

When unemployment benefits dry up, customers disappear from local stores and businesses suffer. More than \$2.2 billion has been drained from State economies since the emergency unemployment insurance expired.

Nevada alone lost \$29 million in economic activity just last month, and \$28 million has drained from the economy in the Republican leader's home State of Kentucky since the emergency benefits expired on December 31. It is no wonder two-thirds of Americans—including 65 percent of Independents—believe we should extend unemployment assistance. Helping neighbors who have been hit hard is not only the compassionate thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do for our economy.

Economists say there is no way to stimulate the economy more than to give these people who don't have jobs some money because they are going to spend it.

Since Republicans filibustered a bill to restore benefits without adding a penny to the deficit—that legislation would not have added a penny to the deficit—the toll on local and national economies has been devastating, but the toll on unemployed Americans has been immeasurable.

For people who worked all of their lives and lost their job through no fault of their own, being unemployed is difficult enough, but worrying about how to pay the rent, put gas in the car, and buy groceries while they look for a new job can be demoralizing. For the long-term unemployed, some of those who have been struggling to find work for more than a year, \$300 a week in unemployment benefits can be the difference between keeping a roof over their heads or becoming homeless, and this is no hyperbole.

A 57-year-old Nevada woman wrote to me last week to say that the loss of her unemployment check was the last straw. Now she is homeless and couch surfing. She is sleeping on the couches of friends kind enough to take her in.

This is what she wrote:

Can you imagine sleeping on friends' couches at my age? Can you imagine having to sell everything you worked hard for just to keep gas in the car in the event someone calls for an interview?

She went on to say:

I have worked my whole life, since I was 16 years old, and contributed to a system that is now failing me on a major scale.

Millions of people—such as this unfortunate Nevada woman—who have worked hard all of their lives and contributed to their communities and played by the rules are on the verge of losing everything, just like her. It doesn't have to be this way.

I remain cautiously optimistic that Republicans will heed their constituents back home and help Democrats restore emergency benefits to Americans in need.

Congress can't solve every problem, but we can solve this problem. All we have to do is work together—Democrats and Republicans—to do what is

right for our constituents, our country, and our economy.

I urge Republicans to join us to restore these crucial benefits.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

Will the chair announce the business of the day.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

AGRICULTURAL ACT OF 2014— CONFERENCE REPORT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 2642, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the House to the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2642), to provide for the reform and continuation of agricultural and other programs of the Department of Agriculture through fiscal year 2018, and for other purposes, having met, have agreed that the House recede from its amendment to the amendment of the Senate and agree to the same with an amendment, and the Senate agree to the same, signed by a majority of all conferees on the part of both Houses.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the time until 5:30 p.m. will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, first, as we begin the final debate and vote on the farm bill conference report, I thank our majority leader for supporting this effort every step of the way. Every time I have gone to him and said, Mr. Leader, we need to have time for some particular procedural vote or to move it along, he has been there. So I thank him very much for moving this conference report so quickly.

I also thank Senator COCHRAN and our entire committee. When Senator COCHRAN is here later today, I will speak more about the wonderful partnership we have had. The senior Senator from North Dakota will be speaking after me. I thank, Senator HOEVEN for being an invaluable partner through this entire process. It has been a tremendous pleasure working with the senior Senator, and he has made a real impact. I am very appreciative.

As my colleagues know, the last farm bill expired 490 days ago. It is time to get it done. It is time to pass this tomorrow and to give it to the President for his signature.

This is not your father's farm bill. This farm bill is focused on the future, not the past. We worked long and hard to make sure that policies worked for every region of the country, for all of the different kinds of agricultural production we do in our country—from

traditional row crops, to specialty crops like fruits and vegetables, to livestock, to organics, to local food systems.

For the past 2½ years, we have been working in a bipartisan way with colleagues in the Senate and in the House, and I appreciate our partnership with the chairman and ranking member in the House to craft a farm bill that reflects the future in American agriculture and the healthy food choices that consumers are asking for in the marketplace.

As we begin this final debate, I want to focus for a few minutes on some of what people might not be focused on in this bill. Later today I am going to speak about the bill and each of its parts.

There are just five things I wanted to highlight as we begin this debate.

First, conservation. The farm bill is actually our country's largest investment in land and water conservation on private lands, which are the majority of our American lands. That means we are restoring and preserving wildlife habitat and open spaces. We help farmers reduce runoff to help keep rivers and streams clean and teeming with fish. This bill includes a historic new agreement that ties conservation compliance to crop insurance.

This bill helps prevent plowing of native grasses through a provision called Sod Saver that will save taxpayers money and preserve sensitive habitat for years to come.

Second, energy jobs. This farm bill has major investments in American energy independence. I am very proud to say this conference report contains the full \$880 million investment we passed in the Senate for renewable and clean energy. It includes my Grow it Here, Make it Here initiative to support innovative biobase manufacturing that takes crops grown on our farms, uses it to replace petroleum and other chemicals, and transforms them into consumer products.

It contains the Rural Energy for America Program, known as REAP, to help farmers install on-farm renewable energy and energy efficiency systems to lower their energy usage. This bill supports the development of the next generation of biofuels, including new technologies using food and agricultural waste.

Third, healthy foods. One of the incentivized programs in this bill, among others, is a successful program in Michigan called Double Up Food Bucks, which essentially doubles food assistance when a family is shopping for produce at a farmers' market. Speaking of which, we have quadrupled support for farmers' markets—four times more help than the previous farm bill. That means farmers have more choices to find fresh, locally grown foods, and it means farmers have more opportunities to sell those products and grow our rural economies.

Fourth, research. Crops and livestock are affected by pests and diseases, and

if we are going to continue to be the world's leader in food production, we need to invest in order to fight back.

Unfortunately, for years we have had to cut funding for critical research, and that has been a great concern of mine and of all of our committee. This farm bill includes an innovative solution to that problem. It creates a new agricultural research foundation modeled after health research foundations to bring private and public dollars together to support our scientists all across the country who are working to fight pests, find cures for crop diseases, and focus on food safety and innovation.

Finally, reform. This farm bill contains the greatest reforms to agricultural programs in decades. We have finally ended direct payment subsidies, which are given to farmers in good times and bad. Instead, we shift to a responsible, risk management approach that only gives farmers assistance when they experience a loss.

The bill also ends farm payments to millionaires, addresses a loophole that allows people who aren't farming to get payments, and tightens payment limits with a cap on payments that, for the first time, includes all commodity title programs, including limits on marketing loans. We looked at every part of the farm bill for reform and savings. It is safe to say we are the only area of the Federal Government that has voluntarily cut spending in our own area of jurisdiction. Counting sequestration cuts, we made a commitment to achieve \$23 billion in deficit reduction, and we have.

I have spoken about five reasons to support the farm bill. There are many more. This farm bill reflects a major step forward in creating a new paradigm for the future and a real victory for farmers, families, and all Americans who care about protecting our soil and water resources, increasing American energy independence, and the quality of life of rural communities across our country.

With that, at this time, so that other colleagues may speak, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, are we in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is currently considering the conference report to H.R. 2642.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent to proceed on my leader time.

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

PRESIDENTIAL ACTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, in his State of the Union speech last week, President Obama promised America a year of action. He said he wants to use his pen and his phone to make it happen. Here is what I say: The President should use that pen and that phone of his today for the Key-

stone XL Pipeline and the jobs that will be created almost immediately.

Here is something both parties can agree on. I see my colleague from North Dakota here, and nobody has been more aggressively advocating the Keystone Pipeline than he has. This is an important shovel-ready project for America. Here is the President's chance to work with Republicans on a bipartisan plan to create thousands—literally thousands—of private sector jobs almost immediately. Here is his chance to show he is not captive to the ideological extremists on the left. Here is his chance for action on a policy the American people actually want. Here is his chance.

On Friday, the State Department released yet another report concluding what the President and everyone else already knew. The Keystone XL would meet the President's stated requirements on the environment, and there was basically no good reason not to build it.

So here is a project that essentially wouldn't cost the taxpayers a dime to build, that would have almost no net environmental effect, and that would put thousands of Americans to work right away. It is an initiative that is supported by an overwhelming majority of Americans. It is supported by unions, by businesses, by Republicans, by Independents, and even by prominent Democrats—close to 20 right here in the Senate alone. Yet the President has delayed and delayed for more than 5 years now, not because the project really needs to be studied further but because of pressure from the most doctrinaire fringe of the doctrinaire left.

These are the kinds of folks who care a lot more about ideology than what makes sense for the middle class. Yet these are the same folks who have a lot of influence in today's Democratic Party. Just look at the war on coal—a war that is being waged with scant concern for the lives of people who live in States such as Kentucky where people are really hurting, and it doesn't seem to matter much to these folks.

So here is the thing. The President has run out of excuses on Keystone. It is way past time to make a decision. Let's be honest: This decision shouldn't be a hard one at all because the science, the economics, and common sense all basically point in one direction. As far as I can tell, ideology is really the only thing that could lead to a different decision.

So is President Obama on the side of the middle class or is he on the side of leftwing special interests? He needs to use that pen to show us where he stands, and he really ought to do it today.

While he is at it, he should pick up the phone too because in his State of the Union Address the President called on Congress to help break down trade barriers that stand in the way of more American jobs. He called for legislation that would help prevent foreign countries from taking the trade jobs that

should be going to America's middle class.

"China and Europe aren't standing on the sidelines," he said, and "neither should we," he said. Republicans applauded him for that. He is absolutely right. But now the President's own party is standing in the way of getting anything done. So if there ever was a moment for the President to use his phone, this is it because trade should be a bipartisan issue. It sure used to be. Just ask President Clinton.

America's middle class is hurting. The very least Washington can do for them is to approve job-creating initiatives such as Keystone and enhancing American exports. So we will see soon enough if the President meant what he said about his pen and his phone—if his year of action will really be just that instead of another tired slogan.

The answer is pretty simple. The President needs to step up and lead. Middle class Americans have taken a back seat to the hard left extremists in this town for entirely too long. It is time for the President to stand up to these folks and to do the right thing. Pick up that phone and that pen and get this done.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, it is interesting that I follow our minority leader who spoke about the Keystone XL Pipeline issue, as well as the chairman of the agriculture committee in the Senate, the esteemed Senator from Michigan Ms. STABENOW, who has done such a marvelous job of leading the farm bill.

The role of Congress is to govern. The people of this great country—more than 300 million people, and the country that leads the world—send us here to govern. To govern, we have to join together on a bipartisan basis to get something done. Solutions, by their nature—particularly solutions to complex problems—are never perfect. There are no perfect solutions. But we are elected to join together, Republicans and Democrats, and solve problems; to put together solutions, although not perfect, that will meet the challenges this great Nation faces.

Regarding energy, I echo the sentiments of the minority leader. I have worked on the Keystone project for more than 5 years now, first as a Governor and now as a Senator, and we have tremendous bipartisan support on that project and we need to move forward. The minority leader is right on point.

I come today to talk about what I believe we are on the cusp of moving forward on, something we have worked on very hard, particularly these last 2 years, and that is the farm bill. I wish to begin by thanking and commending the Senator from Michigan who is the chairman of the Senate agriculture committee, who has worked with unbelievable dedication and who has truly shown the spirit of bipartisanship I am speaking about.

So I begin by thanking our chairman Senator STABENOW, who has worked with Democrats and Republicans. She has continually reached across the aisle not only to her ranking member, the good and senior Senator from Mississippi Mr. COCHRAN, but also to our counterparts in the House, including Representative FRANK LUCAS, who is the chairman of the Agriculture Committee in the House, and Representative COLLIN PETERSON, who is the minority member in the House. One is from Oklahoma and one is from Minnesota. So north and south, east and west, across this great country, Republicans, Democrats, Senators and House Members, and our chairman have worked to fashion a product that truly is a compromise but which is a vital solution we need to put in place and we need to put it in place now for our farmers and ranchers.

I will begin with this chart, and I have to say it is the only one I brought. It is the same chart I am going to end up with. I am going to talk about the farm bill for a few minutes, but here is why a farm bill is so important. It is not just that it is so important to our farmers and ranchers; it is important to every single American and beyond, for these simple reasons: The farmers and ranchers we have in this country produce the highest quality, lowest cost food supply in the world—the highest quality, lowest cost food supply in the world.

That is what we are talking about. When we talk about good farm policy, we are talking about something that benefits every single American every single day.

Somebody can say, Oh, well, gee, we don't need a farm bill. Don't worry about the farm bill; just let the farmers and ranchers do it the way they do and we will see what happens. Really? That is what we should do? We should take a chance on not having the kind of sound farm program we have now, when we have the highest quality, lowest cost food supply in the world, in the history of the world, that benefits every single American every single day? We should say, Oh, let's not worry about that; let's just let it go and see what happens? I don't think that is a very good argument.

So let's talk about this farm bill that is so important to every single American. Sixteen million jobs in this country, either directly or indirectly, rely on agriculture. We have a favorable balance of trade in agriculture, and we have a net worth of farmers and ranchers across this country who do an amazing job every single day.

I am going to start out by talking about the fact that we actually saved money. We saved more than \$23 billion. So think about it. Here is a mandatory spending program where we strengthen the farm program, we improve it, we make it more cost-effective, and we save \$23 billion to reduce the deficit and the debt. How about we go through every other program in government

and see how we make it better and reduce spending. Because when we do that, then we will have done what we are talking about here with the farm bill. It seems like a good idea.

I see the good Senator from Montana on the floor and the Senator from South Dakota as well as the esteemed Senator from Michigan, and they will tell us the same. Here we are reforming a mandatory spending program and we are reducing the cost while strengthening the program. It seems like what we ought to be doing.

I know some folks will come here today and say, Gee, it could be better because of this or that, or we should have done this or that, and go right back into the same old gridlock and, I guess, argue for having yet another extension on a farm bill that expired over a year ago and should have been done a long time ago. We provide a better program with savings of more than \$23 billion to help reduce the deficit and the debt.

What did we focus on in this bill to make it more cost-effective and to make it better? As our chairman on the agriculture committee said, we eliminate direct payments. People want to talk about reforms. We eliminate direct payments for the first time in a long time—more than \$50 billion in direct payments—and we replace it with something that is much more cost-effective. We replace it with strengthened crop insurance so that farmers and ranchers can insure like other small businesses across this country to manage risk, even though they operate in an environment where they certainly can't control the risks. When we talk about weather, whenever we are putting in a crop and then waiting to see what the weather will be, that is a very difficult proposition. So we worked with them on crop insurance so they can try to insure the same way other types of businesses insure. That is much more cost-effective than the old direct payments. As our chairman said a minute ago, those direct payments were going out good years and bad, whether farmers and ranchers needed them or not. Now it is insurance, the way other businesses work.

We give them an option. We give them a countercyclical program called the price loss coverage that works on a countercyclical basis. So if times are tough, if prices are low, if they need help, they get help. And if times are good and prices are high and they have a good crop, they do not get help. That is cost effective.

We have tried to design it so we generate real savings—more than \$23 billion—but if it works as we hope, it will generate more savings so we will continue to have the highest quality, lowest cost food supply in the world, continue to support a growing job base—16 million and growing—continue to help us in our balance of trade by creating a favorable balance of trade for this country in agriculture, and we hope with the reforms made we will con-

tinue to help reduce the deficit and the debt.

We also provide strong support for livestock. I think perhaps the Senator from South Dakota will tell you about a terrible storm that occurred earlier this winter. This has been a tough winter across the country. But for livestock producers out in the Midwest—in South Dakota, in my home State of North Dakota, and other areas—thousands and thousands of cattle were killed in an early blizzard. We provide help and support for those cattlemen.

We continue to provide other programs that will help them market not only here in our country but overseas, to continue to build that favorable balance of trade for our country.

In the dairy program—and it was very important to get agreement in the House; this is yet another example of how the conferees had to work to strike the right balance between what everybody wanted, Republican and Democrat, to come up with a program we could get support on—there is no supply management in the dairy program. It helps our smaller dairy producers with an insurance type product, and the cost of the premium increases with higher levels of production by the dairy producers. So it is designed the way that I think everybody should feel is a fair basis, where, again, when our smaller dairy producers need help, it is there, but it is cost effective and it is done without supply management.

The conservation title—again, the Senator from Michigan talked about the importance of conservation—is an example where we had disagreement. Right. This goes to the heart of what is in this farm bill. Here is an example—as I have said, our chairman did a marvelous job on the ag committee, working with our ranking member and everyone else—on conservation, I have to say, I had some different ideas than what is in the final compromise bill. I felt that crop insurance and conservation should have remained decoupled. But they are not. They are coupled in the final product. But, to make things work, again we sought and found compromise. We made changes in the bill that truly make the conservation provisions much more farmer friendly.

What do I mean by that? I mean it is not retroactive. It is forward looking. The conservation rules in the bill apply going forward. They do not go back retroactively to the start of the last farm bill. That is very important. You cannot put people in a situation where they are being forced to go out and change their farm or ranch on a retroactive basis. That is also very important.

Another provision we were able to include in the report language is mitigation. Farmers and ranchers do a tremendous job on conservation. I love to hunt and I love to fish. My wife likes to fish even more. But when I am out there hunting, I see what is going on, I see who is taking care of the land and making sure the water is there, the

cover is there, the food is there for wildlife—deer, birds.

For any conservation program to be truly effective, you have to enlist the farmers' and ranchers' support so the conservation community and farmers and ranchers are working together in a way that works for those individuals, those business people, those families, those farmers and ranchers who are out there making their living. Every day they are out there. They are not just out there once in a while. They are not just out there sometimes, as I am when I go out hunting. They are out there all the time making it work. So these provisions have to work for them.

That is why when we talk mitigation, the mitigation rules have to work for the people who own the land—the farmers and ranchers. That is why we have worked to include language that makes sure USDA is focused on an acre-for-acre approach, as long as there is reasonable and commensurate value, and we set up a fund to help them do that.

I think we achieved a good result. All of the wildlife groups, the conservation groups, and the hunting groups are on board. They are endorsing this bill. Even the NRA is endorsing this bill. There is strong support from conservation groups, from hunting groups, fishing groups, wildlife groups.

But at the same time, I think we have provisions that truly make it farmer friendly so that it works for our farmers and our ranchers. I know that was something we had to work on very hard to get to but is vitally important.

The bill has a strong energy title. We included and, in fact, strengthened the beginning farmer and the beginning rancher provisions.

I want to end on reform. Clearly, with our debt and deficit, it is vitally important we find ways to achieve savings. So as we go through all the discretionary spending programs—which is one-third of the Federal budget—we have to find savings. We are working to do that.

Since I have been here, we have reduced discretionary spending from \$1.35 trillion to roughly \$1 trillion. Since the beginning of 2011—discretionary spending at that time was \$1.35 trillion—this year and next year, it will be about \$1 trillion. So you can see we have reduced discretionary spending about 35 percent—and over this 5-year stretch—and that is without counting inflation.

But two-thirds of the government is mandatory spending. Two-thirds is mandatory spending programs. So we have to find ways to make revisions so we protect and preserve the programs that are vital to us, such as Medicare and Social Security, but we also have to find ways to take these mandatory programs and find savings and reforms as we do here in this farm bill.

So when we talk about eliminating direct payments, when we talk about payment limitations that for the first time apply to everything, whether you are getting the ARC program—the ag

risk coverage—or the price loss coverage program, as in your farming operation, whether it is the marketing loan program, your total payments cannot exceed \$125,000.

That is the first time we have had a cap that applies to everything. Right. We have had caps before, but they did not apply to everything. That is a real reform. You are going to hear others come down and say: Well, gee, it should have been better. It should have been like this. But I am telling you, we have not had one that applied to everything before where you truly had a cap.

So when we talk about eliminating direct payments, when we talk about a cap that applies to everything, that is a real reform. Furthermore, we have an AGI limit—adjusted gross income limit—that also applies to everything for the first time, just like the payment limit. Right now, if you make \$900,000 or more, you do not get any program assistance. Before, again, it did not apply across the board. That is real reform.

I think in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—where we knew it would be tough to come up with a compromise—clearly, there were differences of opinion on each side of the aisle and between the Senate and the House. Here again, I commend the leaders of our conference committee—Senator STABENOW, Senator COCHRAN, Representative LUCAS, and Representative PETERSON—and the members of the conference committee. There was a lot of work to do in this conference committee.

To get an agreement on food stamps, on SNAP, supplemental nutrition assistance payments, was no small effort or accomplishment. Again, like all compromises, if you look at it, it really is fair to both sides. The compromise itself—based on the reforms we made in LIHEAP and getting the States to truly make sure we do not have waste, fraud, and abuse, but that people who need help get help—we have truly strengthened those provisions. The scoring by CBO is about an \$8 billion reduction. But again, we get our economy going. These kinds of reforms will generate more savings while still ensuring people who need help get help.

If you look at that number, then it is very close to what the Senate said they had to have. So for those who are in that camp, they should feel this is a bill they can support. That is a fair compromise. On the House side, where clearly there was a desire to have a significantly larger number, if you look at this as a two-step process, where you take the savings that come out of expiration of the stimulus program—where there was about \$11 billion in savings—and combine it with the reforms we made here—the \$11 billion and the \$8 billion; \$19 billion—that was \$20 billion. That was close to the House's original number.

Like all good compromises, it is fair and it does seek to get the kind of reforms that I think the American public

wants to make sure there is not waste, fraud, or abuse in the Food Stamp Program, but for those who need help, they get that help.

Again, I commend not only the leadership in the ag committee but also the leadership in the House and the Senate for recognizing that it is time to put a solution in place for the American people. Again, no solution is perfect. But we cannot continue to operate with an expired policy that not only does not give our farmers and ranchers the certainty they need to continue to produce the highest quality, lowest cost food supply, which benefits every single American, but where we do not achieve the very savings and reforms that we have been sent here by the American people to achieve.

So it is time to vote. We will vote on this farm bill. There was a very strong vote in the House—250 to 160—a strong bipartisan support on both sides of the aisle. The Senate needs to step up now and put this solution in place for the American people.

With that, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, I rise today to urge my colleagues to support the farm bill conference report. It has taken a long time to get to this point, with several unnecessary roadblocks along the way, but we are finally near the finish line, and it is time we conclude this process. I commend Chairwoman STABENOW, Ranking Member COCHRAN, Chairman LUCAS, and Ranking Member PETERSON for their leadership in developing this reasonable conference report.

The Agricultural Act of 2014 will reduce the deficit, restructure our ag support programs, continue to feed the hungry, aid livestock producers hit by the Atlas blizzard, and enable consumers to know from where their food comes.

This conference report certainly is not perfect. As with any legislation that is this important and far-reaching, it is impossible to fully satisfy everybody. But this is a reasonable compromise.

Our ranchers will benefit significantly from this bill. Not only does this compromise enable country-of-origin labeling to continue as well as maintain USDA's ability to ensure a fair and transparent marketplace, but it also contains critical livestock disaster assistance programs to help ranchers in my State who are still recovering from the 2012 drought and last year's terrible blizzard. My ranchers lost tens of thousands of livestock, and they have been left hanging because of congressional inaction. With passage, they will finally be able to get the aid they need.

Beyond the important assistance for livestock producers, this bill also reforms our farm programs by eliminating direct payments and by strengthening the crop insurance program. It also offers key support for

young and beginning farmers and ranchers, and it contains reasonable conservation compliance requirements for farm program and crop insurance eligibility.

This legislation represents more than just assistance to our farmers and ranchers. It is also a jobs bill. It contains mandatory funding for several energy and rural development programs, and it will help USDA deal with the huge backlog of pending rural water and wastewater infrastructure applications.

Hundreds of rural communities across the country, including Aberdeen, Watertown, and Brookings in South Dakota will also continue to be eligible for rural housing programs as a result of a provision I included in the Senate-passed farm bill that is maintained in this conference report.

I would also like to highlight the provisions to address some key forestry issues important to the fight against the pine beetle in the Black Hills. This bill provides the Forest Service and private forest landowners with critically needed tools and flexibility. This includes permanently authorizing stewardship contracting to combine timber harvests with needed conservation work, building on the Mountain Pine Beetle Response Project in the Black Hills by streamlining activities to combat insect and disease epidemics, and clarifying the forestry exemption to Clean Water Act permitting. These changes provide needed certainty for both private and public forest managers.

While I am overall very pleased with this conference report, there are some disappointments. The senior Senator from Iowa and I have worked for years for meaningful payment limitations. In fact, we were able to include in the Senate bill a hard cap on payments as well as new language to define farm program eligibility requirements. The House bill includes nearly identical language. However, this conference report actually loosens payment caps and it punts the decision of defining “actually engaged” to the Secretary of Agriculture. This is frustrating. However, moving forward, I will urge USDA to follow the intent of the Senate and House bills with respect to farm program eligibility when it undertakes rulemaking.

Even though I am not fully pleased with everything in this conference report, I think it does represent a compromise. As such, I urge my colleagues to join me in passing the bill. If we do not, food prices will rise, ranchers in my State will be forced out of business, and we will not get the deficit reduction or reforms to our farm programs.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I rise to speak on the importance of passing this farm bill that is in front of us, but I not only speak as a Senator, I also speak as a farmer, someone who is in-

involved in production agriculture. When I am not wearing a suit and casting votes or traveling around the State finding out what is on the minds of Montanans, I am farming. From planting to harvesting, to accessing seed, to hauling food to the market, I know firsthand the life in production agriculture.

