input cost and consumers will enjoy less expensive products on the grocery store shelves.

I know you understand the value of agriculture in Kansas, and I appreciate the opportunity to be on the Senate floor today to describe the value of crop insurance and particularly to highlight the amendment we will vote on later today.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alaska.

ALASKA FLOODING

Mr. BEGICH. Mr. President, I rise today to describe the devastating spring breakup flooding affecting my home State of Alaska. As we just heard about Kansas, weather patterns are affecting long-term droughts in farmlands, while in Alaska it is warm weather that is actually going in the opposite direction.

Over the last several weeks our country has witnessed devastating tornadoes in Oklahoma. Our hearts go out to the families of Moore, Oklahoma City, and many others that have been affected, as they rebuild their lives.

Disasters such as these remind us of the importance of family and community, and it should make us again examine the work being done by FEMA and other agencies to help communities prepare for natural disasters. While it didn't make national news, Alaska's families along the Yukon River are putting their lives back together after record flooding last week.

Thick river ice, high temperatures, and fast melting combined to flood the community of Galena during what we call "breakup" in Alaska. For those who have never witnessed it, breakup on Alaska's biggest and mightiest river is a spectacle almost beyond description. As the ice begins to move, buckle, and crack, you can sometimes hear it from miles away. The trouble is, in the wrong conditions, the moving ice can get caught where the rivers make their natural bends. It piles up into mountains of jumbled ice, creating a natural dam that floods everything behind it, or when it suddenly breaks loose, torrents of raging water and ice rush downstream. This year breakup has, unfortunately, caused some extreme conditions in interior Alaska.

Last week, quickly rising waters from a 30-mile ice jam along the Yukon River had the village of Galena underwater for 3 days. This is an example of what you can see. The woods, the trees are there, but all along there is water burying the buildings.

Galena is a village of fewer than 500 people located in the interior of Alaska. At least 300 of these residents had to be evacuated to keep them from danger. Others moved to buildings on higher ground to keep safe from the rising water.

We are grateful to be able to say no deaths or serious injuries have been reported. It is a miracle when you look at the photos of the damage. As I said, this photo, the aerial photo of Galena, shows the extent of the damage. As mentioned, this was a severe flood. It came on very fast, and we had to try to deal with this very quickly because the power of the Yukon, when it is moving, is fast and furious. These ice jams move fast once they break. It is the worst flooding they have seen in 70 years.

When this happens in very remote communities such as Galena, they don't have communications, river-monitoring technology, and transportation infrastructure to react quickly. Let me remind people that you cannot drive out of this community. You have to fly out of this community. So when the river is breaking, it is all hands on deck for everybody.

We are thankful for the response by the Tanana Chiefs Conference, which safely evacuated many residents. The American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and many volunteers provided invaluable help. I am proud of the community for coming together to support each other and evacuating the elders and those most in need first. Alaskans are the type of people who are always willing to lend a hand to their neighbor.

This flood hit the community hard. Nearly every structure in Galena and the surrounding 25-mile-wide valley basin was under water. You can see here in this photo how that water moved and flooded out the whole area. The ice jam on the Yukon causing this flooding isn't gone yet. Villages down river from Galena, such as St. Mary's or Holy Cross, remain on alert and are bracing for their possible evacuation.

Once again I remind folks, you cannot drive out of these communities, you have to fly out or take the river. The people who live along the Yukon River respect it as a resource but know that living along the banks can also bring dangerous conditions which we must prepare for.

Although the waters in Galena are subsiding, we know the real work is just beginning. This community must rebuild stronger, more prepared for future disasters. And they must do so within the short summer construction season, an added complication for Alaska. Again, our spring is here now, summer will soon be here, and within 3½ months winter will be back.

As chairman of the Senate Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emergency Management, I take this flooding event very seriously. I have been in touch with local leaders, State disaster response agencies, and FEMA. I will re-

main engaged throughout the cleanup and rebuilding process.

I am working with the State on this emergency, and I will make sure we have all the resources possible as Galena repairs and rebuilds. The emergency response priorities right now are restoring essential services and getting people back in their homes. I am pleased Alaska's Governor Parnell declared a State disaster for Galena last week, and I urge the President to act quickly to declare a Federal disaster to free up vital resources to help our State and its people recover.

Responding to natural disasters in Alaska is very different than in the lower 48. We have very unique challenges. It is important to have some perspective on the size and scope of Alaska. Alaska's land is two-and-a-half times the size of the State of Texas. Our road system is smaller than that of Rhode Island, and 82 percent of Alaskan communities are only accessible by air. Flying from Galena to Fairbanks, or back and forth, is equivalent to flying from Washington, DC, to New York. Actually, it is a little longer. It is an amazing distance when you have to go from place to place.

I remind folks, as you can see the great Yukon, in order to bring supplies and necessities in, it is an hour-long flight from the Fairbanks region. This makes the traditional lower 48 disaster response unrealistic for Alaska. In most communities we don't have the road system to truck in critical supplies. We frequently rely on skilled bush pilots and boat captains to bring relief to communities in need. Our pilots are often forced to land on gravel runways or river sandbars and our barge captains must navigate dangerous waters to access rural villages.

Most residents of the lower 48 couldn't even begin to imagine these experiences. This disaster in Galena is a stark reminder of why we must continue to invest in the aviation and maritime lifelines Alaskans rely on for survival.

Another issue unique to my State is the absence of broadband access in rural areas. When I say that, most people say: What is the big deal? Everyone is hooked up. Not in Alaska. This is something most people would consider critical infrastructure in order to respond to disasters.

Increased broadband deployment throughout rural Alaska would help communities such as Galena by providing vital information, such as telehealth access to help injured residents, up-to-date information on changing weather conditions, better communication between responders and the disaster response center, and information on incident response teams and cleanup strategies.

I might relate a personal example here. When I called the individual in charge of the situation on the ground, we were waiting for another radio call-in—let me repeat that: a radio call-in—to get an update from someone on the

site because the technology doesn't exist at the level necessary to monitor a disaster of this magnitude.

This disaster is a reminder of the inequities that still exist in serving rural America. I will continue to look for ways to work with my Senate colleagues to act to provide rural communities with better broadband access, not only for emergency disasters, such as we are having here, but also for basic communication.

All these factors mean Alaskans must work and respond differently when disasters occur in our State. As our State emergency response chief often tells me, "You can't do 'big city' response in most of Alaska." FEMA rules don't always work for rural Alaska. One key concern is making sure FEMA programs for individual assistance are fully employed and complement State assistance.

I am hopeful that between the Federal, State, local, and tribal governments we can get some much-needed assistance to the residents of Galena who are living through this nightmare. I know how strong the people of Galena are, and we know they will continue to stick together through this trying time. But they couldn't do it without the ongoing support of the National Guard and the Alaska Department of Homeland Security Emergency Management Office. We will all continue to work with them as we help the residents of Galena get back on their feet.

Looking forward, as chairman of the Emergency Management Subcommittee, I will be holding listening sessions in Alaska to discuss preparedness and mitigation solutions to natural disasters. Because it is not just the interior that faces serious threats from natural disasters, we must also consider North Slope communities that are often confronting changes from the warming Arctic. It is important for us to tackle these issues head on, to create public-private partnerships, strong communication lines, and disaster response plans so our communities are protected and our residents are safe.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REMEMBERING FRANK R. LAUTENBERG

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I just flew in from Chicago. Early this morning, I was given the news that I had lost a great friend and one of my dearest colleagues; Senator FRANK LAUTENBERG of New Jersey passed away.

Most of us saw FRANK a few weeks ago. He was here on the floor of the