I know that whether you are a farmer or rancher or forester, it can be very tough because there is a lot of uncertainty—uncertainty I witnessed firsthand last summer when I visited the fields of Montana’s Gallatin Valley, a valley that was devastated by a hailstorm literally hours before harvest was to begin, or the uncertainty caused by the blizzard that cost South Dakota thousands of cattle this last fall.

Farmers and ranchers understand and accept that uncertainty is a fact of life because we deal with weather; they know it is part of what comes with being in production agriculture, but what they cannot accept and what they should not accept is a Federal Government that takes 6 years in drafting a 5-year farm bill. We do not need that kind of uncertainty. That is why we need to pass the farm bill we have today.

When I talk to my fellow producers in Montana and around the country, they tell me the lack of a long-term farm bill is preventing them from making critical business decisions. Without a long-term farm bill, farmers do not know what crop insurance is going to look like. They do not know what to expect from future farm loans. It is hard to plan ahead or expand operations. You cannot even do the simple business planning without that farm bill.

Many of us in the Senate got our start in business and know the importance of a predictable business environment. Farming and agriculture is no different. You need certainty to grow and to prosper. The fact is the lack of a long-term farm bill is hurting economies from Montana to Maine. Folks need and are demanding a responsible long-term farm bill. I think it is time for the Senate to do the right thing; that is, pass the 5-year farm bill.

But I am not encouraging folks to vote for this bill just for the sake of certainty. They should also vote for it because I think it strengthens the hands of farmers, ranchers, American families who depend on them. Livestock owners will see many benefits from this farm bill. This 5-year plan makes livestock disaster assistance programs permanent and retroactive, helping those South Dakota ranchers whom I spoke of a minute ago to recoup their October losses as well as Montana ranchers who lost cattle to drought back in 2012.

All in all, livestock owners will be better able to manage risks, improve production, and meet the new challenges because of this bill. When it comes to farmers, this bill removes the term limits on USDA-guaranteed farm

loans so farmers can continue to access credit at banks in rural communities.

It also provides more support for farmers and ranchers just getting their start in agriculture. In rural America we need more young producers willing to get up and work hard, keep small family farms and ranches going. This bill is a positive step for beginning farmers and ranchers.

Conserving land is another critical issue across this country, particularly rural America. Farmers and ranchers are the true stewards of the land. This bill continues that proud American tradition. By improving portions of the Conservation Reserve Program—or Sodbuster—this farm bill supports our outdoor economy by working with farmers and ranchers to preserve more native prairie for wildlife habitat.

That is good news for the hunters and anglers of this country. Montana is no exception. It is good news for folks who sell rifles and waders and the guides who show our hunters and anglers where to fish and where to hunt. All in all, this great outdoor economy adds up to \$6 billion in the State of Montana alone.

This bill also includes an extension of PILT payments to rural communities that cannot generate enough revenue from lands that are controlled by the Federal Government. This is a big deal in rural America. It continues strong country-of-origin labeling so consumers know where their meat was born, raised, and processed, giving them the option to buy U.S.-made meat if they so choose.

The big multinational meat-packing firms may not like it, but for American ranchers it is critically important, as it is for consumers. Why? Because Americans know we produce the finest beef in the world. This 5-year farm bill takes all of these positive steps while saving taxpayers \$23 billion by making tough choices in the nutrition assistance program and changing how we apply farm subsidies.

Chairman STABENOW and Ranking Member COCHRAN have written a commonsense bill that is supported across our agricultural community. I wish to thank them for that. In an era when too many folks look for reasons to vote no instead of yes, it takes strong and determined leaders to bring a responsible, bipartisan bill such as this to the floor. That is why—because I am in production agriculture especially—the work that Chairman STABENOW and Ranking Member COCHRAN did for the American farmers and ranchers needs to be commended.

That commitment is going to keep America’s rural economy strong. The Senators from Michigan and Mississippi are the reason this bill is finally at the finish line. Thanks to them, we are on the verge of approving a bipartisan bill that will strengthen production agriculture and support families, farmers, and ranchers across this country.

My wife and I took over our family’s farm in north central Montana in 1978.

We had land and we had a strong work ethic, but we had little else. So with some hard work and a few good decisions and weather that cooperated, our farm is doing pretty well right now. Our story can be repeated across rural America. But production agriculture will only be strong if it has the certainty that comes with a commonsense, long-term farm bill. That is what is in front of us, a bill that lets farmers and ranchers know how to plan ahead, how to make their books balance, a bill that lets the distributors allocate resources and make sound business decisions, and a bill that takes responsible steps to strengthen programs that are working and ending others that are not.

Let's not leave farmers and ranchers and all Americans who depend on them high and dry again. With strong support for production agriculture, with strong support for a nutrition program, and with a bill that saves taxpayers significant dollars, it is time to vote yes and send this farm bill to the President's desk.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, before the Senator from Montana leaves the floor, I wish to thank him for his wise counsel throughout the process of writing the farm bill. It is nice to have a farmer in the Senate who can give practical ideas and reactions. This is somebody who has been out there fighting for the farmer, small farmers, to be able to make sure they have the same shot to be successful as the big producers.

I thank Senator TESTER not only for his support, but he has a very key voice in supporting farmers and ranchers across the country. I very much appreciate his counsel as we bring this effort to conclusion.

I ask unanimous consent that the time during quorum calls be equally divided.

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

Ms. STABENOW. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SESSIONS. 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.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, the Agricultural Act of 2014 is the culmination of a lot of hard work by our conferees, Representatives MIKE ROGERS and MARTHA ROBY from Alabama, as well as my colleagues in the Senate, Senators STABENOW and COCHRAN and others.

This important legislation contains a number of commendable measures. During my time in the Senate, I have been a strong supporter of Alabama's

farmers and believe this legislation does make a number of positive reforms over the long term that should help in the effort to reduce, not grow, the involvement of the Federal Government in agriculture.

For example, the legislation transitions farm subsidies from a system of direct payments to a more market-based crop insurance support program. Senator Lugar always favored that. I think many other people who have thought about agriculture think that is the right path to go. I have supported that.

As a 5-year bill, this legislation should also give our farmers and their families some certainty that they need to make prudent planning decisions and give them choices to select programs that best meet their needs.

I believe our farmers can move forward and help our Nation remain a global leader in the production of food and fiber which is critical to our economic well-being and national security.

The final bill also contains many other essential provisions to reduce unnecessary regulations, such as the inclusion of the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, forest roads fix, which I have strongly supported. It is an excessive intervention into the forest industry to have the EPA involved in the issues that they are talking about, and I think we have clarified that so that won't be a problem.

It also contains provisions that are designed to help Alabama catfish producers, peanut farmers, cotton farmers, and forest landowners who compete in the global economy.

I am pleased the final bill contains my provision to help farmers in States like Alabama that have not significantly used irrigation practices in the past. Under the current USDA policy, farmers have been excluded from the Federal irrigation program if they don't have a history of irrigation, and that makes no sense where we are trying to involve more people to smartly use more irrigation. I thank the ranking member and the chair of the committee for their work supporting us on that. My provision will help ensure that more Alabama farmers are able to access these programs. It has been a priority of mine for some time, although it is a small part of the overall bill.

As a whole, the Congressional Budget Office claims that the farm bill will reduce the deficit by \$16.6 billion over 10 years. This is a step, a small step, however, in the right direction. It means that if current law were extended without change, we would be spending \$16.6 billion more than if this bill were passed. So that is positive.

I wish we could do more, and we can do more. Unfortunately, we haven't done more, but this is a positive step. It is fair to say that the elimination of countercyclical and direct payments—almost entirely—is a historic occasion. Of course, Congress enacted Freedom

to Farm in 1996, which was intended to slowly phase out these kinds of subsidies. But when times became particularly difficult for our farmers in the years following the 1996 bill with low prices and drought, these programs were, in essence, reinstated by Congress. The retreat and the movement away from Federal intervention was greatly eroded.

In my view—and that is all I have at bottom, is my view—Congress should seek to steadily reduce the role of the Federal Government in farming. But millions are dependent upon farming for their livelihoods, and a thoughtful, conservative approach to reducing Federal intervention would be to continue this reduction steadily over time. It surely can't be done smartly all at once without some real dislocation in the agricultural marketplace—although I must say I think we could have gone a good bit further this year.

But I remain concerned that the reforms to the SNAP program, the food stamp program, are much too modest. I hope our actions today help set the table for continued and badly needed reforms that I and others have outlined during our debate on the farm bill in 2012, 2013, and this year.

Yet it seems clear to me that the bill before us today regretfully does not go nearly as far as it could in addressing the abuses and the wastefulness that are contained in those programs.

For example, the bill spends \$956 billion over 10 years. Nearly 80 percent of that is for the SNAP program, food support programs.

It is, in reality, as someone has said, a SNAP bill, a food stamp bill. Eighty percent of the money goes to that one problem. It asks our farmers to contribute a disproportionate share to deficit reduction. The bill cuts food stamps by only about \$8 billion and it cuts the agricultural programs by about \$8 billion. That sounds fair, balanced, as my colleagues like to use that word, "balanced." But we are cutting \$8 billion from the 20 percent of the program and the other \$8 billion from the other 80 percent of the program, and that is not balanced.

I want to say to my colleagues that there is no intent or desire of any Member of this Senate to have people who are hungry remain hungry and people who are in need of food not to have food. What we are saying is there are a great number of abuses in the program that have clearly been identified and should be fixed and haven't been sufficiently fixed.

Although it repeals direct payments, the bill replaces those payments with new programs that seek to help farmers in a more effective way and that will cost at least \$27 billion. So we reduce some programs and increase others. I think most of that is in the agricultural insurance policy, which is probably, in general, a better way to help our agricultural industry.

Congress needs to be careful about spending more money, and many Senators and independent analysts think

these new programs may cost even more than CBO is currently projecting. It moves money from direct support to crop insurance, and I think that could be good. We have studied the farm bill conference report and note that the Congressional Budget Office has concluded it increases spending in 2014 by \$2.1 billion above the spending limits Democrats and Republicans agreed to in December. It is more than what we agreed to in December—\$2.1 billion over the limits we agreed to in a bipartisan way.

In the Senate this would normally subject the legislation before the Senate to two points of order, budget points of order, because it violates the budgeted spending limits we just agreed to. Proponents of the bill would then be required to either reduce the spending in the bill to the agreed-upon level or gather a supermajority of 60 votes to waive the point of order and agree to violate the budget.

However, the Senate majority, our Democratic colleagues have deployed a budget gimmick with Republican support that rendered these points of order—and consequently limit a minority's right to enforce the spending limits—ineffective. This is something I predicted 2 months ago when the Ryan-Murray legislation passed. I said on December 18, as that deal was being debated:

With 57 different reserve funds, the Murray-Ryan spending bill that is before us now will allow Senator REID and Chairwoman MURRAY to bring to the floor a practically unlimited number of big tax-and-spend bills. It will not be subject to the 60-vote limit. Normally the minority party would be able to raise a point of order under section 302(f) of the Budget Act.

So the Budget Committee chairman has decided to make an adjustment to the budget spending levels, and she can do so because of the Ryan-Murray spending agreement that passed the House, the Republican House, and the Senate. This will allow increased spending in the farm bill above the amount we agreed to.

Though two points of order would lie against the bill, they are voided in the Ryan-Murray legislation because of the powers granted to the Budget Committee chairman in that legislation.

Let me explain this power that was granted, yet again. The Ryan-Murray agreement includes 57 deficit neutral reserve funds. Operationally, a reserve fund allows the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee to adjust the allocations of budget authority and outlays to a Senate committee or committees; aggregate levels of budget authority, outlays, and revenues; and other appropriate levels prior to Senate consideration. This allows the proposed legislation to avoid most spending and revenue-related budget points of order as long as the measure complies with both the subject matter and deficit neutrality instructions in the reserve fund.

In the case of the farm bill, the Ryan-Murray budget numbers refers to

the Senate-passed budget which garnered bipartisan opposition.

The Senate budget, S. Con. Res. 8, in section 313 gives the chairman of the Budget Committee the power to adjust the budget for any farm bill reauthorization: "Provided that such legislation would not increase the deficit over either the period of the total of fiscal years 2013 through 2018 or the period of the total of fiscal years 2013 through 2023."

Those are complex words I just read. But in other words, the farm bill is now in a situation where it can increase spending in the first fiscal year and promise that it will recoup the money later on, which is exactly what this bill does, and the minority's rights are diminished in its ability to stop it because of the Ryan-Murray budget agreement. That is what I warned about in December. Some said there wasn't anything to it. I warned that there was, and I think we are already seeing that there is something to the complaints I made.

I said on the floor of the Senate that the "power that Senators had to block tax-and-spend legislation that breaks spending limits has been eroded significantly" by Ryan-Murray.

The danger is that we will certainly have spending increases in the short-term, but we have only promises of spending limitations in the future.

There is no point of order that lies against the bill because the Ryan-Murray agreement passed by Congress, I acknowledge—I am not sure if Members of the House and Senate fully knew what was included in the Ryan-Murray agreement after that secret meeting between the two budget leaders.

This legislation is far from perfect, and we will see how we proceed with the agriculture bill. I appreciate those who have worked on it. We need to do the right thing for agriculture. It is an important part of our Nation's economy and our national security. I have invested a lot of time and effort in it, as I know most of my colleagues have. I appreciate the work of those who have produced this legislation for us.

I thank the Chair and I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. We all know the Senate and House agriculture leaders unveiled the long-awaited conference report last week for the 2014 farm bill. It has been a long trip getting this far. Every conference committee, of course, has some controversy, but the 2014 farm bill has had more than its fair share of twists and turns—right down to the negotiations on the dairy policy in the fleeting hours—before we, as conferees, signed this conference report. It sounds like the old days of The Perils of Pauline when we had the farm bill tied to the railroad tracks or about to head over the dairy cliff.

Fortunately, we had Chairwoman STABENOW, Ranking Member COCHRAN,

and their superb staffs. I am also blessed with my own superb staff: Adrienne Wojciechowski, Kathryn Toomajian, Rebekah Weber, Kara Leene, and Tom Berry, all of whom spent hours away from their families while working on this important bill. We ended with a bipartisan, bicameral farm bill that addresses the needs of every region in the country. Senator STABENOW and I were on the phone or emailing about every hour of the day, night, and weekends from Michigan, Vermont, overseas, and from the Senate, but it worked. Everybody had a chance, Republicans and Democrats alike, to express their views. Now it is time to vote, pass the bill, send it to the President, and give sorely needed certainty to our farmers, our families, and our rural communities.

After all, the 2014 farm bill saves taxpayers \$23 billion. It eliminates duplicative programs. It strengthens the toolbox for conserving our natural resources. It gives the farmers some much-needed, long-overdue certainty as they make planting decisions. They don't have the luxury that we seem to give ourselves to wait until the very last second to vote on something. They have to plan months in advance. It provides relief to struggling families, support for rural communities, and investments in a sustainable energy future. Is it a perfect bill? Of course not. No farm bill is. But while there are provisions I would not have preferred, I do believe it has a lot of provisions that will benefit Vermont and the Nation.

I wish the commonsense dairy policies that were passed twice by the full Senate and supported by Republicans and Democrats, by the chair and by the ranking member, and also by the House Committee on Agriculture had not been ambushed at the last hour. As a result, we don't have a market stabilization program—something that was proposed by dairy farmers themselves that would have protected taxpayers from the exorbitant costs and would have insulated dairy farmers and consumers from volatile rollercoastering milk prices.

Unfortunately, the Speaker of the House and some of the very powerful, huge industry figures from out West did not want it.

We do have, because of the constant work of everybody—and I again would praise the chair of our own committee, Senator STABENOW—a solution that while not perfect will help our small dairy farmers protect themselves from poor economic conditions when milk prices plummet or when feed prices skyrocket or, as we have sometimes seen in the worst scenario, when both happen at the same time. The final farm bill includes changes to lower the cost of the Dairy Producer Margin Protection Program for Vermont's small, family dairy farms. It will also discourage large dairies from using this program to flood the markets through overproduction of milk, something that wipes out small family farms.

But the bill is not just about farmers; it is a food bill that supports hungry children and struggling families and it has healthy food initiatives. I am disappointed the final bill contains many cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, but the conferees worked together and rejected the deepest cuts to the hunger safety net and the most harmful new conditions which were advocated by an extreme majority in the House, both of which would have undermined the very reasonably offered food assistance. These provisions would have slashed nearly \$40 billion from nutrition assistance programs, eliminating the eligibility for millions of Americans, and making it harder for hungry children to receive free school meals.

Frankly, I am fed up with hearing Members, whether in the House or sometimes Members in this body, say: Oh, we can't afford to feed these hungry children when they go to school. These are the same Members who voted for a blank check to go to an unnecessary war in Iraq, something that has cost us \$2 trillion, which they did on a credit card. We need to feed children in America so they might actually learn while they are at school, but some say: Oh, we can't afford that. Come on. Feeding those hungry children is an investment in the future of this great Nation.

Some of the demeaning and offensive provisions, such as allowing drug testing of beneficiaries and unrealistic work requirements, were left out. You're telling me that we can have tax-paying, hard-working citizens, who, when factories close, won't be able to feed themselves with supplemental nutrition. We are going to demean them after what they have done for the country? Of course not.

The legislation promotes food security in low-income communities and encourages healthy eating through increased access to fruits and vegetables. That is something we have done in Vermont for years and it is also one of the reasons—that and the fact we cover every child from birth to 18 years old for health care—that Vermont is always listed as either No. 1 or No. 2 of the healthiest States in the Nation.

This legislation also—and again I wish to compliment the Chair on this—continues to share the responsibility to conserve our working farmlands and our natural resources. If we lose these natural resources, we can't make them again. We are not going to get them back. Federally supported crop insurance will ease farmers' exposure when natural disasters strike. It will keep working lands in production. Meanwhile, enlisting farmers to continue the simple conservation practices they are already following will ensure the protection of our wetlands and our sensitive lands.

In a country as diverse as ours, it is no simple task to produce a farm bill that addresses the needs of every region or every industry or every pri-

ority. I am proud this is a bill that offers a targeted approach to tackling the needs of each State and agricultural sector, rather than doing it the easy way, which is a one-size-fits-all, which ends up not fitting anybody.

The regional equity program guarantees that no State is left out from receiving conservation resources under the farm bill. Not only Vermont communities but rural America everywhere will be strengthened by a broadband development program, energy efficiency initiatives, and water treatment and distribution loans. Vermont's very beautiful Northeast Kingdom REAP Zone will continue to be a catalyst for growth and progress to help build a resilient rural economy. Organic agriculture is supported through certification cost sharing, stronger enforcement, crop insurance, and funding for organic research. We should promote organics because it is the fastest growing sector in agriculture.

I am also pleased that many of the harmful provisions from the House farm bill were removed during the conference negotiations, including dangerous secrecy provisions and attacks on critical environmental regulations. One that was proposed by an extremely conservative Republican would have actually threatened to limit States rights. What an amazing turn of events. We got rid of all of these.

Bottom line, the Senate and the House have produced a farm bill that at its core is about keeping America strong. Make no mistake, farming is part of our national security. Look at the number of nations in this world that would give anything to be able to feed themselves and have food left over to export. We are more secure as a nation because we can do that.

This farm bill will boost the economy, will create jobs, will offer support for the hungry, conserve our national resources, improve our energy security, and stand up for our country's families. I am proud to have signed the conference report for another farm bill that will support Americans today and into America's future. I look forward to one of my few duties I get to perform after this bill passes: I will sign the bill as President pro tempore after the Speaker signs it. And I know from what he has said to all of us, the President will then sign it.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I am going to address a small part of this bill but a very important part of the bill, something I have been working on through at least two farm bills. Since the chairwoman of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry is here, Senator STABENOW, I thank her for defending my position up until the last day or two of the conference. She kept me informed fully about the difficulty of the position that both Houses had taken getting that out of conference.

I come to the floor not to discuss just my issue but to use it as an example that my colleagues may look forward to in the future; that is, that just because something goes through the Senate, even without controversy—because as far as I know it wasn't discussed or there was no amendment offered to strike what I am talking about that came out of committee and it passed in the House of Representatives by a 230-to-194 vote in the same language—one would assume that something which was the same in both Houses would not be changed by the conference. In fact, rule XXVIII of the Senate rules says this: "Conferees shall not insert in their report matter not committed to them by either House, nor shall they strike from the bill matter agreed to by both Houses."

So if Members are interested in the Senate rules being followed by conference committees in the future, understand in this particular case that was not followed. The provisions were not necessarily struck, but they were changed in such a manner that the \$387 million the Congressional Budget Office said would be saved if my provision stayed in, that amount of money will not be saved.

We are talking about a situation that we are trying to correct, going back at least to the 2008 farm bill and maybe previous to that, where 10 percent of the biggest farmers get 70 percent of the benefits from the farm program, so it is subsidizing farmers as opposed to helping medium- and small-sized farmers get through conditions such as natural disasters, politics, and other aspects beyond the control of farmers that the safety net for farmers was intended to help.

So we could have saved \$387 million, and the rules of Senate said this should have been in the final package that came back to the Senate, but it is not here. It seems to me my colleagues ought to be aware of that fact because they may be in a similar situation sometime on some other conference committee report, and the question is: Are you going to let a small number of people—for most of this conference report 4 people negotiating the difference between the House and the Senate—speak for the other 531 Members of the Congress? Are you going to let a majority of that group of people represent a minority of the Senate and a minority of the House? By this being taken out or this being changed in such a way so it has no value, that is exactly what has happened.

Making sure we have limits on the amount of money a farmer can get and real numbers that work is not something new. President Bush vetoed a farm bill in 2008 because he said it continues subsidies for the wealthy. In another part of his veto message he said the American taxpayer should not be forced to subsidize that group of farmers who have adjusted gross incomes up to \$1.5 million as the rationale for vetoing that bill.

So what we have is the moral authority of a majority of the Senate, a moral authority of the House of Representatives, and their positions taken on this language—language that limited a farmer to no more than \$250,000 and defining a farmer as somebody who is actually engaged in the business of farming so nonfarmers don't get help from the farm program—has been taken out, regardless of the moral authority that said it should be kept in the bill. In other words, conferees are taking out something that represented a minority of the House of Representatives and a minority of the Senate.

We are here to vote on a farm bill—cloture today, final passage tomorrow. The farm bill is a very important safety net for producers. It gives farmers a chance to survive in tough times. As a farmer, I understand the risk of farming. My payment limit reforms were adopted—and I can't say that too many times—in both bodies of Congress. It would have saved \$387 million.

People said, when we limited through my amendment that you could have one nonfarming manager per farming operation, that was unreasonable.

There would have been a lot of money saved. But more importantly, as is the situation today and will probably be the situation in the future, nonfarmers are going to be able to get benefits from a farm program when they don't have legitimacy for it. This provision should not have been touched, because it was the same in both Houses.

Unlimited subsidies, when 10 percent of the biggest farmers get 70 percent of the benefits from the farm program, actually put a new generation of young and beginning farmers at a severe disadvantage. There is nothing wrong with farmers getting bigger. That is the American dream, to use your potential to do the best for yourself. But when large farmers who shouldn't get subsidized get big payments from the farm program, it is, in my estimation, wrong—particularly when it drives up the price of land as it has in the recent 5 to 8 years; drives up the price of cash rent as it has recently. It is very difficult for people who are just trying to get into the business of farming to start. So I think when nonfarmers can qualify for the farm program as managers when they might not even be making a phone call to the operation and having limits that don't mean much—which is exactly what we are doing, subsidizing big farmers to get bigger—it puts young and beginning farmers at a severe disadvantage.

Changing my reforms behind closed doors is wrong. The House and Senate had spoken on the issue. With no debate in the Senate here, a 230-194 vote in support of the Fortenberry amendment in the House of Representatives—something under the Senate rules that is the same in both bodies should not be messed with by the conferees, but it was changed dramatically.

Some are saying the effort the conferees took to give the U.S. Depart-

ment of Agriculture authority to bring about some of these reforms on who is engaged in the business of farming will do the job. But they have had that authority for a long time, and I see this as a Washington hat trick to say you have done something when you haven't done anything.

I am not going to be able to vote for this bill because it would endorse what has happened. Egregious manipulation behind closed doors of something that is the same in both Houses should not be tolerated, and I hope my colleagues will take that into consideration so it doesn't happen to them in the future. How we will fix other entitlement programs if we can't cut subsidies to millionaire farmers who don't even farm makes it very difficult.

As I said, my friend from Michigan, Chairwoman STABENOW, has worked hard on this bill. I wanted to support this farm bill. I just can't get over what happened behind closed doors, once again, here in Washington. And as she has told me so many times, she has defended my position and I thank her for so doing.

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.

Ms. HEITKAMP. 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.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, in spite of all the discussion about our great energy renaissance and "all of the above," and new manufacturing—and, yes, we are going to be a test site for the unmanned aircraft—in North Dakota we live and we breathe agriculture. In summer, our plains are filled with beautiful sunflowers and canola fields and flax. It is the most amazing view, especially when the canola is next to the flax.

Our ranchers take serious pride in their cattle herds that graze around much of our State. The wheat, grain, corn, and soybeans farmers provide help to feed the world and have the best products produced in agriculture today.

Agriculture also supports 16 million jobs around the country, including thousands of manufacturing jobs in North Dakota. This is not surprising, given that our State is one of the most productive farm States in the country. Those jobs make it possible for our State to continue to harvest each year, supporting families across North Dakota but also throughout the country.

I take great pride in the work our farmers and ranchers do. I know all North Dakotans do as well. For too long we weren't supporting them enough to enable them to do their job. In fact, we held farmers and ranchers in limbo because they haven't been sure how to prepare for this crop year

since the Congress had not done its job and passed a farm bill. Finally, that is about to change.

During my campaign I pledged to work tirelessly to get a long-term farm bill passed. Now we are literally at the 1-yard line of finally reaching the goal of passing a 5-year bipartisan farm bill. I am incredibly proud of the work we have done and what we have almost accomplished. And I do have to give a shout-out to our tremendous chairwoman, Senator DEBBIE STABENOW, who, as Senator HOEVEN put it, is a tough negotiator—tough but fair, and absolutely remarkable, not only this year but also in 2013 and 2012, and who never resists an opportunity to inform anyone who crosses her path about the importance to the economy of this country that a long-term farm bill positions us much better to be competitive in the world.

One subject we talk about a lot is the budget and about long-term systemic reforms that can give us what in public policy we need to do, such as a safety net for farmers, but also reduce costs to taxpayers. This farm bill saves 23 billion in Federal dollars, while still providing one of the strongest safety nets for farmers and ranchers ever crafted in a long-term farm bill. It makes critical reforms to target resources where they are most needed while also giving farmers the opportunity to thrive. This farm bill achieves that goal, and puts our agricultural system in a strong position to continue its role as a world leader.

This is achieved through effective farm programs for growers; livestock disaster coverage for ranchers and livestock producers; enhanced crop insurance offerings; expanded research, which is so critical to so many of our new crops; increased export production for agricultural products; critical investments in biofuels and in energy; our renewal of the Sugar Program to prevent excess imports of unfairly subsidized foreign sugar; and targeted conservation assistance to tackle the unique problems in this country, particularly in my State with Devils Lake and the Red River Valley.

In North Dakota we grow more than 20 different crops each year, and we lead the Nation in the production of 13 different commodities, including spring wheat, durum wheat, barley, edible beans, peas, lentils, canola, sunflowers, and flaxseed. So while we talk about this expansion and explosion of both corn and soybeans, North Dakota is leading the way in diversification, which I think is the future for agriculture.

North Dakota is also a leading livestock State, with thousands of cow-calf operators raising livestock in the West, and a leading producer of sugar beets from growers in the Red River Valley.

Approximately 25 percent of my State's economic base and employment is derived from work done on the farm. I talk about this quite a bit, because I think when we think about economics

and what generates economic activity, at the very beginning, we have to have new wealth creation, and in this country new wealth creation comes from what we extract from the earth, how we use our resources, and it comes from exportation of our goods and services. That is new wealth, and farming is such a critical component. When we think about it, we realize our farmers and ranchers help grow the economy and reduce our Nation's trade deficit. North Dakota alone exported more than \$4.1 billion in commodities this year, contributing to farm cash receipts of over \$7.6 billion.

But to simply put in a crop, an average grower in North Dakota spends upward to \$1 million in import costs with the hope of earning a modest profit, a modest return on that investment at the end of the year.

What is more, each year North Dakota faces challenges completely out of their control, such as floods, droughts, price collapse, and the introduction of new pests and pathogens. Each year North Dakota growers face an incredible risk—within the last 2 years—the uncertainty of not having a farm bill. They are able to take the risk because the rest of the country takes a little bit of risk with them for that food security and national security that American agriculture provides.

For too long this body has debated farm and rural policies in place in our country without providing the needed certainty to America. Soon—in just a few hours—we will have the opportunity to prevail by putting rural America on a strong ground by passing a comprehensive long-term farm bill that stands for our ranchers and our producers and stands for the people who consume agricultural products in this country.

I urge all of my colleagues to vote yes on this bill. It is good for my State, it is good for the country, and it is good for the world.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KAINE). The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I have 20 to 30 minutes. I would appreciate it if the Presiding Officer would notify me when I have consumed 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator will be so notified.

Mr. COBURN. I have been in the Congress for a lot of farm bills. I saw "Freedom to Farm." I saw the last farm bill, the one before that, and now I am looking at this one. It reminds me of the auto commercial—something's up. Well, it sure is.

Only in Washington can we claim a bill saves \$24 billion when it increases the spending 43 percent over the next 10 years. How does that fit? Is that just the language of Washington? In fact, we are going to spend almost \$1 trillion over the next 10 years on what should be called a food security bill rather than a farm bill because this is not a farm bill. This is a food security bill.

The language we hear from our colleagues is totally parochial or product

based. We hear all the claims that we are thinking about the best interests of the Nation. What we are truly thinking about is the best interests of the parochial values for our own States. That is how we get this conflagration of people coming together to pass a bill that, I admit, has some limited reforms in it.

I just heard the Senator from North Dakota talk about how we create wealth. I could not disagree more. We create wealth by making sure the risk of capital investment is responsive to market forces. This farm bill is anything but that. There is no response to market forces because there is no place else in this country where someone can go into a business or an enterprise and be guaranteed that their revenue is going to be secure. We even added a new supplemental low-cost Crop Insurance Program that all of us who are not farmers in America are going to pay the deductible on. Plus, we are going to subsidize 62 to 63 percent of all the crop insurance in the country.

When we subsidize crop insurance, what we are doing is taking the capital risk and modifying the risk; therefore, markets are not going to work.

We talk about sugar prices. Americans are losing candy manufacturers like crazy. Why is that? Because Americans pay twice as much as the rest of the world for sugar because we are protecting cane sugar and beet sugar farmers rather than letting market forces work.

I am very disturbed at the process of this bill as well. Senator DURBIN and I tried to put some income limitations on the benefits to the wealthiest in this country when it comes to crop insurance. It passed this Senate with 64 or 65 votes. It was in the bill when it left here. The House passed the same thing by a voice vote and the conferees took it out.

What is the farm bill about? It is about protecting the well-heeled and well-connected in the agricultural community.

I know a little bit about agriculture. My dad ran a ranch with 5,000 mother cows. I worked on it in the summer and after school. Back then—in the 1970s—there were no benefits for a cattle rancher. That has come into the farm program since the 1970s. It guarantees them that now they will make decisions that are against market forces but will farm the government.

So I say again, only in Washington when we are going to spend \$350 billion more on a program over the next 10 years will somebody claim we are cutting spending \$14 to \$20 billion. Only in Washington will that happen. It is unique Washington accounting.

We have heard all the proponents say what a great job they did. Let me talk a little bit about some of the details of this farm bill.

One of the things the President talked about—he just put JOE BIDEN in charge of the job training programs. He is supposed to look at all of them to see if they have metrics. The GAO has

studied that. I have looked at every job training program—State and Federal—in my State.

They have 10 job training pilot programs in this bill. We don't need any more job programs. What we need to do is make sure the ones we have work and have metrics on them. We need to make sure that when we spend American taxpayers' dollars that we are actually giving somebody a life skill rather than filling the coffers of the companies that contract to do all the job training programs or allowing the small bureaucracies that suck up the grants. Oklahoma's Federal programs are highly ineffective—especially when we compare them to the State-run programs, which are highly effective.

So in this farm bill we are creating more job-training programs. It sounds good. It is a good sound bite on the floor, and it is a good sound bite in the press back home. But something is up, and what is up is we continue to make the same mistakes as a legislative body. That mistake is that we want to please constituents at home more than we want to fix the real problems in front of this Nation.

Let me talk about SNAP for a minute. There is not anybody in this country I want to go hungry. When this country was first founded, we used some very good principles that the Senate and the House have totally disregarded in terms of how to help people.

I reference the historical blueprint from a book written by a man by the name of Marvin Olasky. The title of that book was called "The Tragedy of American Compassion." It talks about how we used to help people versus how we are helping them now; how did we build up people as we helped them versus now; how are we tearing down people as we help them. It talks about creating dependency versus creating responsibility.

He outlines several factors this country has used in the past that we ought to be reembracing. Let me list a couple of them. One is we should give relief to people only after one-on-one personal investigation of their need. Let me say that again. We ought to know they need it. Contrast where the money is coming from. The money is not coming from today's taxpayer when we are running a \$640 billion deficit. The money is coming from our kids and our grandkids.

Do we not have an obligation to know that when we give somebody a SNAP card they truly need it versus the fact that the SNAP cards and PIN numbers get sold? The SNAP card is then used by somebody else. That is going on throughout this country. That is not to say that most of the people who are getting this benefit don't need it. Because there is no personal investigation into it and there is no accountability on the part of the receiver or the giver, we are creating a situation in our country where we are undermining self-reliance.

The second point he made was to give necessary articles and only what is immediately necessary. That means you have to investigate it in order to give what is least susceptible to abuse; to give only in small quantities and in proportion to immediate needs and less than might be procured by labor except in cases of sickness. That is a great principle. Let's help people, but let's help people help themselves. Let's don't create a situation of temptation to do the wrong thing; to give assistance at the right moment, not prolong it beyond duration of the necessity which calls for it. We don't do that at all in any of our programs; to require each beneficiary absence from intoxicating liquors and drugs; to discontinue relieving all who manifest a purpose to depend on alms rather than their own exertion for support. I don't have one problem paying my taxes to make sure people don't go hungry and have food on the table for their kids.

I just watched a documentary my daughter referred to me. I have to say, as a physician, I understand the scientific tests and the great research that went into this. It is called "Forks Over Knives." It makes the case that most of our health care cost is based on our diet. It is very accurate and well done—except we have no limitations.

Senator HARKIN and I have tried for years to get limitations on how food stamps and SNAP cards are used. We can't budge anybody to say we ought to limit it to healthy foods, because for every \$1 we spend on food, we are creating \$1 in health care costs down the road.

I recommend that my colleagues watch that study. It is unbelievable in terms of heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension. No medicine, just a change in diet, and all of a sudden those things go away. They go away because we take Big Agribusiness's push to use what is profitable out of the food chain and then start supplying foods that are actually good for us.

It seems to me Congress looks backward instead of forward when it comes to the farm bill. One of the things we ought to do is look at the world and what the population is. I also wish to say that some of the hardest working people in this country are the people who are in agriculture. I don't say these things to demean them, but markets do work.

We hurt our farmers when we take them away from market forces because that will cause them to make decisions that are false choices when it comes to capital investment, and those are false choices for our country because that means capital is going into something that is subsidized by the government rather than going into something that is not subsidized that will create a greater good and more wealth for our country.

This bill does exactly that. You realize in this bill you are guaranteed 86 percent of your revenue. Let me think about that. Do you know anywhere else

where you can get your revenue on your crops guaranteed at 86 percent and the Federal taxpayer is paying most of the cost of the insurance for that?

Individuals in Oklahoma, Maine, and Virginia are paying higher tax dollars so we can create a system where we are investing in crops that are not necessarily good for us and causes us to pay a higher price for a domestically produced crop versus world markets; whereas, we could direct the same inputs into a product that is much better for us and we would be much more competitive.

One of the points I wish to make is that in 2013, net farm income was \$131 billion. That is 16.5 percent over what it was the year before, in an economy that is only growing less than 2 percent. Yet we are going to spend almost \$100 billion a year in the future, of which only 18 percent of that will be for agricultural programs, outside of the Food Stamp Program. We are going to spend \$18 billion to misdirect capital in a way that, in the long run, we won't see that kind of growth.

I will finish with other commentary. It is necessary that we have a farm program, but there is one little trick in this farm bill that everybody ought to be aware of. It is the pressure for the next farm bill that is put in this farm bill, and my colleagues know what it is. They didn't eliminate any of the permanent law that is on the books; they just let it stay there, and then we created the farm bill for 5 years. What is the purpose of that?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has consumed 15 minutes.

Mr. COBURN. I thank the Chair.

The purpose is so that in 10 years, and in 5 years when we come to another farm bill, the default position will fall back to 1940s-era agricultural law, which will create pressure to do a farm bill again. If we do the same next time, it is going to cost \$1.5 trillion over the following 10 years.

My best friend is a feed corn, soybean, and wheat farmer. The farm is in excess of 2,000 acres in Oklahoma. On breaks, when they are harvesting, I go down there and drive a grain buggy. I have only bent the auger on it once. I hear it from a farmer's perspective. Do my colleagues know what he tells me? He tells me we don't need this anymore. We don't need it. We need decisions on capital investment to be made on risks and markets. No one can tell me, when we have \$131 billion in net farm income this year, that we need to be subsidizing 86 percent of everybody's product, guaranteeing them, no matter what happens in yield or price, they are going to get 86 percent.

The cost of this bill isn't just the \$1 trillion we are talking about; it is going to be much higher. We have had historically high commodity prices. They have moderated somewhat, but if they go back anywhere close to historical prices, this bill is going to cost at least another \$100 billion, just in one

program alone. CBO's assumption is that we are not going to do that. But most of the leading agricultural economists in this country think corn is going to be under \$4, it is going to be \$3.75, and wheat will decline and soybeans will decline. So the score we have on this bill is nonsense because it doesn't reflect the reality of what is happening out there.

I appreciate the hard work people did on the farm bill. I am highly critical of adding new job programs. I think we have missed it completely. We don't even know what the real problem is in terms of job training in this program, and the 10 pilot programs aren't going to make a difference anywhere. What we ought to have is real programs that are WTO-compliant, that reconnect capital investment with the real world forces of market prices and markets.

We spend \$200 million a year just on one program—assisting farmers selling their products overseas. Do we know what sells products overseas? Price, quality. But we have a little \$200 million program that everybody in organized agriculture gets to take advantage of. They get a couple of trips a year on the Federal taxpayer. It ought not be so. If we want to promote products, we ought to be out promoting them. We shouldn't be promoting private brands with Federal Government money. We ought to create the opportunity to promote it, but we shouldn't be doing it.

Needless to say, I will not be voting for cloture. I will reemphasize that Senator DURBIN and I had a great amendment. Those who signed the conference report and took that out can't stand up and say anything about anybody who is wealthy in this country or the tax rates or anything else, because they just gutted one of the things that would have put back equality in terms of the farm program for the very wealthy in this country. We are continuing to pay hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars monthly to the most well-connected, well-financed, wealthiest people in this country because they are farming the farm program. By taking that out, those who did lost all moral authority to ever say anything again about income inequality in this country, because those who signed the conference report chose to take that out.

We understand how politics works. I understand how politics works. But credibility is important in our country and we are losing it. We are losing it here. Look at the polls. We have lost it in the Nation's Capital as far as the American people are concerned. We haven't just lost credibility; we are losing legitimacy, because we wink and nod to do the parochial vote, even though in the best long-term interests of our country we are doing the wrong thing. But it sure sells well at home.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise today to speak on two matters.

The first is the farm bill and the second is the U.S. attorney situation in my State of Minnesota.

Being a Senator from a State that is a leader in agricultural products and now the sixth biggest State in terms of agricultural exports, I can tell my colleagues that the agricultural sector of this country is strong and it has, in fact, been a jewel in this economy when we look over the last few years and we look at the industries that were hit so hard during the downturn. Our food supply remains strong. Part of why it remains strong is because we have believed in investing in agriculture and agricultural research and in the next wave of machinery and all kinds of things, and it has helped our country, it has been a positive for our country.

We have 80,000 farms in Minnesota. We are an exporting State, and it is one of the major reasons our unemployment rate is down to 4.6. Because it is not just about the small farmers all over our State, it is also about the businesses and the employees, and it is also about the fact that we are a country that makes its own food and is not dependent on foreign food the way we are dependent on foreign oil.

I fought hard to get on the agriculture committee when I came to the Senate. I was honored to serve on the farm bill conference committee under Senator STABENOW's leadership. We worked together, as the Presiding Officer knows, on a bipartisan basis to put together a farm bill that strengthens the safety net for our Nation's family farms, preserves critical food and nutrition programs, and brings down the deficit compared to the last farm bill to the tune of over \$20 billion, which is one of the reasons we wanted to put this new farm bill in place. The bulk of the savings comes from the transition from those direct agricultural subsidies to a more risk-based management system of crop insurance.

We also worked hard in the conservation area, which is very important in my State where hunting and fishing are a way of life. The conservation provisions are streamlined from 23 to 10 and we have the support of hundreds of environmental and conservation groups, including Pheasants Forever, which is based in Minnesota, as well as Ducks, Unlimited.

We also worked hard in the energy area to finally fund that title, to acknowledge that we need many sources of energy in this country, including biofuels, wind, and solar. That is a big part of this bill as well.

We kept the nutrition programs strong just by the fact that we were up against suggested cuts of \$40 billion from the House of Representatives, and we found a way to make some changes that might not have been our top priority, but they were ways we were able to move on the farm bill and work with some of these States that were leveraging their heating assistance for food stamps. Most States were not affected. My State was not affected.

We also provided permanent disaster relief for our Nation's livestock producers, something that is very important when we look at all the dead cows in South Dakota and everything that happened there.

I believe the strength of this bill is a testament to the work and leadership of Chairman STABENOW and her tireless efforts. I thank Senator COCHRAN as well as Chairman LUCAS, and Ranking Member PETERSON from my State, and then also Congressman TIM WALZ who served on the conference committee as well.

This bill is important to the farmlands of our country, but it also is good for rural economies. I believe we do right by ourselves when we do right by our rural communities.

I was listening to my colleague from Oklahoma, and I too have been on combines with farmers. I will say I wasn't driving that combine, which wouldn't have been good for the farm or the neighboring farms. I was a passenger. I heard a different story from my farmers in terms of the concern about bouncing from year to year and not knowing what the policies are, and how good it has been to have a 5-year policy in place for farm policy, how far we have come from those freedom-to-farm days when we were foreclosing on farms all over our State, and how we want to be able to continue to produce food in our State and to encourage young farmers and ranchers. That is why that amendment was part of my major focus, which was to give them some breaks on crop insurance and grazing their cattle on CRP land.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

U.S. ATTORNEY FOR MINNESOTA

Now I wish to turn to a very different topic, which is Minnesota's U.S. attorney. This is an appalling situation, as the Presiding Officer will hear by the numbers. For 887 days, Minnesota has not had a full-time, permanent U.S. attorney—887 days. During that time, from August 2011 to August 2013, Todd Jones was responsible for doing two jobs. He was responsible for being the U.S. attorney in Minnesota as well as being the Acting Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives. As my colleagues can imagine, with the mess after Fast and Furious, he had a lot of work to do at the ATF and that was his major focus. Meanwhile, we kept going with some fine prosecutors, but we didn't have a full-time leader.

Over the summer, thanks to my colleague from the State of Arizona, Senator MCCAIN, we were able to finally confirm Todd Jones to that job. The ATF had been without a permanent director for 7 years. We got that done. Of course, then it officially left the Minnesota U.S. attorney's position open, even though it had already really been open for 2 years.

Even before that decision was made by the Senate to confirm Todd Jones, Senator FRANKEN and I had gathered

together a bipartisan group, including the former U.S. attorney under President Bush, to advise us on a replacement for Mr. Jones—even before the time we confirmed Mr. Jones because of our concern over the problems in the office, many of which were on the front page of our newspaper. We were able to get a recommendation from our committee for a replacement, Mr. Andy Luger. He is a respected litigator, a former assistant U.S. attorney.

It has now been 196 days since we made that recommendation to the President. It has been 187 days since Director Jones was confirmed with no full-time U.S. attorney again in the office. While the office has continued to provide the United States with the high-quality legal representation it deserves, Minnesota needs a full-time U.S. attorney.

Mr. Luger sailed through the Judiciary Committee with no objections. He has passed all the tests necessary, including the FBI test. He has the support of law enforcement with whom I have spoken. He has the support of one of our Republican Congressmen in the area. I want to thank Senator GRASSLEY, who also supports him and has raised issues with the Minnesota U.S. Attorney's Office because of the fact that we have not had a full-time attorney for 888 days, and he has been supportive of our efforts to quickly move Mr. Luger's nomination, not just through the committee but to the floor.

Senator GRASSLEY is in a similar situation because his U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Iowa was nominated on the same day and is also awaiting confirmation on the floor. Again, they have both come through the Judiciary Committee without any objection.

So why is this important? Well, I ran a prosecutor's office with about 400 people for 8 years. We worked directly with the U.S. attorney's office. We were there during 9/11 when the U.S. Attorney's Office in Minnesota was dealing with the Moussaoui case. As you remember, he was caught in terrorism issues. We worked hand in hand. We took a number of their white-collar cases.

I have been able to witness firsthand how day in and day out you need a U.S. attorney to make very difficult decisions as to what cases to go forward on, and especially without a full-time U.S. attorney it is very difficult to decide where to put limited resources in terms of strategic decisions. We have not had that person in place for 888 days.

Protecting our Nation from terrorists is a top concern for all of us. When you hear of the Minnesota U.S. Attorney's Office, you might not think: terrorism. But in fact, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Minnesota is renowned for its counterterrorism efforts and terrorism prosecutions, especially investigating the terrorist organization al-Shabaab. For years, authorities have been on alert for al-Shabaab in Minnesota.

In Operation Rhino, the Minnesota U.S. Attorney's Office prosecuted Omer Abdi Mohamed, who recruited young Somali Americans to fight for terrorists in Somalia. Mohamed was indicted in November 2009 in Minnesota and pled guilty in July 2011 to conspiracy to murder, kidnap, and maim abroad.

This operation is part of an ongoing terrorism investigation. As you know, there have been suicide bombings in Somalia—sadly, recruiting people out of our Somali community in Minnesota. We are proud of that community. They are an incredible part of our State. But this did happen. It has led to charges against 18 people for aiding al-Shabaab—8 of whom have been convicted, some receiving sentences of up to 20 years in prison.

So I ask you, why would you pick an office like this not to have a leader for 888 days? But through a variety of circumstances—the fact that the ATF job was held up in terms of an appointment, and then the fact that this is being held up right now—we still do not have a leader.

In addition to terrorism cases, the U.S. attorney's office is also responsible for prosecuting major drug crimes. Recently, the office won a major conviction and played a key role in shutting down a big synthetic drugstore in Duluth. And 2 weeks ago, the Minneapolis Star Tribune had a major news story about a growing and deadly heroin epidemic in Minnesota. As we have seen from the death this weekend of someone who was a celebrity, I think we all know there have also been heroin deaths all over this country, so Minnesota is not alone. But we are alone in that we have not had a chief leader in our U.S. attorney's office to come up with a strategy to deal with this case for 888 days.

In the first half of 2013, 69 people died of opiate-related overdoses in Hennepin County, MN. That would be 69 people died. Some of these deaths were young kids. This is a situation that demands attention immediately, and Mr. Luger is eager to work with law enforcement on a strategy.

Federal and State law enforcement also partnered to combat identity theft and white-collar crime. Minnesota had the second biggest white-collar conviction in terms of money—next to Madoff—in the country. Yet this is an office that we have chosen not to put a leader in for 888 days. The U.S. attorney's office won a conviction in a \$3.65 billion-dollar Ponzi scheme case—as I mentioned, the second biggest Ponzi scheme in U.S. history.

Currently, Minnesota's U.S. Attorney's Office is headed by an acting director. But an acting director simply cannot provide the same kind of leadership as a full-time U.S. attorney.

I know that the local heads of the DEA, FBI, and other Federal and State law enforcement agencies are very anxious to get a U.S. attorney in full time.

I would also note that we also do not have an administrative officer because

we are awaiting putting in a U.S. attorney so that Mr. Luger can hire an administrative officer. This is not a small office. There are more than 100 people working there, including 54 lawyers. Again, they are without a full-time boss and a leader. I think these hard-working prosecutors and the people they work with deserve a leader in the office.

When Minnesota was first made a State, President Zachary Taylor filled the position of U.S. attorney in 2 days for our young new State. Back then, they deserved a U.S. attorney. If they could get it done in 2 days, I think we should be able to get it done in 888 days.

I urge my colleagues to support his swift confirmation and give this office and its hard-working prosecutors the full-time prosecutor they deserve.

Thank you. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I would like to make remarks about the farm bill conference agreement that is before us.

Of course, across the Nation Americans are demanding that Washington restore their faith in government. Last year we saw a Congress crippled by government shutdowns and debt-ceiling standoffs. We nearly failed to pass a Defense authorization bill.

While many of my colleagues have high hopes this year for returning to the practice of moving legislation through the regular order and perhaps working under a more open amendment process, I am profoundly disappointed that one of the first pieces of legislation we will send to the President this year is a \$1.5 trillion farm bill. It is a mind-boggling sum of money that is spent on farm subsidies, duplicative nutrition and development assistance programs, and special-interest pet projects.

Taxpayer groups such as Citizens Against Government Waste blasted this farm bill as a "Dung Deal." Last week, the Wall Street Journal called it "A Bipartisan Taxpayer Raid," writing:

It's no accident that Congress dropped this porker under the cover of the State of the Union hoopla. Handouts to agribusiness and millionaires, continued trade protectionism for the sugar industry—it's all still there.

How are we supposed to restore the confidence of the American people with this monstrosity? A few weeks ago we crammed down their throats a \$1.1 trillion Omnibus appropriations bill loaded with wasteful spending. Tomorrow we will wash the omnibus down with another trillion dollars. The only policy that gets bipartisan traction in Congress is Washington's desire to hand out taxpayer money like it is candy.

We have heard about some of the "savings" generated by this farm bill. It is true there are noteworthy cuts to several outdated Depression-era farm subsidies such as the Direct Payments

Program and the Countercyclical Program. We also close loopholes in our Food Stamp Programs and conservation programs, which generated about \$16 billion in savings, according to the Congressional Budget Office, and I applaud the conferees for their efforts.

But, unfortunately, just about every subsidy eliminated under the farm bill is simply reinvented into a new and many times more expensive program. For example, we have a new thing called Agriculture Risk Coverage Program, which locks in today's record-high crop prices and guarantees farmers up to an 86-percent return on their crop. Depending on market conditions, ARC—agriculture risk coverage—could cost taxpayers between \$3 billion to \$14 billion each year—far more expensive than the \$5 billion saved by the elimination of the Direct Payments Program. The bill also maintains the \$95 billion federally backed crop insurance program which subsidizes crop insurance premiums. We then pile on a new \$20 billion program called Supplemental Coverage Option that subsidizes crop insurance deductibles.

The bill also strips out an amendment offered by my colleagues Senator DURBIN and Senator COBURN which would have prevented crop insurance subsidies from going to individuals with a gross income greater than \$750,000 a year. That amendment was adopted by 59 votes in the Senate's farm bill earlier last year. And guess what. Surprise. It is absent from the conference agreement. Millionaire farmers can rejoice that their crop insurance subsidies are safe. That is millionaire farmers, farmers with a gross income greater than \$750,000 a year. So the next time I hear the managers of this bill talk about the small farmer, I guess they are talking about millionaires as well.

But it is all part of farm bill politics. In order to pass a farm bill, Congress must find a way to appease every special interest of every commodity association from asparagus farmers to wheat growers. If you cut somebody's subsidy, you give them a grant. If you kill their grant, then you subsidize their crop insurance. Let's look at several handouts that special interests have reaped in this year's farm bill.

The bill provides \$7 million in grants for the marketing of sheep. Now some who may be viewing this at home will maybe think I am making it up that we are spending \$7 million of their tax dollars for the marketing of sheep.

It also adds a thing called—and I am not sure I pronounce it right—"japonica rice." Japonica rice is a sushi ingredient grown primarily in California, and it is added to the list of products that can receive farm subsidies.

The bill provides \$100 million to promote the maple syrup industry. I repeat: \$100 million to promote the maple syrup industry. It says American tax dollars will go to—and I quote from the bill—"promote research and education for maple syrup production . . . promoting sustainability in the maple

syrup industry . . . and market promotion for maple syrup.”

So, my fellow citizens, the next time you see an advertisement for maple syrup, you may want to watch it because it is your tax dollars that paid for it.

It places a 15-cent fee on harvesting Christmas trees. Not even Christmas is left out of this one—a 15-cent fee on harvesting Christmas trees. That money then is earmarked for promoting the orchard industry.

There is \$12 million for a “wool research and promotion” program. There are a lot of needy areas of America today, but I had no idea that wool research and promotion was worthy of \$12 million of our tax dollars.

I think this next one is probably my favorite—or unfavorable: \$5 million for a study to—again, I am quoting from the bill—“evaluate the impact of allowing schools to offer dried fruits and vegetables to children.”

I know that is a tough decision for schools to make, as to whether they should offer dried fruits and vegetables to children. Do we need \$5 million to help them evaluate that?

There is \$25 million for a new grant program to “teach children about gardening, nutrition, cooking”—and get this—“and where food comes from.” I am sure all over America children are asking: Where does food come from? This may sound like a well-intentioned initiative, but this grant program is a lot like 18 other food and nutrition programs that the Government Accountability Office declared duplicative in a report issued 2 years ago.

The Federal Government’s duplication of nutrition programs has cost \$62.5 million annually in previous years. So here is a new grant program under the label of “nutrition education.”

The energy title of this bill doles out about \$881 million in energy programs. Most Americans do not realize that the farm bill has become as much about energy subsidies as about farm subsidies. There is funding for ethanol research, biorefinery installations, and a sugar-to-ethanol program where the Federal Government purchases surplus sugar and sells it at a loss to ethanol producers.

American taxpayers will spend \$5 million on the Biodiesel Fuel Education Program. Now, if there is anything that is needed in America, it is a good, vigorous biodiesel fuel education program. We are going to spend \$5 million on it. It is to spread the gospel on the benefits of biodiesel. I have no objection to the use of biodiesel. In fact, I think I prefer it much more as an alternative compared to corn ethanol. But here we have \$5 million to educate consumers on the benefits of biodiesel.

Hidden in this bill is a tax on heating oil. Just yesterday, the Washington Times talked about the farm bill’s National Oilheat Research Alliance Program in an article entitled “Congress seeks to jack up fees on home heating

oil in midst of frigid winter.” The article reads:

Congress’ mammoth farm bill restores the imposition of an extra fee on home heating oil, hitting consumers in the cold-weather states just as utility costs are spiking. The fee—two-tenths of a cent on every gallon sold—was tacked onto the end of the 959-page bill, which is winding its way through Capitol Hill. The fee would last for nearly 20 years and would siphon the money to develop equipment that is cheaper, more efficient and safer, and to encourage consumers to update their equipment. The heating oil fee was backed by Northeast lawmakers who said it would fund important research to benefit consumers.

The bill prohibits oil companies from passing the fees on to consumers, but taxpayer advocates said that’s a sham and that the money has to come from consumers. To say they can’t pass on the cost, said Diane Katz, research fellow in regulatory policy at the Heritage Foundation, “It’s kind of silly because of course the costs are going to get passed on. Money is fungible.”

So here we have a special oil tax on consumers where the revenue is earmarked back to the heating oil industry, about \$15 million a year according to the GAO. Why is the Federal Government in the business of collecting funds for heating oil research on behalf of the heating oil industry?

The bill reauthorizes USDA loan subsidies for peanut growers and allows them to use their peanuts as collateral. If a peanut grower forfeits on their USDA loan, the Federal Government takes ownership of the peanuts and taxpayers bear the cost of storing the peanuts.

The infamous sugar program is housed in this farm bill. This is probably the most ongoing scandal in the history of all of the farm bills and of all of the egregious aspects of it. Like the peanut program, USDA gives sugar growers, primarily in Florida, Louisiana, and Michigan, hundreds of millions of dollars in loans each year.

If a sugar grower misses their profit margins, they get to keep the loan and transfer their excess sugar to the Federal Government as collateral. Over the past year, sugar subsidies and forfeitures have cost the taxpayers \$258 million, while over 640,000 tons of sugar was handed over to the USDA.

You know something. If you really look at it, there are a few families that control the sugar industry in Florida. Those families, God bless them, have given generous contributions to both Democratic and Republican parties. So the taxpayers have paid \$258 million and over 640,000 tons of sugar was handed over to the USDA. Combined with import tariffs and marketing controls, the USDA Sugar Program costs consumers over \$3 billion every year, one of the most obscene Federal farm subsidies ever conceived. This farm bill, advertised as full of reforms, does nothing.

Another bizarre handout in this farm bill that I have been involved in now for many years is the creation of a catfish office. Again, I assure my colleagues, I am not making this up—a

catfish office inside the U.S. Department of Agriculture at a cost of \$15 million a year.

The USDA will hire inspectors to visually inspect catfish in seafood facilities—only catfish and not shrimp, not a cod, not a tilapia, but only a catfish. We are going to have a special office called—appropriately—the catfish office, to inspect visually catfish in seafood facilities—and only catfish.

Senator SHAHEEN and I and 11 other Senators have sponsored legislation to kill this catfish program. I have been opposing it for years. In 2012, our legislation was adopted in the Senate by voice vote. I assure the distinguished manager of the bill that is the last time that on this issue I will accept a voice vote. The distinguished chairperson assured me that with a voice vote this amendment of ours would remain in the legislation, and obviously that has not been the case.

So next time the distinguished manager, if it ever comes up again, assures me that an amendment of mine will be adopted in the final legislation, I will have to have better authentication than just taking her word.

Last year, the House Agriculture Committee passed a bipartisan amendment to repeal it in the farm bill. Despite all this opposition, the unpopular catfish office resiliently survived conference. We do not need a new USDA catfish inspection program. The Food and Drug Administration already tests catfish, along with all other seafood.

But certain farm bill conferees are insisting on creating a catfish office because catfish farmers in Southern States do not want to compete against foreign catfish importers, particularly those from Vietnam. Its true purpose is trade protectionism at the taxpayer’s expense. Under this farm bill, there will be a virtual ban on catfish imports for several years while foreign inspectors switch from FDA’s inspection procedures to USDA’s catfish procedures.

The Government Accountability Office investigated the proposed catfish office. In four different reports—four different reports—they called it “duplicative” and “wasteful” and warned that it fragments our food safety system by splitting FDA’s ability to inspect seafood.

In fact, one GAO report was simply titled, “Responsibility for Inspecting Catfish Should Not Be Assigned to USDA.” It called on Congress to eliminate the catfish office. Both the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the FDA have questioned the scientific value of the proposed catfish office. Several years ago, USDA studied the idea and concluded that there is substantial uncertainty regarding the actual effectiveness of a USDA catfish inspection program. Even the President’s budget proposed to zero it out.

American consumers should also be concerned about the trade implications of this program. Some nations, including Vietnam, have threatened WTO retaliation against American agricultural exports, like beef and soybeans.

Trade experts warn that this catfish gimmick is the kind of protectionism that harms our efforts to win concessions under trade agreement negotiations like the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which could reduce the tariffs on American products sold to Asian trading partners.

Again, Senator SHAHEEN and I tried to eliminate the catfish office in the Senate's farm bill, but the managers blocked the vote on our amendment. The House Agriculture Committee did the right thing and passed the farm bill amendment to eliminate it. Unfortunately, when this bill went to conference, several Senate conferees blocked the vote in conference to repeal it—actually blocked a vote in conference and actually rewrote the law to increase it.

It seems that catfish is one bottom feeder with friends in high places. At the end of the day, this farm bill will be hailed by its supporters as reform-minded. Let me assure the American public that this is hardly reform. It was managed under a closed amendment process and will prove to be more wasteful and costly than any farm bill we have ever seen.

For these reasons, I urge my colleagues to join me in opposing this bill. I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the Wall Street Journal Editorial appropriately entitled, "A Bipartisan Taxpayer Raid."

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

[From the Wall Street Journal, Jan. 28, 2014]

A BIPARTISAN TAXPAYER RAID

(Editorial)

President Obama delivered his State of the Union address Tuesday night to the usual bipartisan cheers for proposals that don't have a chance of becoming law and that half the Members despise. If you want to know what they were really cheering about, take a gander at the gaudy spectacle of the 2014 farm bill, which gives bipartisanship a bad name.

Congressional negotiators on Monday unveiled this hulking 949-page special-interest bonanza, which will cost nearly \$1 trillion over 10 years—or more than President Obama's stimulus. House Agriculture Chairman Frank Lucas, said to be a Republican, and Senate counterpart Debbie Stabenow (D., Mich.) are advertising the bill's token savings and reforms. The real headline is how complete a victory this is for the entitlement and farm-subsidy status quo.

Start with the fact that the subsidy programs are still linked to food stamps. House conservatives last summer revolted to force the chamber to separate the two, in an attempt to end to the unholy alliance of urban Democrats and rural Republicans that sustains the growth of both. The conferees negotiated a remarriage.

Republicans also caved on a House provision to limit the food-stamp reauthorization to three years, which would have required a debate on a separate timetable from farm subsidies in the future. The final bill reauthorizes everything for five years, setting the stage for a logrolling repeat.

As for food stamps, the House bill had reduced future 10-year spending by \$39 billion—a mere 5%—in a program that has doubled in cost since 2008 and is now about \$80 billion a year. The "compromise" settles for a cut of

\$8 billion over 10 years (1%), which is barely larger than Senate Democrats' opening bid of \$4 billion.

The elated conferees are bragging that they closed a food-stamp "loophole," but that's a rosy interpretation. "Heat and eat" is a classic liberal spending tactic by which states direct small home-heating assistance checks to households solely to make those households eligible for food stamps.

The reform requires that households receive all of \$20 in annual federal heating assistance (rather than today's \$1) to trigger benefits. They must be laughing at that one in the grocery lobby. Meanwhile, Republicans abandoned reforms that would have tightened the program, such as making food-stamp eligibility contingent upon asset tests (as used to be the case) or work requirements (as under welfare reform).

The farm crew is also boasting they eliminated the "direct payment" program—handouts that go to growers whether they produce a crop or not. Yet the \$5 billion in savings is rolled back into the government-subsidized (and uncapped) crop-insurance program as well as a new "shallow-loss" program that guarantees farmers' revenues and could balloon to \$14 billion a year.

Speaker John Boehner is getting credit for winning his showdown with Collin Peterson over the Minnesota Democrat's demand for a new Soviet-style program to manage U.S. milk supply. The conferees stripped that stinker, but they salved Mr. Peterson's feelings by fiddling with a separate insurance program as an alternate means to give government control over milk production.

Handouts to agribusiness and millionaires? Continued trade protectionism for the sugar industry? It's all still there. Heritage Foundation research fellow Daren Bakst notes that the GOP even rolled over for President Obama's Christmas tree tax, which demands a 15-cent assessment on every fresh-cut Christmas tree, to fund an industry promotional program.

Republicans get credit for keeping the bill free of earmarks, and for bucking Democratic demands that the bill's savings go to more spending, rather than deficit reduction. But with the Congressional Budget Office reporting on Tuesday that the bill saves a pathetic \$16.5 billion over 10 years (rather than the \$23 billion negotiators claimed), these are linings without much silver.

The apparent GOP political calculation is that it needs an election-year farm bill to solidify its rural-voter support and to ward off President Obama's attacks that they are mean to poor people. Talk about premature surrender. Unlike the autumn government shutdown, the farm bill did give them real political leverage. Democrats and Mr. Obama want food stamps and a farm bill. Republicans could have held out at least for some reform progress. The main achievement of this bill will be to re-elect Mr. Peterson, the Democrat, and give more GOP voters reason to wonder why they elected these guys.

Oh, and it's no accident that Congress dropped this porker under the cover of State of the Union hoopla. GOP leaders are eager to leave town for their annual retreat and to avoid a conservative revolt. So they are planning a vote Wednesday morning, fewer than 48 hours after it was unveiled.

So much for Mr. Boehner's promise to run a more transparent Congress and allow 72 hours for Members to read what they are voting on. The American people elected a GOP House not merely to oppose the Obama agenda, but to stand for real reform. They deserve a lot better than this.

Mr. McCAIN. I yield the floor.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, the conference report for the 2014 farm bill

represents a true compromise in the longstanding tradition of the Agriculture Committees. The proposal continues numerous reforms and progressive policies that we created, expanded, or strengthened in previous farm bills when I served as chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

This agreement is not perfect, and each side had to give. For example, we were very far apart and had to negotiate on how we were going to support the food assistance programs we have. But, in this bill we have preserved SNAP and rejected the draconian House provisions that would have meant the end of food assistance for nearly 4 million people. I take solace in knowing that no one who needs this assistance will be kicked off the program.

As a conferee and as a longtime supporter of SNAP, what we used to call food stamps, I am proud of what we have done in this bill to improve SNAP—the Nation's most effective nutrition program. It has been a crucial support to needy families around the country, particularly during the recent economic downturn.

First, we took a number of steps to improve overall program administration and program integrity. While SNAP is extremely efficient and effective with low rates of fraud, we can always strive to do better. This bill equips States and USDA with a number of new tools to continue their strong track record on program administration.

In this bill we have provided USDA with additional resources to improve integrity. USDA has a strong and commendable commitment to rooting out fraud in the program. But the number of stores accepting SNAP has increased significantly, which means that USDA must continue to improve its efforts to monitor retailers. This bill provides USDA with additional resources to boost its use of technology, for example, by taking advantage of innovations like data mining, which can show patterns of redemption among retailers and help pinpoint outlets that may be abusing the program. We expect USDA to use data analysis and other smart tools to uphold the program's high compliance standards.

The bill also provides funding for pilot projects for State and Federal partners to address retailer fraud. States selected for the pilot must demonstrate a commitment of resources to recipient trafficking and they must prove that they have accurately determined fraud. The States that have successfully found and fought fraud should receive priority in partnering with USDA on the retailer fraud pilot projects. But success is not defined as a State that has used threats to persuade recipients to accept disqualification. Subsequent audits must confirm that the State disqualified participants who truly were guilty of fraud and not confused about their rights or scared

about the possibility of being prosecuted under criminal law, as it is understandable that some innocent people may be.

One of the thorny issues we wanted to tackle was the issue of how to handle when clients request to have their EBT card replaced multiple times. The concern was that some households were repeatedly reporting their cards stolen or lost. USDA thought that some households requesting that their cards be replaced 10 or more times per year were selling those cards. We wanted to empower the agency to address that issue. In the case when a household requests an excessive amount of card replacements, the household must provide an explanation about why they need another card. We know from experience that some households request multiple cards because they are confused about program rules. We heard one report about an elderly woman who requested a card replacement each month because she thought she was supposed to throw away the card after she used the benefits. By asking households to provide an explanation, States will be able to accommodate individuals who need more help to access their benefits. Of course, making a household wait to receive a new card until it provides an explanation is a burden for the household. Increasingly, States aren't answering their phones in a timely way. So this requirement should not be imposed on households unless we have a reason to believe there is a problem—either with their ability to use the card or with program integrity. We expect that USDA will not impose this new requirement on households that lose their cards a few times. We understood that they would set the trigger for the explanation at least at 4 times a year.

It is also important that households be able to provide their explanation through any number of options, such as over the phone to their EBT customer service center, via e-mail or mail. Most important, we don't want SNAP agencies requiring households to provide their explanation in person. That is too burdensome a requirement, particularly when many offices may be far away from a given recipient and have long lines and delays to see someone. And, no matter what the reason a household provides, States cannot withhold their card or use withholding the card as leverage to compel some other action. Obviously, if the State believes the household has committed fraud or doesn't believe their explanation, the State should investigate. If they discover illegal activity, they can pursue a fraud violation through regular program rules. Those are steps that come after the State reissues the food card. I am particularly concerned about how this provision is implemented with respect to vulnerable groups such as the homeless, people with disabilities, or seniors. We don't want these individuals or any struggling household to lose access to their

food benefits because their lives are chaotic and messy. We do not want vulnerable people to feel that their food benefits are conditioned upon giving the right answer about why they lost their card. We cautioned USDA to make sure that this provision was not used to delay benefits in any way. We can balance program integrity needs with compassion for our most vulnerable citizens.

The farm bill also tightens SNAP eligibility in response to some rare cases.

One of the provisions that got a lot of attention was the provision that reiterates that felons who have been convicted of certain crimes such as murder and who violate their parole or probation cannot be eligible for SNAP. SNAP has long banned fleeing felons from the program. My good friend former Senator Lugar championed that rule. But Members felt that it was important to reiterate this rule with respect to ex-offenders who served time for particularly heinous crimes. As has been the case for many years now, those who serve their sentence and are in compliance with the terms of their parole or probation and who are otherwise eligible for SNAP may apply for and receive assistance through the program. This provision does not change anything with respect to program eligibility or program operations. States already have the processes in place to implement this provision.

Second, over the last several years, there have been highly publicized instances where SNAP participants who won big at the lottery continued to receive SNAP. My understanding is that both of these winners lived in Michigan. Of course, people who win millions of dollars from the Powerball do not need the help of SNAP, and for the most part program rules would already exclude them. But we wanted to be sure that this type of thing never happens again. We included a provision to prohibit households where someone won a substantial amount of money from a lottery or gambling from participating in SNAP. We are leaving it to USDA to define "substantial". Our expectation is that they will not include nominal winnings that don't permanently change the household's economic circumstances or their ability to purchase food.

We also expect USDA to work with States to ensure that this provision is implemented behind the scenes without asking questions of clients. While we had two lottery winners, the nearly 47 million people who participate in this program are struggling. We don't want them to be asked if they had won the lottery when they are going through the process of applying for benefits. State lotteries and gaming commissions must report winners that exceed the threshold to state SNAP agencies. That way, State agencies can remove individuals with substantial lottery or gambling income without requiring reports from every participant or adding questions to current SNAP forms.

While I am focused on using back-end data matching to implement this provision, I would like to discuss the bill's provisions that have to do with what we call data matches. Data matching helps SNAP to preserve its record of strong program integrity and also cuts States' and applicants' paperwork requirements.

First, the bill makes it possible for SNAP to more easily exchange data with other programs by adding Federal standards for such data sharing. This sensible provision means that our systems can "talk" with each other across the various State and Federal programs. It is a welcome and timely change. We expect the administration to protect individuals' personal private information and prevent it from being misused.

We also are requiring States to use HHS's National Directory of New Hires when certifying a household for SNAP to help the State determine eligibility and what level of benefits the household should receive. Right now States' use of the database is optional. We think the Federal database could be helpful to States to find important information about the employment of noncustodial parents who live or work in other States.

Finally, the bill puts in statute the existing State practice of using the Federal Systemic Alien Verification for Entitlements Program, or SAVE, to verify immigration status. States can use this to efficiently determine eligibility without requiring a household to fill out unnecessary forms or find paperwork. This does not change anything with respect to immigrant eligibility rules or households' responsibilities. This requirement is another example of a behind-the-scenes administrative efficiency in the bill. The use of the Income Eligibility Verification System, or IEVS, will remain optional, though. It is sensible for the administration to set standards for how to verify immigration status through a national immigration data set. Given low rates of error and fraud in SNAP, we did not want to dictate how and when States use IEVS.

On the topic of data matches, I want to make clear that we want States to use available data sources containing up-to-date, accurate information that helps determine SNAP eligibility and benefit levels as States are making their decisions. Matches can help us to verify what clients tell us and reduce burdens on them. Matches can also identify information that clients failed to reveal. However, data matches are sometimes wrong and they can require a lot of staff work to correct, as well as place undue burdens on clients. This bill should not be interpreted to force States to seek or to use unhelpful data matches or where they determine the data match is not cost-effective. We expect the Secretary will help States determine the best ways to use the data sources. It is not sensible to pay for matches for all individuals or to do the

matches every month or quarter, rather than as the State is making an eligibility decision or if the State has uncertain information about a SNAP recipient. States need the flexibility to determine that an individual living a 2-hour drive from the State border with a verified long-term job in the community does not need to be checked in the new hire data base to determine if he is working out of State. We expect USDA to work with HHS to find ways to hold the costs of the match to State agencies and the Federal Government in check, while maximizing payment accuracy. As always, States must ensure that SNAP applicants and recipients always have a chance to prove that data matches are inaccurate.

As useful as data matching can be, we need to remember to ensure some balance on program integrity efforts. It is an inefficient use of resources to have eligibility workers looking for information about clients every minute of the day. Asking States to follow up on matches that may not yield any changes in eligibility or benefit levels isn't a good use of States' time and resources. In the last two farm bills, we took steps to establish certification rules such that States would carefully assess eligibility at certification and recertification. In the interim, unless States had information to suggest that clients were income ineligible or participating in two households, households were to continue to receive benefits without disruption or inquiries about their circumstances. Those changes worked. Overall program participation is up among eligible households, suggesting that we were right to make it easier for households to maintain benefits. States need to focus on adjudicating eligibility at application and renewal. This framework informed our approach to the use of datasets. We want States to use third-party data to make eligibility renewals as efficient as possible. But, this information is not meant to be used in fruitless fishing expeditions to prove households ineligible or to find data that requires needless back-and-forth between the client and the agency during their certification period.

I would like to turn now to talk about one of the more exciting aspects of the nutrition title. The final bill includes several reforms of SNAP's employment and training program, including new investments in identifying innovative job training opportunities for this population.

Most SNAP participants who can work, do work. As we know, however, millions of Americans are out of work. So we want to find more ways to help those who are able to work but have been unable to secure a job. We also want to find ways to build and grow the skills of workers so that they may find better jobs with better pay.

SNAP work programs will receive better, and more, funding in this bill. It gives \$200 million to pilot and evaluate new state employment and training

programs. States can draw these pilots from SNAP E&T components, but the programs can also include work supports, like child care or transportation assistance, that those with low-paying jobs often cannot afford. We want to help States build pioneering volunteer programs, which if focused on skills building or education programs, might boost an individual's employability. It was imperative in this effort that States be creative and try different approaches to addressing the barriers that could be keeping individuals from working, such as stable housing or childcare.

We recognize that it is far better for the long term for people to secure and keep unsubsidized jobs in the private sector. So we have allowed those types of arrangements to be considered part of the pilots. But because States will have much less control over information about what private employers are doing, we needed to include significant safeguards. We fully expect that these pilots will operate under longstanding protections from the SNAP law and other laws against the displacement of other workers, as well as workplace protection laws such as those for health and safety, wage and hour standards, family leave, workers' compensation, and the like.

The initial House proposal in this area was surprising in its harshness. The House essentially gave States incentives to throw off of SNAP people who could not find jobs. Furthermore, the proposal allowed States to then spend on whatever they wanted the savings obtained from throwing people out of the SNAP program. I thank the leadership of the conference committee, especially Chairwoman STABENOW, for holding firm to the principle in designing these work pilot projects that we should not give States any new authority to take away people's SNAP benefits when they cannot find jobs. The rules under the pilot project for sanctioning people will be the same as under current law in terms of when sanctions can be applied and for how long.

When it comes to sanctioning individuals for refusing to cooperate in employment and training programs, we already have in place protections to ensure that if there are good cause reasons for noncompliance that individuals cannot be sanctioned. Similarly, for how these are extended to employment activities under the pilots, the agreement ensures that unless clear evidence shows that an individual wilfully refused to take actions that she or he could safely and properly take, participants in employment activities in the work pilots may not be subject to sanctions. For instance, no sanction will apply if the employer gives the individual fewer hours than expected or if the individual's mental or physical disability prevents the individual from succeeding at the work or if childcare or transportation is not available at the time when he or she

has been asked to work. Wilful refusal to cooperate is different from failing to perform adequately at work. Some low-skilled workers will fall short at the workplace as a result of taking jobs that may be at the outer limits of their ability. This is a difficult determination, and a State may have a hard time telling with a private sector employer whether an individual wilfully refused to comply or whether the employer made demands that the employee could not, for whatever reason, comply with. In such instances, it is inappropriate for States to take away SNAP benefits.

In designing the pilots, we did not intend in any way to take away from States' existing authority to treat jobs that SNAP applicants and recipients have found for themselves as allowable work activities and support such work with support services like childcare and transportation.

Figuring out which services and activities work the best for different types of people is a hard nut to crack in the job training world, but it is one of the main goals of these pilots, and so we have required a careful evaluation. With the low-wage labor market the way it is and such a high percentage of SNAP recipients working already, we must ask how we will know whether the State's program and services made a difference. So we have required that only projects where the State can guarantee they will participate fully in the evaluation should be included in the pilot. We especially want to know more about how States can most effectively assess SNAP participants' needs early and match those needs to the right education and training programs and other supportive services that will positively affect that individual's job prospects.

Even though we have invested heavily in these handful of pilots, we also want to learn more broadly what is working and not working so well across the country in getting SNAP participants the skills and training they need to get and keep a well-paying job. So under the bill States must report more on the results of the services that they provide to SNAP participants. Using this information, USDA will work with the other experts in job training to improve assessment of whether SNAP employment and training can attain more longlasting results and will push States to focus on proven activities. We will rely upon this information when we reauthorize the program five years from now. We understand that SNAP participants are often poorer and have lower education and skills than people who participate in other job training programs, and as such, we made clear we must have appropriate expectations of these services' outcomes and take those differences into account. In this slow-growing economy, everyone will not find work immediately. Sometimes we have to invest now in building skills to see a better outcome for people in the future, and when designing measures, we expect USDA to take a long-term view.

As I mentioned above, upfront assessment is key, and so, while individual assessments already are a requirement for SNAP work registrants, we expect the USDA to have a focus on assessment as part of the state measures.

Now, let's turn to how this farm bill modernizes SNAP through a number of improvements for retailers.

The way we buy our food is evolving rapidly, and this bill helps SNAP remain in step. This bill gives the Secretary authority to test mobile technology use in SNAP, such as applications for smartphones that have become increasingly common and hold special promise to simplify SNAP transactions at farmers markets and vegetable stands. But we don't want recipients to see higher prices and we don't want program integrity to lapse as we seek additional ways to accept benefits. As a result, we start in this bill with a pilot project to test the idea. We expect USDA to pay special attention to testing fraud-prevention measures, so that these new technologies do not open the program up to new schemes for criminal activity. Some things will be tricky in a mobile environment. USDA currently relies on inspections of retailers' stores as a way of keeping out unscrupulous retailers, and so will need to find ways to reliably distinguish between eligible and ineligible or disqualified retailers in a comparable fashion as it implements this provision.

Pilot projects testing purchasing food online with SNAP benefits also are allowed under the bill, reflecting a trend in the food industry towards online transactions. The delivery of groceries could potentially help elderly or disabled recipients to access food more easily. Of course, we worked here too, to ensure that the same strong program integrity standards apply to this potential new way of redeeming benefits and we require, in the bill, that the agency stop the expansion of online transactions if the Department determines the fraud risk is too great. We were clear that SNAP benefits cannot pay for any delivery fees associated with online purchases, but we also expect USDA to also set standards for the fees to ensure that they are not so high that, on balance, this provision results in more hunger. After all, SNAP recipients rely on the program because they cannot purchase enough food—high fees would make hunger worse. USDA should ensure that fees are capped at very low levels and are clear to the recipients so that they are not surprised at the time the food is delivered.

On the topic of modernizing SNAP benefits, I am troubled by the recent reports of States seeking to include photo identification or fingerprinting as a way of supposedly ensuring program integrity. That is not a direction I think the program should go. One of the main advantages of moving to SNAP benefit cards, away from the paper coupons, was that the transaction looks the same and so there is

less stigma. USDA should not approve State attempts to require photos on SNAP cards unless there is an airtight way of making sure every household member can use the card, as well as any other person who is authorized to shop for the SNAP recipient. There is no need for SNAP to pursue such measures when other card issuers, like credit card companies, have not insisted on such measures to maintain security even though those cards are issued to individuals.

One final point I want to make about EBT cards. Last fall, because of a glitch with the computers at an EBT contractor, Iowa and about 15 other States had their EBT systems go out of commission for hours, wreaking havoc in grocery store aisles and leaving thousands without food. In this bill we have taken another step to "modernize" by restricting the ability of States to routinely issue manual vouchers, but we have created an important exception for disasters or system outages. We expect USDA to create a simple, fast way for States to declare that they need to invoke this back-up plan.

In addition to these changes for how retailers take SNAP benefits, the bill also raises the bar for retailers in an effort to increase the availability of healthy foods. Stores that want to participate in SNAP have an obligation to participate as full partners in making healthy food available to low-income Americans.

Some retailers have sought to spread SNAP issuances out over longer periods during the month for the purposes of evening out their business. This is allowed now through staggered issuance, and some language in the statement of the bill managers encourages USDA to allow benefits to be staggered throughout the month.

I am sympathetic to the need for retailers to not have spikes and troughs in their business, but I am deeply concerned about a practice in some States I have heard of where, as part of a State's staggered issuance plan, households may receive no benefits for as long as 10 days during a month. Apparently this is in the "transition" to staggering benefits, but this kind of hardship in the name of smoothing retailers business is very troubling. SNAP benefits already are low and run out for many households before the end of the month. To add on another 10 days before the household receives the next month's benefits could be a devastating hardship and means more children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities going to bed hungry or facing heart-wrenching decisions.

The SNAP law regarding staggered issuance actually does provide a requirement to protect households from stretches without food during the transition. We revisited this provision in the last farm bill and again reaffirmed that households may not experience a cut as a result of staggering benefits over the month. Nonetheless, I under-

stand that the Department has not fully enforced this rule. One solution would be for the Department to allow States to protect households during the transition with a one-time increase in the month prior to cover the transition period.

In this debate over the last several years I heard repeated concerns, particularly from some House Members, that SNAP was somehow out there recruiting people who don't need food assistance to sign up. This is a ridiculous claim. Quite the opposite is true. Some people need help learning about the program, and there are many groups around the country who are working day in and day out to ensure that people who need some assistance have the information they need to sign up, have misperceptions cleared up, and can get some help navigating what is a very complicated and burdensome process.

At the insistence of the House, we included some narrow provisions to prevent some perceived, uncommon abuses. We ended the USDA's collaboration with the Mexican consulate and we prohibit groups who help sign up eligible households from being paid on a "bounty" basis for each successful application, a practice I don't believe occurs very often, if at all.

But we have been assured that we have done nothing in this bill to undermine the great work that goes on around the country by dedicated individuals and community groups to help educate and assist our low-income neighbors. We still hear that the main reasons eligible households don't sign up are that they are not aware of the program, they don't understand how it works, or they don't understand the program rules and can't get through the process. In this bill, we have done nothing to change the education and application assistance activities that states and community groups can engage in. We have long prohibited "recruitment," which is trying to talk someone into applying if that person has made an educated choice to not apply. In this bill we codify that definition. But we fully expect that it will continue to be allowable for USDA, States, and other partners to share information about the program, the advantages of participation, how the rules work, and to assist people in applying for benefits. Such activities may change someone's mind about applying, but it is acceptable to change your mind because you learned new, accurate information or because you understand what you have to do to apply. That is not persuasion, but rather, is education, and is still completely appropriate under this bill.

So to be clear, we have severed the relationship with the Mexican Government related to SNAP. And while it is inappropriate for anybody to receive their pay as a "bounty" per application, it is fine to be tracking how many people a group assists in applying and the outcome of the application process. That is just a common, responsible

practice for assessing whether the group successfully is achieving its goals. Section 16(a) already prohibits tying anyone's pay to the number of people disqualified from SNAP and we have extended that principle to application assistance.

I do want to address the one significant cut in SNAP benefits that the nutrition title includes. I am disappointed that as a result of this bill 850,000 very low-income households are going to lose food assistance. There are certainly many ways we could have reinvested these funds into SNAP to improve the program and reduce hardship, but I have to agree with my colleagues that the practice of issuing a household just \$1 in energy assistance so that they can deduct more income than we had intended goes too far and it is sensible to address this issue.

In this bill we have limited this practice. It is a painful loss for families who benefit from this policy, but the change repairs the unintended oversight. What happens is that States can give SNAP households without heating or cooling expenses a token LIHEAP payment of \$1 or less, which enables them to qualify for a utility deduction and in turn increases their SNAP benefits.

But we do not want this provision to affect any households in the States that have not engaged in this practice or to cut benefits for households that do pay for utility expenses in the States that engaged in the practice. I know LIHEAP is a critical program in helping low-income families meet their energy needs, especially in cold weather places and in winters like the one we're having this year. When the State has already determined that a household needs help paying for utilities, it is wholly appropriate for SNAP to piggy-back on that information. We expect the Secretary to work with States to ensure that where a legitimate LIHEAP payment is made—that is, when LIHEAP has determined the household pays heating or cooling costs that such information still can be used to authorize a utility allowance in SNAP and that nothing should change in how the State makes this determination. All we wanted to do was shut down the inappropriate practice of very small LIHEAP payments to households without utility expenses from triggering a full SUA.

In addition, we also expect USDA and States will work to ensure that households that do not receive LIHEAP but that do incur utility expenses will continue to be able to receive the appropriate allowance. Many households do pay separately for utilities and need the SUA to receive adequate benefits. In cases where the cost of gas for heating is included in rent but the household pays for air conditioning or where the landlord has a surcharge to rent for utilities, the tenant should be able to claim the higher standard utility allowance.

We understand and regret that some of the effective dates in this legislation

will result in considerable time pressure for the Department and States as a result of the slow process by which the final bill came together. We hope they make their best effort to meet these deadlines. But agencies should not establish any claims against households for benefits that would have been proper under prior rules because new rules have not yet been implemented. None of this is the fault of any household, and they should not have to experience the hardship of recoupment or tax intercept because the policy-making process moved slowly.

Several other provisions in the bill's nutrition title deserve a mention.

In Puerto Rico the Nutrition Assistance Program block grant plays a unique role in the safety net because the island does not receive significant funds from other programs that are available in States, such as TANF and SSI. Despite this, Puerto Rico remains shortchanged on nutrition assistance too—if NAP operated as SNAP does in the States, participation would be 15 percent higher and the program would cost more than 22 percent more in Federal dollars. Because of these inequities, Puerto Rico can currently issue 25 percent of its SNAP benefits to households as cash, rather than in a form that can only be spent on food. As a result, some of the benefits likely are spent on other essential household items. Although I have no objections to current law, responding as it does to the unique circumstances of Puerto Rico, on the Agriculture Committee we have been under pressure to end this cash allotment. However, I fear that such a change could be very problematic for some participants who really need access to certain nonfood items and lack any other means of obtaining them. This bill requires a study on how eliminating the cash portion of the nutrition grant would affect Puerto Ricans. Assuming the study shows that it's feasible to make such a change, the cash allotment will be gradually phased out. But we wanted to be sure to protect poor Puerto Ricans, and so under the bill, if the Secretary determines that eliminating the cash portion would cause hardship, he or she can exempt categories of participants. The exemption could apply to the entire NAP caseload if the study shows that changing the policy would significantly and adversely affect all participants.

The bill also requires USDA to test changes to food assistance in the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands. USDA will explore whether CNMI's food aid can be configured more like the national SNAP structure and then a pilot is authorized subsequently to test this new approach. We understand that many of SNAP's administrative requirements may not be appropriate for CNMI, so we don't expect an identical program, just one that moves in that direction. If the Secretary finds that it is not feasible to run such a pilot, the funds available

in this bill can be used for any of the things that the existing CNMI block grant currently allows for.

The bill also provides for a pilot program to test the provision of canned, dried, and frozen fruits and vegetables in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The program, as the name suggests, currently allows for only fresh fruits and vegetables. The pilot in the conference report was included at the suggestion of some in Congress who believe that providing other forms of fruits and vegetables will be beneficial for the health of children.

I myself am skeptical of the need to make changes to current law with respect to the program. As we know from a recent, rigorous evaluation of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, the program is currently effectively improving child health and increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables. In addition, the program is extremely popular with both children and with schools, with far more schools desiring to be included in the program than are able to do so because of limited funding. This doesn't sound to me like a program that is not working.

But the pilot program will settle the question of the health impact of canned, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables, allowing us to know from a sound scientific study whether allowing canned, frozen, and dried fruits increases consumption at a level consistent with a fresh-only program. Luckily, we have a sound benchmark for purposes of comparison that can be found in the evaluation of the fresh-only program. And it will be interesting to learn whether other forms of fruits and vegetables improve kids diets in the same way the current program does. In carrying out this pilot, we expect USDA to put together the soundest methodology possible so that we can compare the performance of the fresh-only program with one that also provides canned, dried, or frozen fruits and vegetables.

In addition, the bill makes a couple of changes to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children program, known as WIC.

WIC provides healthy foods, nutrition education, and health care referrals to nearly 9 million pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and very young children, and has a strong track record of improving birth outcomes as well as the diets and health of participants. One reason that WIC has been so effective is that the foods the program provides were selected through a rigorous, science-based process to fill gaps in the diets of the low-income women and very young children who participate. There have been many efforts over the years to get Congress to intervene in the specific foods offered by WIC, the most recent of which has been an attempt to require WIC to offer white potatoes. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's decision to exclude

white potatoes was based on the recommendation of the Institute of Medicine, which found that Americans already consume plenty of white potatoes and providing them through WIC would crowd out purchases of other vegetables, like leafy greens, that are truly lacking in participants' diets. The absence of such a requirement in this legislation reflects a firm commitment by Congress to protecting the integrity of the WIC Program by keeping the process of selecting which food to offer science-based.

Another one of WIC's hallmarks is that it is very cost-efficient. Each year Federal WIC spending is reduced by \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion as a result of a competitive bidding process for infant formula, which results in sole-source contracts between State WIC programs and infant formula manufacturers. In light of the tremendous savings associated with these sole-source contracts and the valuable health improvements that WIC participation brings, Congress has remained strongly committed to WIC's competitive bidding process for infant formula. This legislation calls upon USDA to study the implications of sole-source contracting across all nutrition programs, as well as upon retailers and consumers, including the important role that sole-source contracts play in WIC. Our consideration of the WIC Program when it is next reauthorized will benefit from a comprehensive assessment of the implications of WIC's infant formula bidding process for participants, retailers, and other consumers, as well the implications for federal cost-containment efforts and the ability of the WIC program to serve all eligible applicants.

As I said at the start, this agreement is not perfect. Each side had to give a little, but I am proud that we have rejected provisions that would have kicked worthy SNAP recipients off the program and this proposal is a sound, balanced, bipartisan bill. It contains significant reforms, and extends and funds progressive elements that I was proud to include in previous farm bills. Coming to agreement wasn't easy, but this farm bill takes an important step forward in dealing with the Nation's most important food and agricultural issues. I urge my colleagues to support it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, first of all, I thank our majority leader again, as I did earlier today, for his help in bringing this conference report to the Senate as quickly as possible and for his willingness every step of the way to work with us. I thank my partner in the Senate, Senator COCHRAN from Mississippi, for his wonderful leadership.

At this point in time I will turn to him and allow him to make his statement before proceeding with mine. I want to say to Senator COCHRAN and to all of those in Mississippi who are lucky to have him as their Senator

fighting for them what a pleasure it has been to partner with him and his really excellent staff, and to have the opportunity to come here today with a strong bipartisan product that represents the agricultural and food interests of all parts of our country.

I yield to the distinguished Senator from Mississippi.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I am honored to be invited by the distinguished chairman to proceed in describing our work product, the farm bill conference report. It has been a true pleasure working with her and the members of her staff, it seems like over a long period of time with her coming to my State of Mississippi and traveling to other regions of the country to get a first-hand impression and a lot of knowledge about the challenges being faced by the agricultural sector in our country. She has brought to this effort a lot of enthusiasm and commonsense intelligence and pure old hard work. Also, there are the personal courtesies that abound to all of us who serve on the agriculture committee in the Senate, during hearings preparing for the mark-up of an agriculture bill and during conference with our colleagues in the House to produce a conference report.

I am pleased that this conference report represents a 5-year farm bill. It is very important to production agriculture and to all Americans, as a matter of fact. The leadership that we have had from other Senators on the committee is reflected here too. We have had an active committee participating in hearings as well as our mark-up sessions. It has been a pleasure to work with Senator STABENOW and with all of our fellow colleagues on the committee.

We are recommending reforms in this legislation that are designed to assure producers that we understand the value of a safety net that will support them when they are struck by disasters or other things that are out of their control. Marketing disasters are just as severe as weather-related disasters. The risk management policies in the bill recognize the regional differences in priorities of agricultural production throughout the country. The commodity and crop insurance titles of the conference report reflect how Congress can work effectively to support American agriculture and at the same time be responsible to taxpayers.

The conference agreement consolidates and improves programs to encourage farmers and ranchers to use healthy land and forest management practices to conserve land, water, and wildlife resources. Programs such as the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, which will become a part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Wetlands Reserve Program, are very important elements of a new emphasis on conservation.

We also achieve savings that are significant from reforms in the nutrition

title of the program. The expected costs of nutrition programs are reduced by \$8 billion. The conference report includes programs to combat waste, fraud, and abuse.

I am particularly proud of our work to address the needs of our Nation's food banks because whether it is in Jackson, MS, or in Indianapolis, IN, many people turn to these facilities when other options are not available.

Other titles of this legislation, such as the research title, have proven that keeping the United States' lead in agricultural research is essential to our maintaining an edge in global competition. Our land-grant universities, such as Mississippi State University and Alcorn State University in my State, have seen their university-based research commercialized to improve American agricultural production.

In addition to agricultural production reforms, this conference agreement contributes to the goal of deficit reduction. The Congressional Budget Office estimates the bill will save taxpayers nearly \$17 billion. The farm bill baseline was trimmed by \$6 billion from sequestration, resulting in an overall savings of \$23 billion.

Failure to enact this farm bill would leave farmers and related businesses with uncertainties that have been hanging over the agricultural sector for the past 2 years. This bill achieves significant savings and addresses a variety of agriculture needs across the country.

I urge the Senate to support passage of the conference report.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Again, I wish to say what a pleasure it has been to work with the distinguished Senator from Mississippi and also with the chairman in the House, Congressman LUCAS, and the ranking member, Congressman PETERSON.

This really has been an example of the House and the Senate working in a bipartisan way. We are about to take the final steps now in passing the 2014 farm bill. We have actually passed this twice in the Senate. Each time we have gotten large bipartisan majorities because of the fact that we have worked together.

The final conference report that we have before us is one of which I believe we can all be proud. I hope my colleagues will support it and send it to the President for his signature.

We all know this has been a long time in coming—in fact, frankly, way too long. Our farmers and ranchers have waited way too long.

This bill has seen a long and winding road, but in the process we have worked together. We have not quit. We have worked across the aisle. The final bill has the support of over 370 different groups, and they represent those from all over the country and all over the ideological spectrum. That is because we wrote this bill when we were working hard to find common ground.

We listened to each other, we respected each other, and we developed a bill that works for every kind of agricultural production in every region of our country, for families, and for consumers across the country.

We have 16 million people who work in America because of agriculture—16 million people. Many of them work in Michigan. Many of them work in Mississippi, California, New England, Virginia, North Dakota, and in every other State in this great country. They grow different crops in different climates, and they have different needs. That certainly is one of the challenges, always, for a farm bill, particularly when we are talking about a farm bill that reforms programs. Those 16 million people were on our minds every single minute as we wrote this bill, and that is why we have such a strong coalition supporting this farm bill.

This is a farm bill for the future with a whole new focus on responsible risk management, healthy, locally-grown foods, strong conservation practices, clean energy, and research. In fact, it is a bit of a misnomer to call it a farm bill. It is 12 different bills, all of them impressive and worthy of colleagues' votes, and they all are put together in what we call the farm bill.

I want to take a moment to talk about these different pieces and all of the great policies that we have been working on for 2½ years.

The first title, the commodity title, if we were going to split off the commodity title of the farm bill and give it a name of its own, we would probably call it the farm bill. That pretty well describes the commodity title. Maybe that is why—even though the commodity title of the farm bill is, in fact, smaller in terms of spending this year than it has been before—the farm bill has held onto its name all of these years.

Once upon a time the commodity title was the be-all and end-all. The first farm bill was written during the Great Depression, when the entire agricultural system in the country broke down. Farmers left food to rot in the fields because crop prices were so low. It would bankrupt them to spend the money to harvest and to ship their products to market.

At the same time, people were so desperate for food that some of the most iconic images of the Great Depression are long, crowded bread lines that stretched for blocks and blocks. We have come a long way since the Great Depression, and our agricultural farm policies are very different than they once were. That is why this farm bill focuses on the future of agriculture in this country. This is not your father's farm bill.

In 1996 Congress passed a law called Freedom to Farm that eliminated the last vestiges of those production controls. To give farmers time to get used to the new system, that bill created a system of direct payment subsidies, which were supposed to be temporary.

But it didn't quite work out that way. Those payments continued, farm bill after farm bill, even when it was quite clear they were no longer defensible. The checks kept coming in good years and in bad. In some cases the checks went to people who weren't even farming.

In the budget climate of today, we just cannot afford those business-as-usual policies of the past. It was one of my top goals, as we wrote this bill, to end direct payments once and for all, and that is exactly what we have done together in this farm bill.

We also went through this bill page-by-page and made major reforms. We streamlined programs. We have cut red tape. We have eliminated waste. The first thing in this bill, on page 1, line 1, is repealing direct payments.

This is not your father's farm bill. This is a critical step in changing the paradigm of agricultural policy. Instead of direct payment subsidies, we are shifting the focus of the farm bill to responsible risk management. Farming is a risky business. In fact, I can't think of a more risky business than farming in this country. We saw this in South Dakota last fall when a freak blizzard wiped out tens of thousands of cattle and devastated ranchers. We saw this the year before when record-setting droughts wiped out crops across America's heartland. We saw it in Michigan where the combination of an early thaw and a late freeze almost destroyed our entire cherry crop and our apple crop.

No other industry is as dependent on the whims of Mother Nature or on the wild swings of the market as agriculture. That is why we have a farm bill. We have a stake, and we should be proud we have the safest, most affordable food supply in the world because we partner with farmers. That is why risk management is our No. 1 goal in this bill.

In fact, it is what farmers have been asking for. They want the ability and, more importantly, the responsibility of managing their own risk. Of course, in a country as big and diverse as ours, the risks faced by farmers in Michigan are very different from the risks faced by farmers in Mississippi or Oklahoma or Minnesota. That is the key principle that guided us when we wrote the bill to make sure it worked for all different kinds of crops throughout the country.

As farmers are managing their risk, we are giving them the choice to participate in an Agricultural Risk Coverage Program—that we are calling ARC—which will help them cover losses they incur at the individual farm level or county level or they can participate in a Price Loss Coverage Program which will trigger if prices drop below a reference price.

Both of these programs will use historically-based acres decoupled from production to minimize any influence from the program on farmers' decisions on what or where to plant. We don't want them planting to the government program.

In addition, in order to qualify for either of these programs, farmers must agree to comply with conservation and wetlands requirements. They are so important.

We are reforming the system to stop subsidy payments to millionaires, and we have imposed a new, overall cap—a first-time overall cap—of \$125,000, for the first time covering both crop support and marketing loans, all parts of the commodity title.

This is the overall commodity title cap passed by the Senate, even though underneath the cap there were differences. We are requesting the USDA to close what is called the management loophole by updating its definition of "management" and giving the Secretary, for the first time, the authority to put limits on the numbers of managers on a farm that can qualify for payments.

By ending direct payments once and for all—by asking farmers to take responsibility for managing their own risk, and by partnering with them so that they can do it, and by capping farm payments and stopping payments to millionaires—we are putting in place the most significant reforms in agricultural policy in decades. This is a bill our colleagues can be proud to vote for.

In hearing some of the opposition, people are debating the old farm bills and not understanding what we have done.

Every farmer we have talked to in writing this bill said that crop insurance was their top priority. So we strengthened crop insurance and gave more crops access to this kind of insurance.

With this bill, we are taking significant steps to change the paradigm of farmer programs. With crop insurance, farmers don't get a check, they get a bill. They may pay tens of thousands of dollars in premiums and never get a check in a year because it is a good year and there is no disaster, just like any other kind of insurance.

This bill also includes a very important permanent livestock disaster assistance program for ranchers who lose livestock due to severe weather, disease or other acts of nature. In the past, Congress had to pass ad hoc disaster assistance for livestock producers, adding to the cost and the complexity of the program. These have been some very tough years for ranchers. In fact, livestock herds are down to their lowest level since 1951—imagine that—because of what we have seen.

That is why this bill, for the first time, has a permanent, funding baseline, and a system that will ensure our ranchers don't go bankrupt because of a freak blizzard in October or a scorching drought that wipes out a rancher's feed supply. This disaster assistance is applied retroactively to October 1, 2011, and makes the program permanent.

One of the worst agricultural disasters happened in 2009 to our American dairy farmers. That is why we worked

very hard in this bill to strengthen the dairy safety net by replacing the existing dairy supports with two new programs. The dairy margin insurance program, another insurance program, protects producer margins equal to the difference between the all-milk price and a national feed cost. We are taking special care to make sure that these insurance premiums are affordable for small and medium-sized dairy farms, making sure, especially, that we focus on any farm with fewer than 200 cows.

The Dairy Product Purchase Program, which is new and is a part of this, gives the Department of Agriculture the flexibility to purchase dairy products, milk, and other products when margins fall below \$4. Those dairy products will be donated for the first time to families in need, through public and private organizations, including food banks, homeless shelters, and soup kitchens. This was a hard-fought compromise on dairy. I have to say my preference would have been what we passed twice in the Senate as a strong dairy policy. But given the resistance of the Speaker and the leadership in the House and the need to be able to find something we could move forward on and pass that would work for dairy farmers, we worked very hard to find a way to move forward to get the votes and support and make sure we were helping farm operations in every region of the country. We know the pressures on the New England area farmers are very different from the pressures on our own producers in Michigan or in the Midwest or on the west coast, and we have worked hard to find something that works.

While title I of the farm bill reforms programs so farmers are taking responsibility for their own risk, title II of the farm bill is about risk management for the whole country. This is the conservation bill in this farm bill. In all the discussions in the farm bill, it too often gets overlooked. In fact, it is our Nation's largest and most enduring investment in conservation on private lands, which are the majority of our lands in America.

This farm bill includes a historic agreement between supporters of traditional commodities and environmental and conservation groups to link conservation compliance to crop insurance—critically important as we eliminate direct payments and ask farmers to manage their risk through crop insurance. We do not want to create unintended consequences of risk for our lands and our water resources.

At the start of this farm bill process, commodity groups and conservation groups were on very different sides on this issue, but they sat down together, they listened, and they found common ground. It turned out their differences weren't as great as they thought they were. In fact, no one has a bigger stake in protecting our land and our water than our farmers. With a little compromise and a lot of hard work, which is the story of this entire bill, they

brought us a plan that conserves soil and water resources for generations to come and protects the safety net for farmers to rely on.

This has been called the greatest advancement in conservation in three decades. I wish to underscore for my colleagues that this is an important and historic agreement, and I thank everyone who has been involved in the hard work of putting it together.

We have also created a new sodsaver provision to prevent farmers from plowing up native prairie lands, saving money for taxpayers and saving absolutely critical wildlife habitat. We need to manage land to prevent erosion. That is how we avoid having another dust bowl during droughts. It is equally important to continue preserving wetlands that help prevent flooding and create important wildlife habitats for ducks and birds and other waterfowl.

What else does the conservation title do? It directly preserves millions of acres of wildlife habitat, which in turn has helped to rebuild populations of duck, quail, and pheasants, among others. That is why the bill has the strong support of the National Wildlife Federation, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Quail Forever, Pheasants Forever, the Audubon Society, World Food Program USA, and the World Wildlife Fund, which are only a handful of the more than 250 conservation groups that have endorsed this bill.

To strengthen conservation, we went through every program and focused on making it more flexible, easier to use, and we were able to take 23 different programs, cut it down to 13, and put it into 4 different areas with a lot of flexibility that also allowed us to save dollars in this bill.

The first is working lands, giving farmers the tools they need to be the best stewards of their natural resources. The centerpiece of this function is called EQIP—the Environmental Quality Incentives Program—one of the most important conservation programs out there for farmers. EQIP gives technical and financial assistance to farmers, ranchers, and private forest owners to help them conserve soil and water.

Working lands conservation also includes the Conservation Stewardship Program, which encourages higher levels of conservation and the adoption of new conservation technologies. We continued the conservation innovation grants and the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program, which allows landowners to get value-added benefits from their land by opening them to hunting and fishing and bird watching. We made these programs even more flexible and added a focus on wildlife habitat, making them easier for farmers to use.

The second area, the Conservation Reserve Program, recovers highly erodible land from production to benefit soil and water quality as well as wildlife habitat. Despite record droughts over the last few years—droughts that

in many ways were worse than during the Dust Bowl—the soil stayed on the ground. We haven't had a Dust Bowl. The soil has stayed on the ground. CRP was a big part of that, protecting not only the soil but air quality as well.

We also continued an important incentive program to help older farmers transition their land to beginning farmers.

One of the parts of the conservation title that I am most proud of is a new focus on regional partnerships. This will have a big impact on my own Great Lakes—that we in the Great Lakes area love so much—as well as the Chesapeake Bay and other critical areas where there are large-scale regional conservation challenges. We consolidated several programs into one, which will offer competitive, merit-braced grants to regional partnerships made up of conservation groups, universities, farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners to support improved soil health, water quality and quantity and habitat for wildlife.

The final area includes conservation easements, which lets landowners voluntarily enter into agreements to preserve wetlands and farmlands and protect them against development and sprawl. We consolidated and streamlined existing easement programs to protect important land for generations to come.

The farm bill is also an export bill. In fact, agriculture is one of the few areas where our Nation maintains a healthy trade surplus. That is why this farm bill continues efforts to expand opportunities for American exports, including the Market Access Program, to promote U.S. agricultural products in overseas markets and develop programs to open new markets for American agricultural products.

The farm bill is also a humanitarian bill that speaks to the best about us and our American values. Around the world millions of people get their only meals as a result of the generosity of the American people through the Food for Peace and the McGovern-Dole program.

I saw this last year firsthand in Haiti, where schools would open bags stamped with the American flag and provide a modest meal to students every day—very likely their only meal that day. I met one little boy who saved part of his lunch to take it home in his bag to his parents so they could have something to eat that night.

In fact, in the life of this program, more than 3 billion—billion—people in over 150 countries have gotten a meal thanks to the generosity of the American people and the American farmer.

The farm bill makes major reforms to our food aid program, speeding up emergency food aid response and giving flexibility to organizations on the ground to supply local food to people in need. These reforms mean that because of this farm bill we will feed another 500,000 people around the world. That is

why this bill has earned the endorsement of many humanitarian and religious groups, including Feed the Children, the ONE Campaign, CARE USA, Church World Service, Catholic Relief Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Methodist Church, and the American Jewish World Service, among many others.

Of course, we know hunger and poverty strike families all around the globe, including right here at home. I believe in the richest country in the world it is a disgrace for any child to go to bed hungry at night or go to school hungry in the morning. Crop insurance is disaster assistance for farmers who have been hit by a natural disaster. The nutrition title of the farm bill is disaster assistance for families who have been hit by an economic disaster. Most families who need food assistance only need it for a few months, and the vast majority of people receiving food help are children, the elderly, and the disabled, including our disabled veterans.

When the House of Representatives passed their nutrition bill, they included many provisions that would have seriously hurt Americans, such as many in Michigan who have paid taxes all their lives, lost their jobs through no fault of their own, and are mortified they need help to put food on the table for their families while they are getting back on their feet. This conference report rejects every single one of those harmful provisions. Instead, this final conference report before us strengthens the integrity and accountability of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—or SNAP—ensuring every dollar is spent responsibly so those who need help can get it.

The bill stops lottery winners from being able to get SNAP benefits and stops the use of SNAP funds at liquor stores. It also includes an important provision that addresses what the Washington Post called “a black eye on the program.” We have streamlined eligibility requirements to cut down on wasteful duplication, but a number of States discovered a way to use that streamlining to give some families additional SNAP benefits by counting utility bills they do not have. By sending out as little as \$1 in home heating assistance, States have been able to qualify families for a utility deduction, even if they do not pay any utility bills.

I salute those who want to help people get additional funds. I would have very much supported adding additional help in this bill, but this cannot be justified—what is being done here. We addressed this loophole and protected the entire program for 47 million people.

Here is what we have done and here is what it means to someone on SNAP. If you receive \$20 or more a year in low-income heating assistance—if you receive \$20 a year in low-income heating assistance—nothing changes for you. If you receive less than \$20 a year, you will need to go back to the old sys-

tem of producing an actual utility bill in order to receive credit for a utility bill.

That is the sum total of where we have received and garnered the savings in this bill as it relates to closing loopholes. This is about strengthening the integrity of this program to ensure that food assistance is there for families who have fallen on hard times.

The farm bill also includes a number of pilot programs to help people find work or receive job training so they do not need food assistance. The Secretary of Agriculture can approve these pilots, which include funding for child care and transportation to make sure individuals are able to succeed.

The bill increases funding for food banks, continues an important effort that provides supplemental food for seniors as well as the senior farmers market program.

I am pleased this bill has the support of the AARP and others who understand the importance of senior nutrition.

The farm bill continues efforts to serve fresh fruit and vegetable snacks in schools, and includes a new national pilot based on something we do in Michigan called double Up Food Bucks. It essentially doubles the SNAP benefits for families when they shop for fresh produce at farmers markets.

I also wish to mention the healthy food financing initiative, which addresses the very serious problem of lack of access to grocery stores in low-income neighborhoods. There are many places in Michigan where this is a very serious issue. This financing initiative will help families put healthy food on the table while creating jobs in neighborhoods across the country.

It is also important to stress that the Congressional Budget Office projects that this farm bill, in addition to addressing fraud and abuse, will spend \$11.5 billion less on food assistance the right way—by the economy improving and people going back to work. So when we look at the fact that the numbers are going down, it is because of the economy improving. Frankly, this is where we need to be focusing our efforts, on supporting businesses to create jobs, and part of the way to do that is by passing this jobs bill called the farm bill.

The farm bill is also a credit bill, increasing access to resources which help farmers, especially the beginning and veteran farmers, own and operate farms. This results in jobs. This title will make more qualified farmers, of all sizes, eligible for USDA farm loans and gives more flexibility to the USDA so they can better reach new types of farming, including local and regional producers.

With 16 million people working in agriculture across the country, the farm bill is a jobs bill—and nowhere is that more evident than in America’s rural communities. The rural development title of the farm bill authorizes programs which are absolutely essential

to small towns and rural communities and those who work in those communities.

We are continuing the important work of rural economic development and rural broadband. Just as rural electrification brought opportunities to families across the country in the last century, rural broadband opens doors for increased commerce and interconnectedness for the 21st century.

Ninety percent of community water systems serve 10,000 people or less. We provide mandatory funding to address the backlog of rural water applications at USDA so rural communities have a safe supply of drinking water.

For the first time we prioritize and reserve funding for rural development applications submitted by communities working together on long-term, sustainable community and economic development plans because these regional strategies will be more effective at the local level, and we want to provide as much flexibility as possible. The farm bill’s rural development title is about entrepreneurship and the lasting strength of small towns across America in which it invests.

As I mentioned earlier today, we are creating an innovative new Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research in this bill—modeled after what we do with medical research—to tackle the difficult fight against pests and diseases, and it increases opportunities through innovation to create jobs. For too many years, agricultural research has suffered because of budget cuts over and over. This new research foundation will bring together public and private funds to maintain a steady stream of funding for this important research. We provide \$200 million in seed money, and it can be matched by \$200 million from the private sector in an ongoing commitment.

In addition to the new research foundation, we have a major new focus on food and agricultural research throughout this bill. We have a major focus on the specialty crops research initiative to find solutions to pests and diseases that affect fruit and vegetable crops, and we have efforts in this title to support beginning farmers and ranchers as well. We are also continuing successful research and extension efforts, including work done by our premier land grant universities—such as my alma mater, Michigan State University.

As to the forestry title, healthy forests mean clean air, fresh water, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities. Coupled with the tools we have in the conservation title, the forestry title of the farm bill helps foresters maintain the health of our private forest lands.

We are strengthening our efforts to fight invasive pests that have destroyed many thousands of trees, particularly in the West. We worked hard to ensure that private landowners can continue to effectively manage their operations.

As I mentioned earlier this afternoon, the farm bill is an energy bill. I

am extremely pleased that during negotiations with the House we kept the full funding from the Senate's energy title.

Our rural communities have been at the forefront of the effort to achieve American energy independence. We are strengthening these efforts through the highly successful Rural Energy for America Program, which helps farmers and rural small business owners generate their own power or improve energy efficiency to lower their utility bills. Thousands of farms across the country have lowered their input costs thanks to the REAP program.

We are continuing our commitment to the development of the next generation of advanced biofuels. Scientific advancements are allowing us to develop ethanol with food and agricultural waste products. With this farm bill, we will see even more biorefineries come online, producing homegrown fuels which bring competition and lower prices for consumers at the pump.

This farm bill also supports our growing biobased economy with my new grow it here, make it here initiative. Biobased products are manufactured items made from all kinds of plant materials that replace petroleum and other chemicals. These products are everywhere, from the cups in the Senate cafeteria—which are made by a Michigan company, by the way—to cleaning products, industrial lubricants, and even the foam in the seats of cars which, if it is a new American-made car, will be based on soy oil foam rather than petroleum oil. Biobased manufacturing creates jobs, strengthens our economy, and reduces our use of fossil fuels.

As I have said before, this is a farm bill focused on the future, and nowhere is that more evident than in the specialty crops title. This is essentially the produce aisle of the farm bill. Specialty crops include fruits, vegetables, nuts, and nursery crops. We are strengthening the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, expanding specialty crop research, expanding crop insurance to include specialty crops, and continuing the highly successful fresh fruits and vegetables SNAP program in our schools.

We don't want to just grow more fruits and vegetables, we need to be able to get them to consumers. That is why this farm bill more than quadruples support for farmers markets. We are also strengthening local food hubs, which bring farmers together with local supermarkets, restaurants, and schools to supply locally grown healthy foods.

The farm bill also recognizes an incredibly fast-growing segment of agriculture—organics. We continue our efforts to support farmers to get certified as organic, expand crop insurance options to organic farmers, and provide funding for continued organic research.

This bill truly reflects the diversity of crops we grow in America, and nowhere is that more evident than in the specialty crops and organics title.

In every part of this farm bill we worked on streamlining and consolidating programs. In fact, we ended over 100 different programs and authorizations in this process. I said to my staff at the very beginning: Don't think about programs. Think about principles—what should we be doing in agriculture and food policy, not what programs do we want to protect. That is how we have moved forward throughout this entire process.

There is one thing we did add and I am very pleased with; that is, a new veterans agriculture liaison at USDA to work with our men and women in uniform who are coming home and want to get involved in agriculture. We know the majority of our men and women are coming home to small towns, such as where I grew up in northern Michigan, and rural communities, and we want to support them so they can be successful if they choose to go into agriculture.

This is a new kind of farm bill, designed to meet new challenges of a changing world. We are also making major reforms, eliminating unnecessary, unjustified programs to cut government spending and to increase the integrity of farm programs.

This farm bill reflects critical steps in changing the paradigm, where we are ending subsidies and giving farmers the tools they need to manage their own risks. We support them, but in doing that, as we know, when we have insurance products—and that is what we are looking at throughout this bill, whether it is a new insurance-type approach for cotton or dairy or for our traditional commodities. With any other kind of insurance, you pay the premium, pay the premium, and pay the premium but don't get any help unless there is a loss, a disaster. This is a fundamental shift in this farm bill, helping our farmers to manage risk in a fiscally responsible way.

I think my distinguished ranking member would admit it was a lot of work. After all of this work, to my knowledge, we offer the Senate the only effort where a group of people within their jurisdiction of authority have voluntarily cut spending to reduce the deficit. If we couple the sequestration cuts of approximately \$6 billion and the cuts in this bill to agriculture, we are coming to the Senate and offering a bill of reform, cutting programs, cutting duplication, cutting spending that actually creates \$23 billion in deficit reduction. I am proud of that. This truly is not your father's farm bill.

We are about to vote to bring debate on this conference report to a close. But before we do, I once again thank my ranking member, the senior Senator from Mississippi, who has been a friend and a partner throughout this entire process. I have enjoyed very much having the opportunity to work with Senator COCHRAN and his very competent staff. I learned along the way that we have a great love of music

in piano playing and the blues—which sometimes we were singing during this process. But it has been my great honor to work with him and our House colleagues as we have worked to bring this forward.

My ranking member had a different perspective than I had, and we have written this bill together. I have learned a lot about the perspective of Mississippi and the South, and I hope I have shared the perspective of Michigan and the North—and the East and the West—as we have listened to our colleagues. I urge our colleagues to support this conference report.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on the conference report to accompany H.R. 2642, the Federal Agricultural Reform and Risk Management Act.

Harry Reid, Debbie Stabenow, Robert Menendez, Bill Nelson, Tom Harkin, Tammy Baldwin, Jon Tester, Michael F. Bennet, Patrick J. Leahy, Max Baucus, Amy Klobuchar, Heidi Heitkamp, Joe Donnelly, Richard J. Durbin, Mark Udall, Martin Heinrich, Sherrod Brown.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the conference report to accompany H.R. 2642, an act to provide for the reform and continuation of agricultural and other programs of the Department of Agriculture through fiscal year 2018, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Alaska (Mr. BEGICH), the Senator from Louisiana (Ms. LANDRIEU), the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. ROCKEFELLER), and the Senator from Colorado (Mr. UDALL) are necessarily absent.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY) and the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. VITTER).

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

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 72, nays 22, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 20 Leg.]

YEAS—72

Alexander	Fischer	Merkley
Baldwin	Franken	Mikulski
Barrasso	Gillibrand	Moran
Baucus	Graham	Murkowski
Bennet	Hagan	Murphy
Blunt	Harkin	Murray
Booker	Hatch	Nelson
Boozman	Heinrich	Portman
Boxer	Heitkamp	Pryor
Brown	Hirono	Reed
Burr	Hoeben	Reid
Cantwell	Isakson	Risch
Cardin	Johanns	Sanders
Carper	Johnson (SD)	Schatz
Casey	Kaine	Schumer
Chambliss	King	Shaheen
Coats	Kirk	Stabenow
Cochran	Klobuchar	Tester
Coons	Leahy	Thune
Crapo	Levin	Udall (NM)
Donnelly	Manchin	Warner
Durbin	McCaskill	Whitehouse
Enzi	McConnell	Wicker
Feinstein	Menendez	Wyden

NAYS—22

Ayotte	Grassley	Roberts
Blumenthal	Heller	Rubio
Coburn	Inhofe	Scott
Collins	Johnson (WI)	Sessions
Corker	Lee	Shelby
Cornyn	Markey	Warren
Cruz	McCain	
Flake	Paul	

NOT VOTING—6

Begich	Rockefeller	Udall (CO)
Landrieu	Toomey	Vitter

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 72, the nays are 22. Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

The Senator from New Jersey.

EXTENDING UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, it is an honor to speak for my first time in the Senate. As I speak today on the urgent need to extend unemployment insurance, I feel a sense of profound gratitude that I first want to note. First, I feel this gratitude to the people of the State of New Jersey. It is remarkable, the privilege they have given me to walk into this hall, to stand right in the area where the great Senator Frank Lautenberg stood, to work here in this hall which is filled with such history, to have the privilege of sitting there at the desk where the Presiding Officer is sitting and touch things that seem like they should belong in a museum, like a gavel from hundreds of years ago, to walk in here and see over our heads words like “courage” and “wisdom” and “patriotism.” Most importantly, it is a privilege to walk here among my colleagues, all 99 of them, every single one senior to me in months and years served, in wisdom, and in experience. It is my prayer, first and foremost, that I prove worthy of this incredible honor.

With all of that said, I also realize that I joined this body at a time when Congress is not really thought that well of by the American public. In fact, this institution's approval ratings are at an all-time low. I find that not surprising. Even when I was running for this office, I encountered so much frustration. In the days before I came down here, people who you would think

would love Congress would look at me and say: Go down there and give them hell. I think that is because so many people in America understand what we have endured for the last 6 years, which is the worst economy of my lifetime. While we are seeing some progress in our national recovery, it has come slowly and unevenly. Many families are still hurting. Americans believe Congress is not doing all it can to address the urgent problems they face. They believe that we have, in some cases, made problems worse. Some people, I understand, have surrendered to cynicism about government, cynicism about America's future, cynicism about the ability for people themselves to shape their own lives and their destiny. But we cannot allow the pain of so many Americans to overshadow that long history we all share. There is a reason why American history does not look kindly upon cynics and naysayers, for even with all of its wrenching pain and savage problems, our collective past offers a resounding testimony to overcoming impossible challenges, to righting terrible wrongs and advancing deeper and deeper meaning to those very American words “liberty and justice for all.”

That is what our Nation is, the oldest constitutional democracy, a country founded not so that its people get special treatment because of divine rights of Kings and Queens but because everyone is valued. We did not get there right away. Even in our founding documents, where Native Americans are referred to as savages, African American as fractions of human beings, and women not at all, we have made progress.

I know I am here in this Chamber because of what this Nation has done by coming together. Like all of my colleagues, all 99 of them, we are not here because of some royal lineage or entitled ancestor. I personally stand here like others because of the grit, work, sacrifice, and discipline of my ancestors but also because they had the blessing to labor in a Nation that for generation after generation advanced to greater and greater inclusion, greater and greater opportunity, spread among more and more people.

Our Nation has an enduring belief that when we struggle together for a common cause America is better and we are all better. It is the understanding that we are a Nation with a profound and sacred Declaration of Independence. Also, our country has a historical chorus that profoundly proclaimed a declaration of interdependence.

We began and have endured because our ancestors understood the common cause that is America. This cause was heralded by our greatest leaders in every single generation, the people whose words and speeches and examples inspired me to be here today. George Washington, an original Founding Father, reminded us of this principle and American ideal in his farewell address where he wrote:

The name American belongs to us. We have in common cause fought and triumphed together. The independence and liberty we possess are the work of joint counsel and joint effort, of common dangers, common suffering and common successes.

So standing here I am grateful that I have never forgotten what my mom has told me time and time again: “Boy, don't forget where you come from.” Well, I know from whence I come. I now from whence all of my colleagues come. I am proud that we, all 100 of us, descendants of slaves, of immigrants, labor factory workers, domestics, of farmers who through toil brought from the earth hope, of business people, who with impossible mountains before them climbed high and commanded forth new opportunity—all of us, despite our political differences, share a common heritage, and we share a common desire to solve problems, to address the challenges that plague this Nation, that hurt families, to serve our country so that we may give truth to the words like “courage” and “patriotism” and “wisdom,” so that they never become simply empty words etched above our heads but they constantly fuel the passion and desire of our hearts.

That is why 3 months in, almost to the day, I am inspired by the work of this body. I have not surrendered to the cynicism about it. I am inspired by the remarkable people who sit around me right now. This is a great institution. I now have an even more fervent, relentless belief that together we can address our common cause and the common challenges afflicting our national strength.

Principal among these challenges facing the United States is the persistent economic hardship and insecurity facing too many Americans. Our economy, though improving, is nonetheless failing too many people. Economic trends and challenges, not of any individual's making, and particularly not of the making of those who felt the pain of this great recession the most, are forcing too many families out of the middle class and into poverty.

This is not a threat to just some. It is a threat to us all. A shrinking middle class and intractable poverty is a threat to America. It is a challenge to the very idea of who we profess to be as a Nation; that each generation should do better than the one before; that we are a land of growing prosperity shared by a widening population; that the idea that anyone born in any station, through hard work, self discipline, and sacrifice can make it in America.

But over the last few decades this has become less and less the case. You see, wages are stagnant and by some measures have declined for the middle class. Social mobility in America, almost embarrassingly, lags behind many of our competitor nations. More and more families are beginning to question that idea that in America every generation does better than the one before.

More and more people now are getting stuck and feeling stuck through

no fault of their own in a dismal hope-subduing economic condition. I watched, when I was Mayor of New Jersey's largest city, how company after company shed workers during the recession, how retirement savings collapsed, how the ratio of people looking for jobs to jobs available jaggedly cut against the American worker, still standing now at roughly 3 Americans looking for a job for every job that is available.

Amidst this jarring recession, other economic trends continue to deepen our national economic wounds. Companies are now outsourcing jobs and investment. New technologies bring incredible societal benefit, but they are also driving many jobs into obsolescence. The worker in America is facing a weakening in negotiating position.

So as a new Senator, I am inspired by my colleagues, many of them, and especially their incredible staff, the unsung giants of our Federal Government who are working hard to meet the challenges. I profess that I hear from Members on both sides of the aisle a true understanding of our common cause and our collective responsibility here in the Senate.

Senator after Senator to whom I talked in my first 3 months is driving an agenda that gives my very hope sustenance. I am proud to roll up my sleeves and work with them regardless of party. While we may have differences in approach and disagreements on strategy, the common call to improve our economy has Senators nobly pushing what I believe are critical important legislative measures, measures that range from efforts to address our national skills gap, to expand educational opportunities, to boost our manufacturing sector, to lift small businesses, to promote research, development and investment in infrastructure, and efforts to stop the perverse incentive that drives jobs and investment overseas, and so much more.

But these critical and worthy efforts may take months or longer to move through Congress and even more time to have an effect to expand our economy at the necessary rate. Thus they do not relieve us from the urgency to do more right now to help those families caught amidst these treacherous economic trends.

These are families who so desperately want to work, who spend their days searching for jobs, sending out resume after resume after resume, going online and filling out application after application after application. There are tens of thousands of New Jersey families who are visiting food pantries for food or depleting their savings accounts or are cashing out their IRAs and who are racking up credit cards just to pay for necessities, who are skipping prescriptions, who are missing rent payments, and who are falling behind on their mortgages, letting car insurance lapse, having their utilities canceled, and having their children miss out—sitting out of field trips or afterschool activi-

ties just because their parents can't afford the costs.

This is why unemployment insurance is critical. It is America answering the call to help people in a crisis not of their own making.

I am proud, God, I am so proud, that for the past 50 years America has answered that call time and time again to help others in crisis. We are America. We have been America. This is our tradition. When times are tough, as the great New Jersey poet sings: "We Take Care of Our Own." In fact, we are a nation that takes care of its own and reaches beyond. If there is a crisis, America is there. If there is a crisis, be it a typhoon in the Philippines, an earthquake in Haiti, America responds; be it an act of terror in New York or Washington, an oilspill in the gulf, flooding in Colorado or a hurricane barreling up the northeastern coast, America responds.

Our tradition is clear. When the vicious vicissitudes of the market create economic crises for our people at levels as high as they are now, America responds. Extending unemployment insurance has always been viewed in this light.

When Senator Robert Wagner rose in the Senate in the mid-1930s amidst a depression that cast millions of families—my family—into economic peril, he called the Social Security Act and its unemployment provision a compound in which blended elements of economic wisdom and social justice exist.

George Bush, who extended unemployment benefits five times, at a time when unemployment was lower than it is now, said in very plain English:

Americans rely on their unemployment benefits to pay for the mortgage or rent, food and other critical bills. They need our assistance in these difficult times, and we cannot let them down.

Our inaction in the Senate in not renewing emergency unemployment benefits at the end of December, with national unemployment as high as it is now, has let millions of Americans, adults and their children down—down into an avoidable economic misery.

In New Jersey, I found it was particularly stinging to our residents, even confusing to them, that when times were not as bad as they are now, we acted with bipartisan, no-strings-attached conviction for our fellow Americans. Not only did we act when the unemployment rate was lower than it is now, but we acted to extend unemployment insurance time after time when long-term unemployment was about half of what it is today.

President after President, Congress after Congress responded—but not now.

When times were better, we responded—but not now.

When fewer people were struggling, we responded—but not now.

When foreign competition was not as fierce, we responded—but not now.

When banks were irresponsibly over-leveraged and when insurance compa-

nies were dangerously undercapitalized, when rating agencies rated trash as treasure and when mortgage companies used reprehensible practices that harmed family after family, all together threatening to create cataclysmic crisis, we responded—but not now.

For millions of Americans suffering in these horrible economic conditions not of their own making, who play by the rules, who are looking for work, who are struggling, who are suffering, we have more than 50 years of history of responding and extending unemployment insurance—but not now.

I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment just to extend and single out my gratitude for the leadership of my colleague JACK REED. For his efforts, he has been incredible in trying to extend these benefits. He, along with other of my colleagues, refused to give up. He has worked quietly and relentlessly to find a bipartisan solution. He has offered compromise, offered pay-fors, and has offered a way forward that would bring hope. But so far that solution has proved to be elusive.

If we are to honor our collective legacy and tradition, we cannot surrender in this moment to the partisanship of today. So many people are depending on this body to come together and find a way not left or right but forward for America, because every week that we delay, 70,000 Americans lose their benefits. For thousands, every week, that means losing a house, an eviction from an apartment, and depletion of savings. Because 40 percent of those who received benefits have children, it means depriving our children of things we would all consider the basics. Nearly 3 weeks ago I stood with Senator REED and pledged to go back to New Jersey and return with stories of the people I met who needed our collective action and needed us to come together. Twelve events later, after stops all across New Jersey, my heart has broken time and time again.

It is broken by the former A&P manager in River Edge, working every day to find a job and has burned through his entire life's savings; by the Hunterdon woman whose home of decades has gone into foreclosure. She is working every day to find a job but is in crisis; by the soon-to-be father in Paterson, working hard every day to find a job but is wracked with worry about providing for his new baby; by the father of five in Bridgetowne who now struggles every day to find a job but also to afford life's basic necessities. He was talking to me about keeping the heat on, about how they can keep gas in the car and food on the table. He told me about the strain and the stress it is creating in his oldest, a 10-year-old son.

These stories from cities to suburbs, from Barbara and Robert's kitchen table in Old Bridge, NJ, to the County Griddle Lounge in Clinton, NJ, to the One Stop Center in Plainfield, NJ, were eerily similar and, most of all, they

were all avoidable with action from Congress.

Eileen from Bernardsville told me she had been looking for work for 1 year. Federal benefits allowed her to stay afloat and afford the things necessary to find a job, money for gas, dry cleaning, a cell phone. Even in front of other job seekers, she couldn't disguise her anger and disappointment with Washington. Her anger was about feeling that she and others were being ignored. She told me she felt ashamed of a country that would turn its back on its own people. She is mad about a Congress that she feels doesn't hear her, but she is mostly mad that anyone, especially a Member of Congress, would say she is lazy.

She is right to be mad, especially about the absurd notion that unemployment benefits provide a disincentive to work. That allegation frankly burns me. It is something I have heard too often; that somehow people are lazy or that unemployment insurance and payments, as meager as they are, provide a disincentive to work. This, to me, is intellectually dishonest and, according to most studies, factually not true.

This is one of those corrosive political strains that burns the collective gut of our national truth, pitting, actually, American against American and violates that American wisdom—my mom always told me—that we should not look down on another person unless we are extending a hand of help. We are not calling them lazy.

When I was mayor of Newark, I saw my share of lines of good people doing that well, offering a hand of help. These lines, I will tell you as mayor, motivated me even harder to double down because they were lines at soup kitchens where Americans were helping Americans. They were lines at the one-stop job center where Americans were helping Americans.

But the longest lines I saw as mayor were when we had successes, when a new business, supermarket or company would come to town and say they were hiring. The lines would go on for blocks or wrap around buildings with people desperate to work, even for minimum-wage jobs.

I can vividly remember scenes just like that when Newark opened a Home Depot or then-Continental Airlines held a job fair. It was Americans in line with pride in their hearts, resumes in their hands, and hunger to find a job, any job, to get to work.

I heard that the last 2 weeks all over my State from former managers applying for entry-level jobs to no avail and people with years of experience so desperate they were applying for minimum-wage jobs with no success.

The people who really blew me away, who just set me aback because I honestly should have expected it—but I didn't expect to hear it—were people who told me in order to keep their pride and to keep their feelings of self-worth, on top of all of their stress and

strain of unemployment, they found ways to volunteer at their local libraries, at their schools, at their churches. These were folks such as Mary, whom I met in Hunterdon County. Mary told me she was helping women look for work as she herself was. She was helping them develop skills from her experience while she was trying to find her own job.

This is the America I know. From our cities to our wealthier suburbs, people want to work. They want to give back. They want to contribute. They want to represent the truth of who we are as a country. Time and time again I heard people say, "We don't want unemployment insurance, we want a job."

Even folks who had jobs, though, told me of the pain of congressional inaction.

I stopped to meet with folks in Woodbury. I went to a restaurant, Marlene Mangia Bene—Senator MENENDEZ can probably pronounce that better. I spoke with the owners: Christopher, Maria, Frank, and other business leaders. The community of businesspeople told me how high the prevalence of unemployed people was and how many people were losing their benefits, and they came to the simple conclusion, as they watched how it hurt businesses in that town—less money coming to people in their time of need, less money spent, and that meant less revenue for businesses, which meant that some businesses might not be able to hold on to as many employees, and then those laid-off employees would then need unemployment insurance and more social services.

The cycle feeds itself.

If we fail to extend unemployment benefits, economists say it is going to cost the country almost one-quarter of a million jobs this year alone. This is another government self-inflicted wound we can avoid. Reinstating benefits will save 19,000 jobs in New Jersey alone.

But it is bigger than that. Every single job is a family-added distress. While all families are important, there are some who should weigh especially heavy on the conscience of our country.

Take New Jersey State Assemblyman Bob Andrzejzak, an Iraq war vet who lost his leg in service to our country. He pulled together a group of veterans, young and old, for me to talk with at a Rio Grande diner in Middle Township in Cape May County.

I challenge any Member of Congress who hasn't done so already to sit with veterans who are receiving unemployment benefits or who, because of our inaction, just lost them. It is not hard to find them.

Unfortunately, nearly 21,000 veterans lost their benefits earlier than anticipated when we failed to extend benefits in December, and about 3,000 or more will join them each month unless we right this wrong.

Listen to the testimony of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines who have

come back into this economy after fighting on the frontlines, after facing peril and danger most of us can't imagine, and then here in America they have to face the harsh realities of, despite their best efforts, being unemployed and even facing the potential horrors of homelessness.

These men and women who fought for our country, who stood for our Nation, are not lazy. There is no disincentive to work in these benefits. These are people who signed up to go to war. The assemblyman told me how hard it was for his friends and even him to find a job. He told me what it does to their spirits and what it is like to give all for your country and then have your country fail to do what it has consistently done for others during times of crisis over the last 50 years—to extend unemployment benefits.

This man, Bob Andrzejzak, is shorter than me but he stands taller than I will ever stand—and on a prosthetic leg. He works a job as an assemblyman in New Jersey, with honor, battling to give more hope to his constituents in counties with high unemployment, such as Cape May County, with an over 12-percent unemployment rate.

He has good days, he has bad days, fighting it out on the front lines of our economic struggle. This Iraq war veteran is still fighting to protect his country, to advance it, and make real his country for the lives of thousands of people. His cause is our common cause. This burden should not be his to bear alone. We too, U.S. Senators, like him, have jobs, elected by the people. We swore an oath to be there for our countrymen. We too pledged our sacred honor to serve America, to return to the words of General Washington. The name "America" belongs to all of us. We must be there for everyone, especially in this time of trial.

It is my hope this body, in this generation of America, finds our measure of commonality and comes together to find a way so we can better tend to those in crisis, so that we too may add our humble measure to the greatness of that enduring American ideal.

Let us extend unemployment insurance.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, if I could praise my colleague for his eloquence and for his passion and say how right he is. I thank my colleague Senator MENENDEZ for allowing me to speak, but I wanted to commend Senator BOOKER for his brilliance and for his dedication.

I want to applaud the Senator for New Jersey for his maiden speech and for using this opportunity to focus on the urgent need to renew unemployment insurance for over 1.7 million Americans. The expiration has drained an estimated \$2.2 billion from State economies according to estimates based on data from the Department of Labor and the Ways and Means Committee.

Our constituents, who lost their job through no fault of their own and are searching for work in this extremely challenging economy, are looking to Congress to renew this commonsense and very modest support. They've worked hard and are searching for work with just as much fervor. But on December 28 the rug was pulled out from under them because some of my colleagues on the other side had decided they would rather let emergency unemployment insurance expire. And yet we have traditionally extended aid when the long-term unemployment rate remains as high as it still unfortunately is.

Democrats have been pushing to extend this vital lifeline since before its expiration. And on December 17, Senator HELLER and I introduced a bipartisan path forward—and I thank the Senator from New Jersey for his support for that measure. This emergency extension for unemployment insurance for 3 months would give us more time to work on a year-long extension and address the concerns raised by some of my colleagues. This way folks in Rhode Island, New Jersey, Tennessee, and Kentucky—jobseekers all over the Nation—would not lose unemployment insurance as we work through these complex issues. Unfortunately, that immediate aid was filibustered despite our efforts.

That did not deter us. We have kept on working through those issues raised by some of my Republican colleagues and we have addressed them. We are now proposing a 3-month fully paid extension—which is way out of line with past extensions. Indeed, 17 of the 20 times that emergency aid was extended no strings were attached.

President Reagan extended emergency aid three times and President George W. Bush did it five times.

We are still working to secure enough votes to break a potential filibuster. We are not there yet, but I remain hopeful. Yet the clock is ticking. I hope some of my Republican colleagues understand that jobseekers deserve a solution now and not procedural delays or obstruction. So I look forward to continue working with Senator BOOKER on doing everything we can to extend this vital aid to our constituents immediately.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I want to commend my colleague from New Jersey for an eloquent and soaring speech that speaks to the collective aspirations we should have in this body on behalf of the collective Nation we represent. I am not at all surprised at Senator BOOKER's ability to relate to this body the lives of people from New Jersey and across the country who depend upon us to respond to them in their times of need and to remind us of the greater nature of what we should stand for as an institution and on behalf of this country. He did it with such aplomb and such passion and intensity,

yet at the same time with such sincerity that I think it is an excellent beginning to what will be a very long series of remarks in the Senate on critical issues that will both inform us and at the same time remind us of the high calling for which we are all brought to the Senate.

I want to take one moment to add to what Senator BOOKER said, specifically on the topic he ultimately drove home, and that is this question of unemployment. I want to relate one story—I see the Senator from Utah is up, so I will relate only one story—but it speaks to the very heart of what Senator BOOKER was conveying here.

I get thousands of letters from people who depend on their meager unemployment benefits to avert economic disaster while they desperately look for work. As Senator BOOKER said, these people are not lazy; they are not looking for a handout. They just want a job, any job. I want to talk about one constituent in particular—Noelle from Atlantic County, who described herself as “a middle-aged unemployed single mother trying to raise two sons to be successful contributing members of our society.” She relates what happened after her marriage ended:

I didn't shrug my shoulders and give up, even though the “system” said I didn't qualify for assistance . . . I took care of children in my home to pay the bills and avoid child care costs. In 2000, when my children were school age, I found a minimum wage seasonal job and worked hard to become a permanent employee . . . I worked even harder to rise up in the organization and become a respected manager. When that company went bankrupt in 2009, I found another job within two weeks taking a large pay cut and making far less than I would have made on unemployment. I stayed with that company for 4 years until I was laid off in July of 2013. Once again, I didn't shrug my shoulders and give up. For the following 26 weeks I sought employment. I have joined every employment website I could find and I applied for any job remotely within my limited job skills. Unfortunately, the responses I have gotten have not been encouraging. Thirteen years of retail experience, including nine years of management experience, translates into few opportunities. No one will consider me for any entry level positions based on my previous experience.

She closes by saying:

No, I do not think unemployment should be a way of life. No, I do not think you can be unemployed and disabled. No, I do not think 3 million unemployed Americans are going to find jobs in 26 weeks.

She is so right, and these are the type of Americans Senator BOOKER was talking about, and this is why the Senate should act.

I don't believe that is too much to ask, and I am pleased Senator BOOKER has come to this floor to lend his voice to the debate and to stand for people such as her. Again, I congratulate my colleague from New Jersey on an eloquent speech on such an important issue.

I am pleased that he chose to speak about unemployment insurance, an issue critical to so many families in New Jersey and across this Nation so

they can make ends meet while they're looking for work.

Senator BOOKER has always been a voice for the voiceless, given hope to the vulnerable, and a helping hand to those who need it. It is why he chose public service. It is who he is and what he has always stood for.

He spoke eloquently and I commend him for his remarks. He rightfully pointed out that the issue of unemployment insurance isn't just about the poor. It is about all those people who need help while they continue to look for work.

We have seen the recession chip away at the middle class, pulling more and more families to the edge.

In this job market, they need more time to find work, and extending unemployment benefits will give them that time. It will allow them to step back from the edge.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, we are better than this. This farm bill is a monument to every dysfunction Washington indulges in to defend our policies and twist our economy to benefit itself at the expense of the American people.

The top-line talking point among defenders of this bill is “compromise.” The farm bill, we are told, may be imperfect, but it is a compromise we can all live with. They said negotiators from both Houses and both political parties came together and hammered out a deal. They said: This is just how you have to act to get things done in Washington.

There is, of course, some truth to this, but it is more of a half truth. There absolutely is compromise in this thousand-page \$1 trillion mess. But it is not a compromise between House Republicans and Senate Democrats. No, it is collusion between both parties against the American people. It benefits special interests at the expense of national interest.

This bill does not demonstrate how to do things in Washington but instead demonstrates how to do things for Washington. The final product before us is not just a legislative vehicle, it is a legislative getaway car.

And what did they get away with? Well, the farm bill is really two bills—one that spends about \$200 billion to subsidize the agricultural industry and another that spends \$750 billion on the public assistance program previously known as food stamps. The farm bill is, thus, a beltway marriage of convenience between welfare and corporate welfare, ensuring the passage of both while preventing reform in either. Instead, Congress broke out the neck bolts and sutures and put Frankenstein's monster back together.

This was the year the farm bill was supposed to be different. This was supposed to be the year when we would finally split the bill into its logical component pieces and would subject them both to overdue scrutiny and reform.

This was the year we might have strengthened the Food Stamp Program with work and other requirements for able-bodied adults, to help transition beneficiaries into full-time jobs. This was the year we might have added an asset test, to make sure wealthy Americans with large personal bank accounts were no longer eligible for food stamps. But those reforms aren't there. Those reforms aren't here—not in this bill.

Under this legislation, the Food Stamp Program is not really reformed, it is just expanded. Once again, the give and take of compromise in Congress boils down to the American people give and Washington takes. Yet, if anything, the other side of this bill is even worse. Not only did the conference committee fail to reform programs subsidizing agricultural businesses, the conference committee removed many of the few improvements the House and Senate tried to include in the first place.

For instance, the original Senate bill, for all its faults, included a novel provision to limit farm subsidies to actual farms, actual farmers. The Senate bill was also going to phase out crop insurance subsidies for wealthy Americans with an annual income of more than \$750,000; farmers who made three-quarters of a million dollars a year, after all, should not need taxpayer assistance to keep their farms afloat.

The House bill included a transparency reform requiring Members of Congress to disclose any subsidies they personally receive under the crop insurance programs. Yet all of the above reforms mysteriously disappeared from the final legislation now before us.

It is not as though the farm bill was a paragon of accountability and fairness to begin with. Agricultural policy follows a troubling trend in Washington, using raw political power to twist public policy against the American people to profit political and corporate insiders.

For instance, under this legislation, the Federal Government will continue to force taxpayers to subsidize sugar companies, both in the law and in the grocery store. The bill maintains the so-called "dairy cliff," keeping dairy policy temporary. This will create an artificial crisis the next time we take up the farm bill, which will once again undermine thoughtful debate and reform.

Perhaps of all the shiny ornaments hung on this special-interest Christmas tree, the shiniest may be the actual croniest handout to the Christmas tree industry itself. Under this farm bill, small independent Christmas tree farmers will now be required to pay a special tax to a government-created organization controlled by larger corporate producers, like some medieval tribute to feudal lords. These costs will, of course, be passed on to working families. So every December, Washington will, in effect, rob the Cratchits to pay Mr. Scrooge and his lobbyists in Washington.

Yet, even all this is squeaky-clean legislating compared to this farm bill's most offensive feature—its bullying, disenfranchising shakedown of the American West. Most Americans who live east of the Mississippi have no idea that most of the land west of the great river is owned by the Federal Government. I don't mean national parks, protected wilderness, national monuments, and the like. We have a lot of those and we love them. But that is a fraction of a fraction of the land I am talking about. I am just talking about garden-variety land—the kind that is privately owned in every neighborhood and community across the country. More than 50 percent of all of the land west of the Mississippi River is controlled by a Federal bureaucracy and it cannot be developed: no homes, no businesses, no communities or community centers, no farms or farmers markets, no hospitals or colleges or schools, no Little League fields, no playgrounds, nothing.

In my own State, it is 63 percent of the land. In Daggett County, it is 81 percent. In Wayne County, it is 85 percent. In Garfield County, it is 90 percent. Ninety percent of the land in Garfield County isn't theirs. In communities such as these, financing local government is a huge challenge. There, as in the East, local government is funded primarily by property taxes. But in counties and towns where the Federal Government owns 70, 80, or even 90 percent of the land, there simply isn't enough private property to tax to fund basic local services: another sheriff's deputy to police their streets, another truck or ambulance to save their lives and protect their property from fires, another teacher to educate their children.

To compensate local governments for the tax revenue Washington unfairly denies them, Congress created—as only Congress could—the PILT program. PILT stands for Payment in Lieu of Taxes.

Under PILT, Congress sends a few cents on the dollar out West every year to make up for lost property taxes. There is no guaranteed amount. Washington just sends what Washington feels like sending.

Local governments across the Western United States, and especially in counties such as Garfield, Daggett, and Wayne County, UT, completely depend on Congress making good on this promise. Given this situation, there are three possible courses of congressional action:

First, Congress could do the right thing and transfer the land to the States that want it.

Second, Congress could compromise and fully compensate western communities for the growth and opportunity current law denies them.

But in this bill it is neither. Congress instead chooses option three: lording its power over western communities to extort political concessions from them, like some two-bit protection racket.

"That's a nice fire department you got there," Congress effectively says to many western communities. "Nice school your kids have. It would be a shame if anything should happen to it."

These States and communities are looking for nothing more than certainty and equality under the law. Yet Congress treats these not as rights to be protected but as vulnerabilities to be shamelessly exploited.

For weeks I have been on the phone with county commissioners who feel they have no choice but to support a policy they know doesn't work. This bill takes away their ability to plan and budget with certainty and forces them to come back to Congress, hat in hand, every year. County commissioners know this is no way to run a community.

I share their frustration, and I applaud their commitment to their neighbors and their communities. I am convinced that in the long run, the best way to protect these communities is to find a real permanent solution—one that gives them the certainty and the equality under the law they deserve.

My vote against the farm bill will be a vote to rescue Utahns from second-class citizenship and local communities in my State from permanent dependence on the whims of faraway politicians and bureaucrats in Washington, DC.

For all the talk we hear in this Chamber about inequality, we nonetheless seem oblivious to its causes. This bill—and thousands of other bills, laws, and regulations like it—are themselves the root cause of our shortage of opportunity in America today. The end result of this legislation will be to disenfranchise and extort the American people to benefit special interests, to enrich the well-connected at the expense of the disconnected.

The true cost of that transaction—just another forced deposit and withdrawal from Washington's dysfunctional favored bank—is a lot more than \$956 billion. The true cost of this kind of unequal cronyist policymaking is the trust of the American people in the legitimacy of our political institutions, in the fairness of our economy, and in the good faith of their countrymen.

Our constitutional republic, our free enterprise economy, and our voluntary civil society depend absolutely on the equality of all Americans under the law, the equality of all citizen opportunity to pursue happiness in their own communities, according to their own values, each on a level playing field with everyone else. This legislation dangerously subverts that principle and mocks any patriot who still holds it dear.

All Americans may be equal but—as George Orwell might put it if he were here today—under the farm bill some Americans are simply more equal than others.

I will not be a part of it, and I encourage my colleagues to recognize

that there is another way, there is a better way, a new approach that remembers what—and whom—we are supposed to really stand for.

What we are supposed to stand for is deliberation—open debate and transparent amendments on this floor, in this Chamber. These programs should not be coupled to shield them from scrutiny and protect them from reform. If we need food stamps to fight poverty and farm subsidies to maintain our food supply, let those programs stand on their own merits or not at all.

Furthermore, the land out West is not going anywhere. This should be an opportunity for us to bring our people together, not turn our regions against each other and turn the right to local government into a dangerous political football.

It is time to have a serious debate about a permanent solution to federally-owned lands which can improve economic opportunity and mobility while reducing the national debt and deficit. All the evidence in this farm bill to the contrary, I believe we are capable of finding such a solution.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I wish to congratulate Senator BOOKER for his maiden speech. It is great to have him with us, and I thank Senator BOOKER also for calling upon the better angels in all of us to do what is right. Opportunity and fairness for all are not just empty words. They are words to live by and words to live up to.

Today I rise to add my support for extending unemployment benefits to those among us who need and deserve this lifeline.

In December over 2,000 Hawaii workers lost their unemployment benefits. Since then about 250 more Hawaii workers are losing their benefits every week.

In 2008 our country was plunged into the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression. Many lost their jobs through no fault of their own. Many are still unemployed. Since 2008 unemployment benefits have kept over 11 million people out of poverty. Unemployed workers spend their benefits immediately on food and other necessities. Unemployment benefits go immediately into the local economy. Every dollar of spending on unemployment benefits generates almost \$1.60 in local economic activity.

But this isn't just about numbers. For people struggling to find work, emergency unemployment insurance is a vital safety net. It can mean the difference between being able to get back on your feet or falling into poverty. These programs provide real hope and real opportunity for people. I know this because I have lived it.

My mother raised three children by herself as a single parent. Most of us have relied upon or know families who have used the earned unemployment assistance they paid for. When my

mother lost her job through no fault of her own, her unemployment checks went for rent and putting food on the table for her three children while she searched for work. So I know the anxiety when the family breadwinner loses her job, when every dime makes a difference.

Those who say people on unemployment are lazy or don't want to work are insulting and injuring millions of Americans, about whom nothing could be further from the truth.

High unemployment particularly hurts women. Among female heads of households, the U.S. unemployment rate was 8.7 percent in December. That is two points higher than the 6.7 percent unemployment rate for the Nation as a whole. Neither one of these statistics takes into account workers who have given up looking for work. We should support a short-term extension of unemployment benefits while Congress works on a needed longer-term bill.

Last Friday President Obama announced a new effort to support the long-term unemployed. He gathered over 300 companies who have signed onto a set of best practices for recruiting and hiring unemployed—especially those long-term unemployed—to prevent discrimination against these Americans.

The Federal Government will lead by example in a new Presidential memorandum to improve its own recruiting and hiring of long-term unemployed people. Congress can do its part by updating and strengthening job-training programs, such as through the Workforce Investment Act which we will take up later this year. For right now, millions of families are counting on us to extend a vital life line to them. I urge my colleagues to support extending unemployment benefits.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I rise this evening to discuss the Agricultural Act of 2014—the farm bill conference report.

This legislation has been delayed over 2½ years, weighing the entire time on the minds of farmers and ranchers all across the country.

Last Tuesday I came to the floor to explain why I was the only Senator on the farm bill conference not to sign the conference report and why I cannot in good conscience support this legislation. I am here today to go beyond my philosophical concerns with the direction of the legislation, and I will instead focus on how the farm bill will negatively impact agriculture in my home State of Kansas, as well as other States.

The farm bill is not a simple reauthorization or continuation of our Nation's farm and food programs. We have already done that once with the 1-year extension of the 2008 bill. Instead, the legislation before us should be a wholesale rewrite of the programs and policies at the Department of Agriculture.

When this bill is signed into law by the President and fully implemented, our producers will have to make choices among new safety net programs, new regulations, and new rules. Some of these choices will happen only once and will be irrevocable. They cannot be changed for the next 5 years. This is a 5-year bill. We owe it to these farmers, ranchers, small business owners, as well as to the next generation of producers to get this legislation right. Unfortunately, I believe the Congress has missed the mark in that the conference report goes backwards toward protectionist subsidy programs instead of forward with innovative and responsible solutions.

I am not alone in that assessment. As reported by the Kansas City Star last Friday, January 31, all four Kansas House members voted "no" on what is arguably the single most important piece of Federal legislation in Kansas. Now, that should grab everybody in America's attention. The entire House delegation from the wheat State was united in opposing this version of the farm bill.

It is not that we do not appreciate agriculture or the producers and their families in our State. It is entirely the opposite. We care so much that after 3 years of work, we will not settle for supporting backwards legislation just to get something done. I call it a look in the rearview mirror.

I understand compromises were made. But I cannot support a bill which marches backwards toward producers making bad decisions based off of government subsidies, retaliation against our livestock producers, and, once again, agriculture taking a disproportionate cut in spending compared—yes—to Federal nutrition programs.

When Chairperson STABENOW and I started the process of rewriting the farm bill, Kansas producers, regardless of what they planted, over and over again said their number one priority and concern was the availability of crop insurance which protects in case of disaster. They were also fully aware that direct payments would no longer be available to them, and most were OK with that direction. Kansas producers did not ask for a continuation of a target-priced subsidy program and they certainly did not want Congress to raise the target prices of all commodities.

Two years ago, in 2012, the Senate Agriculture Committee and the full Senate passed a farm bill that ended the countercyclical and commodity subsidy programs. If signed into law, the 2012 Senate farm bill would have taken the Federal Government and the Department of Agriculture out of the business of sending signals to producers, essentially telling them what crops to plant. Unfortunately, that reform was never fully realized.

We have something called the new Price Loss Coverage Program that is contained in this conference report. It

sets high fixed target prices and subsidies for all commodities and regions of the country.

Last week, after the final details of the bill were released, I talked with a young producer near Dodge City, my hometown, who is a member of my volunteer agriculture advisory council. I fondly refer to them as my "ag posse."

With the current cash price for wheat at the Dodge City grain elevator around \$6 and a target price guaranteed for wheat set at \$5.50 a bushel for the next 5 years, I asked this young, successful, and informed producer: What are you going to plant? What he told me should not surprise anyone in this body—or anyone. He said: Pat, I am going to plant wheat for the government subsidy.

His answer only reinforces one of my biggest concerns with this conference report. When the Federal Government guarantees producers a subsidy triggered off a target price, reference price, a countercyclical price—whatever you want to call it—it always has and always will lead to planting and marketing distortions.

Today many producers have a college or advanced degree, often in business. They are going to evaluate the programs at the Department of Agriculture and make decisions that benefit their business's bottom line.

Instead of planting grain sorghum or corn or soybeans, my friend in western Kansas already knows he is going to plant the crop he is guaranteed to receive the highest subsidy payment from the government, not from the market. In this case, he plans to plant wheat at \$5.50 per bushel over corn which has a target price of \$3.70 a bushel.

I have yet to hear one explanation for why Congress is not only including target prices for corn, wheat, sorghum, soybeans, rice, peanuts, and barley but raising and fixing their prices regardless of movements in the market.

Kansas is the breadbasket of the world. So you might think Kansas producers planting more wheat would be a good thing; however, simple economics and history demonstrate why this is such a dangerous road for the Federal Government to take.

When all producers in Kansas and the rest of America have the same price guarantees and signals to plant wheat—no matter where you are—and the majority makes the business decision to follow subsidy signals instead of the market, over time there will undoubtedly be more production than global demand or otherwise.

We will have a surplus of wheat leading to lower wheat prices. That could normally be corrected by market signals, but with the fixed target price, farmers will continue to plant wheat for the subsidy—that subsidy guarantee—leading to further overproduction and even lower crop prices. We have been there before, and that is why we tried to reform the program several farm bills back.

This cycle of overproduction, low grain prices, and expensive support payments could eventually lead back to the days of mandatory quotas and acreage allotments—it has happened before—known as set-asides, paying farmers not to grow anything. We don't need to go back to those days. Our producers in Kansas want none of that from their Federal Government.

Besides having high fixed target prices, the new Price Loss Coverage Program sets the price guarantees so high that some are at or above the producer's cost of production. This would mean the government is essentially subsidizing a producer so much that they are guaranteed to make a profit if they have a normal or average year.

It gets worse. The early analysis I have seen shows that the target prices are high enough that rice, peanuts, and barley growers will receive a subsidy payment at least 75 percent of any given year, likely triggering a payment 4 out of the next 5 years.

Other commodities are not treated as favorably. Wheat prices are likely to trigger a payment, on average, only 35 percent of the time and soybeans less than 15 percent.

What that tells me is that the new target price guarantees are set high enough for a few commodities to trigger subsidy payments with a high frequency.

Folks, this is no longer a risk-management tool or part of a responsible safety net. Make no mistake, the Price Loss Coverage Program is nothing more than a profit protection program from some of our commodity growers.

The lone commodity that has moved out of the price supports entirely was forced to after learning the lesson the hard way.

In 2002, the World Trade Organization ruled against the United States for cotton programs, including a decoupled target price subsidy. In a settlement with Brazil, we have been paying their producers \$147 million a year for damages. We are still paying them.

As much as I disagree with the backward direction of the commodity title, Kansas livestock producers may have more beef with this conference report. Kansas is in the heart of cattle country. After 3 years of drought, livestock producers in my home State are waiting for disaster assistance that has been unnecessarily delayed for over 3 years.

Yet when taking the full conference report under consideration, both the Kansas Livestock Association and the Kansas Pork Association strongly oppose this bill. Why?

In a letter sent to me by Jeff Sternberger, president of the Kansas Livestock Association, he says:

We are deeply disappointed the report does not address our two priority issues, mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) and the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration, GIPSA, rule on cattle marketing.

Mandatory country-of-origin labeling, or COOL, is a marketing program;

however, our closest trading partners have found the practice anything but cool. Canada and Mexico are two of our biggest and historically strong markets for U.S. beef, pork, and chicken exports. In 2012 alone, Canada imported over \$1 billion worth of U.S. beef and Mexico imported over \$800 million.

If we do not come into compliance, as required by the World Trade Organization, Canada and Mexico will retaliate against the United States.

Without these markets, Kansas livestock producers will lose value on their products, negatively impacting one of the biggest drivers of our State's economy. Unfortunately, our efforts to fix COOL in the farm bill conference committee fell short—to the displeasure of our livestock producers and trading partners.

The GIPSA rule on livestock marketing should have been addressed in the final farm bill conference report as well. The House version of the farm bill had strong provisions that would have let our livestock producers make their own marketing decisions instead of GIPSA. Yet the provisions were left entirely out of the conference report with no explanation or transparency—behind closed doors.

Finally, I have to address a major inequality in the final conference report; that is, nutrition spending. When the Congressional Budget Office released their official estimate of the budgetary effects of this agriculture act, I was more than disappointed.

According to their letter:

CBO estimates that direct spending stemming from the programs authorized by the conference agreement would total \$956 billion over the 2014 to 2023 period, of which \$756 billion would be for nutrition programs.

That is almost \$800 billion. By the way, that lower figure is a bet on the economy improving and people getting off the SNAP program, which would certainly be good but is not certain.

When you do the math, that means 79 percent—almost 80 percent—of the total spending in the farm bill will go to nutrition programs, including SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

The final compromise includes \$8 billion in food stamp savings mainly from tightening the Low-Income Heating and Assistance Program, the infamous LIHEAP loophole, and that is a good thing. States were gaming the system. I am all for that, but that amounts to a 1-percent reduction to the nutrition spending out of a \$750 billion program if you believe the projections. I think it is probably more toward \$800 billion.

The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry recently released a statement with the headline "Deficit Reduction: The 2014 Farm Bill," showcasing the savings in this legislation. The release highlights the inequality between farm and food programs:

Farm subsidy programs were cut far more significantly than any other area of the budget under the Agriculture Committee's

jurisdiction. By comparison, farm subsidy programs were cut by 31 percent, while nutrition programs were reduced 1 percent.

You heard that right. Farmers, ranchers, farm broadcasters listening in, you heard that right. The farm bill once again prioritizes spending for food stamps over all other Department of Agriculture programs, including important conservation programs, research programs, and rural development programs.

I am fine with reducing farm subsidies such as the target price program, but we should have included additional reforms to the nutritional programs, which we tried to do—in several votes—in a reasonable and responsible manner. We were not touching anybody's benefits; we were just looking at the eligibility requirements. But the conference principals decided on the final compromise—again behind closed doors.

While we all want to provide much needed certainty to producers—goodness knows it is been a long time since we had a farm bill in place—the conference missed an opportunity for greater and necessary reforms to our Nation's farm programs, burdensome regulations on livestock producers, and Federal nutrition programs.

After over 3 years of deliberation and disputes over the farm bill, our producers, consumers, taxpayers, and global trading partners expect and deserve more than what is found in this conference report.

As a conferee, I did not sign the conference report last week. That didn't give me any pleasure. As a Kansan and a Senator from a large agriculture State, I am going to vote against this rearview mirror legislation for all the reasons I have itemized.

Having said that, I do wish to take a moment to personally thank Chairperson STABENOW and Chairman LUCAS, over in the House, for their unwavering drive and perseverance to finalize a farm bill. It is one thing for me to stand and criticize it and find in my heart and my mind and on behalf of my Kansas producers to vote no because I think that is the right vote, but I also know they have endeavored—Chairman STABENOW and Chairman LUCAS—to at least get a bill. It is a tall task to get a majority of the Members of Congress to understand that the farm bill is not simply a bill that you pay off.

I can remember when I was chairman of the committee over in the House and I asked a colleague to help me on the farm bill. He said: Why don't you just pay it? That indicated his broad knowledge of the farm bill at that particular time.

The farm bill is not simply a bill you just pay off. It instead represents important legislation for both urban, rural States and districts and the stability of the world, if you will, knowing we have to feed 9 billion people in the next several decades. At last, the Chairs have beaten all the odds and are on the verge of completing a very com-

plicated and time-consuming undertaking, to say the least.

I must also thank my colleagues and friends on the House and Senate agriculture committees for their knowledge, their expertise, and their diverse perspectives on agriculture. It is going to be really hard to imagine that many of the faces in the Senate agriculture committee room will not be there in person for the next farm bill 5 years down the road—Senator TOM HARKIN, Senator SAXBY CHAMBLISS, both of whom will be sorely missed as they have both led the committee in their respective caucuses through previous farms bills. However, they will literally “watch over” the committee for years to come, because their portraits are on the wall, hanging just above us. I think their eyes move when we consider amendments.

Senator MAX BAUCUS will continue his service to the country as the next Ambassador to China, but we will miss his advice and counsel in the committee.

Finally, it is hard to describe the void that will be created with the departure of Senator MIKE JOHANNIS of Nebraska. As the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, he has seen both sides of the farm bill, implementing one and writing another. Even though Nebraska left the Big 12 for the Big 10, this K-State fan can admit we will all miss having this champion from the Cornhusker State around.

So although I will not vote for the farm bill conference report, I promise to all of Kansas agriculture that I fully appreciate the need for a farm bill, especially one that has been delayed for years. But while we need a farm bill, we do not need this farm bill.

I truly respect the farmers and ranchers and everybody connected with agriculture for what they do as a profession for our economy and for global stability in a troubled and angry world. I just wish the rest of this Senate would do the same thing. I will continue to work and to advocate and to champion agriculture on their behalf every single day.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I wish to commend the junior Senator from New Jersey on his first speech on the Senate floor. He brings a strong voice to the U.S. Senate. Today he raises that voice for our friends and neighbors who need it, and I am proud to stand alongside him.

Just 5 years ago middle-class families got hammered by the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. These families didn't cause the crisis. They worked hard and played by the rules. But they ended up paying the price for Wall Street's wild risk-taking and Washington's failed oversight. People lost jobs, lost savings, lost homes. Far too many of them are still struggling.

For these families every dollar counts. An extra couple of hundred dollars a week can keep food on the table or the heat on during cold winter months. It can mean the difference between making the rent or mortgage payment or being out on the street.

That is what emergency unemployment insurance is for—to give folks the little bit of help they need to keep their heads above water while they search for a job. Unemployment insurance represents our commitment as a country that we will pitch in when our friends and neighbors have fallen on rough times, knowing they would do the same for us.

So far, Republicans seem determined to break that commitment. Because of Republican filibusters, 1.6 million Americans and counting have lost access to unemployment insurance since the end of last year, including more than 60,000 people in Massachusetts. Their obstruction means we cannot fulfill our commitment to the families who need it most.

My Republican colleagues should be looking for a way to say yes—yes to helping middle-class American families and their 2.3 million children who rely on unemployment insurance. But, once again, they just want a way to say no.

Extending unemployment insurance should be a simple matter. It happened five times during the Bush administration and not once—not once—did Republicans demand that the costs be offset by cuts or revenue increases elsewhere. But the Republicans have insisted on a different standard this time, filibustering because the extension of benefits wasn't offset. Democrats thought this was wrong, but we compromised and we agreed to offset the cost. So did we have a deal? No. The Republicans refused to take yes for an answer and filibustered again.

Why would Republicans block the extension of unemployment benefits? Some seem to believe unemployment insurance is actually bad for struggling families. One Republican Senator recently said emergency unemployment insurance does a “disservice” to people because it causes them to “become part of this perpetual unemployed group in our economy.” Last year's Republican Vice Presidential nominee, Congressman RYAN, said that Federal safety net programs such as unemployment insurance are like “a hammock, which lulls able-bodied people into lives of complacency and dependency.” This is an insult to hard-working people across this country—people who are doing their best and can't find a job.

This is an insult to people such as Terri, a 41-year-old resident of Gardner, MA, who lost her job last year. Here is what she wrote to me after Congress let the unemployment insurance program expire:

[M]y employer suddenly let me go and I found myself unemployed for the first time since my very first part-time job at 15. I have been diligently looking for work, applying everywhere, but I haven't had any job offers . . .

She writes that unemployment insurance:

... is all we have. I'm already on the brink of losing my home, we are struggling to hang on to what very little we have. . . . I know I'm one of 1.3 million faces, but I'm a face from near your home. I'm a face that never thought I'd be in this situation. I'm a face that needs the help of my government's services that I have paid into for many, many years. I'm a face that has done everything I'm supposed to—but I feel like I've fallen aside and no one sees me.

I'm not an abuser of the system. I'm someone who really needs my government to be there for me now. Please see me.

Terri isn't looking for a life of complacency and dependency. And she is not the exception. A person can't get unemployment benefits unless they prove they lost their job through no fault of their own, and they prove they are actively looking for work. Unemployment insurance is a critical lifeline for people who are trying their hardest and need a little help—a recognition that Wall Street and Washington caused the financial crisis but Main Street is still paying the price.

And there is the rub. Republicans line up to protect billions in tax breaks and subsidies for big corporations with armies of lobbyists, but they can't find a way to help struggling families get back on their feet.

People such as Terri are hurting. They worked hard their whole lives and paid into the system, and after the worst economic crisis in generations, they are searching for jobs and scrambling to stay in the middle class. They are not looking for a handout; they are looking for a chance to rebuild their lives. They would be there for us; we should be there for them.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am reminded even at this late hour, when most of the world has moved on to other pursuits, what a great privilege it is to be with two magnificent voices and advocates for fairness and economic opportunity: Senator WARREN of Massachusetts, and my very good friend, Senator BOOKER of New Jersey, on his first occasion here on the floor. I feel very blessed and fortunate and privileged to be here with them. I feel that way at any moment on this floor in this body but particularly as we face this great challenge ahead: how to preserve and enhance our middle class in America; how to make sure America fulfills its great promise Senator BOOKER evoked so eloquently, going back to the days of George Washington; and now, with great leaders facing many of the same kinds of basic questions about whether we can provide that opportunity going forward, whether we are equal to the task in an increasingly complex society.

Just today, in the New York Times, there was a very profound and telling story about markets losing middle-class consumers. Only the high-end and

the low-end retailers are being able to find markets for their products because our middle class is dwindling, squeezed by the vise of an increasingly desperate situation. How desperate it is for people who are depending now on unemployment insurance, as they see the deadlines for them approaching and they know they will lose roofs over their heads, meals on their table, for families they are struggling to keep together. As Senator BOOKER and Senator WARREN said so well, the unfairness of the economic crisis caused by Wall Street and Washington but visited upon Main Street America, middle-class America, mainstream America, still struggling to recover.

We know the unemployment we face today is deeper and more intractable than at any other time in our history. Long-term unemployment is larger percentage-wise than it has been in previous recessions. That is a tragedy for those families but also for our economy, because those consumers are lost to the retailers and to the mainstream small- and middle-sized businesses that depend on them to grow and hire more people.

In Connecticut, as of last month, almost half of all of the individuals who have suffered a job loss—43.6 percent—were unable to find work for 6 months or more. That is more than 60,000 people. Those numbers don't tell the stories. They are not the voices and faces I have seen who are depending on a meager \$300 a week and who have lost even that amount.

Rosa Dicker, who has a deep knowledge of health care reform from her previous work, has received only three call-back interviews out of 500 jobs she has sought, and her job search lasted almost a year. Michael Kubica, who went back to get his MBA after years of experience in insurance and publishing, and, again, has been repeatedly turned away for employment. Alicia Nesbitt, proud to have been employed continuously from the age of 16—decades ago—recently found herself applying for food stamps. Then, of course, there is Katherine Hackett of Moodus, CT, who joined the President recently to speak out about the need for extending these benefits. Katherine's family has sacrificed greatly for this Nation, because she has not one but two children serving in our military. Yet, because of Congress's inaction, Katherine is struggling to pay for food and heating bills during her job search.

There are good guys out there helping people to find jobs. Capital Workforce Partners has done tremendous work. I have met with them and other job creators, as well as job seekers around Connecticut, and sometimes those job searches actually succeed, because people are able to sustain their lives and continue to search for work.

Erin Londen, one of the constituents whom I met as I have gone around the State, has found work after 10 months of unemployment. She writes:

I could not be happier! I just love my new job, it is everything I was looking for.

She is not a person who wanted to be without work. She is not a person who sought to be unemployed for 10 months. None of these people—none of the people on long-term unemployment insurance—want to be without work. She wrote to me:

It can take up to three months to get an interview. Then if you have follow-up, it could be another month. So I do not think it is reasonable to only offer six months of unemployment benefits.

That pretty much says it.

I want to emphasize one aspect of this problem that I think is absolutely unconscionable for this Nation to tolerate, and that is the high unemployment rate among our veterans.

This situation for post-9/11 veterans is beyond comprehension and beyond accepting. The male post-9/11 veterans in particular face rates of 8.6 percent, almost 2 points above the national average. Many of these veterans have been out of work for more than 6 months.

Long-term unemployment among our veterans is a scourge that this Congress has an obligation to address. Many of them left good-paying jobs. They came back to a nation that said it was grateful, and now they find no jobs and no unemployment insurance to keep a roof over their head and food on their table.

That is why I have introduced the VOW to Hire Heroes Act that would extend a key tax credit to incentivize companies to hire veterans. This credit expired last year, but veteran unemployment remains a serious problem, and I urge the Congress again to pass it. I have been joined by Senator BEGICH and Senator UDALL of New Mexico in writing to the Finance Committee to urge it to approve this measure so we can bring it to the floor.

I want to thank AMVETS as well for its support on a measure that is, unfortunately, increasingly important; that is, to ban discrimination against veterans in both employment and housing. Believe it or not, this phenomenon occurs. Most would find it incredible. Yet a measure is necessary to ban discrimination against men and women who served in uniform, who served and sacrificed, who have given to this Nation.

Discrimination, unfortunately, is also a fact of life against the long-term unemployed. I have proposed again and reintroduced the Fair Employment Opportunity Act, which would prohibit discrimination on the basis of employment status.

Discrimination has been established by various studies—researchers at Northeastern University. Similar studies involving academics at Yale, the University of Chicago, and the University of Toronto have found that the long-term unemployed—the longer they have been unemployed—are much more likely to be victims of discrimination. I want to thank seven cosponsors on this bill: Senators MARKEY, GILLIBRAND, SANDERS, SHAHEEN, MURPHY, MENENDEZ, and BROWN. I urge other colleagues to support it as well. I

Finally, I want to thank again Senator BOOKER. He honors not only his own long history of public service but also the memory of our late colleague, our extraordinary and esteemed colleague, and my wonderful mentor and friend, Frank Lautenberg. He joins the ranks of others in the Senate who are fighting for the needs of the economically disadvantaged—people, as he said so eloquently, who play by the rules. They believe in this country, its ideals, its goals, and they want to serve it and give back and contribute.

This Nation depends on a covenant. It is the covenant that each of our generations leaves the country better for the one that follows—not only that the country is better for the next generation, but that each of our generations, on our watch, pledges to do better.

That is the reason we need to extend unemployment insurance. Without it, we will be a lesser nation, not just economically but in fairness and morality as well. I thank Senator BOOKER for reminding us of that fundamental fact about our Nation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I would like to briefly say thank you to my fellow Senators who took time to come and listen to my maiden speech but especially those who also spoke on the issue as well. They spoke with eloquence. They spoke poignantly about people in their State. And I pray they spoke persuasively.

I thank Senator HIRONO, Senator MENENDEZ, my senior Senator, especially. I thank Senator WARREN and Senator BLUMENTHAL, who are still here. I thank, also, Senator JACK REED and Senate Majority Leader REID, as well, for their working on this issue.

I finally want to say that I have already gotten word from people who actually saw some of the speeches from myself and my colleagues that even the words alone made a difference to them. At least they felt someone heard them, is understanding what they are going through. But that urgency persists, and my hope is that we, working together, can find a way to extend these benefits.

Thank you very much.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

FEDERAL COAL PROGRAM INVESTIGATION

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, the coal under our Federal public lands is a tremendously valuable asset that belongs to the American people. For nearly my entire career in Congress, I have been working to ensure that we do not shortchange taxpayers by giving this asset away to the coal companies for bargain-basement prices. As we are facing Federal deficits and budget cuts for programs that benefit hard-working, middle-class families, we need to ensure more than ever that we are not giving a windfall to coal companies on the backs of taxpayers in Massachusetts and across the Nation by selling this public coal for less than it is worth.

In 1982, following coal lease sales by the Department of the Interior on public lands in the Powder River Basin, PRB, in Wyoming and Montana, I asked the Government Accountability Office, GAO, to investigate whether taxpayers had received a proper return in these lease sales. The GAO found that this Federal coal was sold for pennies on the dollar. The GAO report concluded that the Interior Department had sold this public coal in the Powder River Basin for \$100 million less than it was worth. Following that revelation, there were a number of recommendations made to reform the Federal coal leasing program and ensure that taxpayers were protected. Unfortunately, I have concerns that similar problems with the Federal coal program may persist today at the expense of taxpayers in Massachusetts and around the country.

This week, I am releasing a new public GAO report on the Federal coal leasing program. This is the first time in 20 years that the GAO has evaluated this program and it is well overdue.

The findings in the latest GAO report highlight the fact that there still is a lack of competition for Federal coal leases. This dearth of competition amongst coal companies means that it is the Interior Department, and not the market, that is ensuring a fair price is set for these valuable resources. To give you an idea of the magnitude of this issue, for every cent per ton that coal companies decrease their bids for the largest coal leases, it could mean the loss of nearly \$7 million for the American people. We have to act to correct the issues identified in the report and make sure national resources are not being given away at below market prices.

The GAO has found that the Interior Department is not properly considering the potential of future exports of this coal from Federal leases. These coal leases are issued for 20 years and can be further extended. Coal exports for electricity generation in other countries have doubled in just a few years. Companies want to sell U.S. coal overseas to China and European markets to increase their profits. If we are not properly valuing the possibility that coal

exports to higher priced markets will continue to increase, we risk not only costing taxpayers money but also exacerbating climate change by, in effect, subsidizing coal companies to send more coal abroad to be burned in dirty power plants.

Moreover, the GAO has concluded in its public report that the Interior Department lacks transparency and is not providing sufficient information to the public on the Federal coal leasing program. I am extremely concerned that a lack of transparency and public information for the American people and for the Congress is inhibiting proper oversight of this important program to protect taxpayers.

When I was serving as ranking member of the House Natural Resources Committee, I began an oversight inquiry into the Federal coal leasing program in July 2012. While the Department has provided me, and my staff has reviewed, hundreds of pages of leasing documents, certain critical information necessary to properly evaluate this program has been withheld. As a result, the Interior Department is not providing information on the Federal coal program to the Congress in a way that allows for proper oversight. While the intent of this restriction may be to protect the integrity of future lease sales, the effect is to hamper congressional oversight.

As part of its investigation, the GAO released two reports to me, one that is public and one that is not able to be made public. GAO kept one of these reports nonpublic because the Interior Department believes that the proprietary information contained in the nonpublic report could harm the integrity of future lease sales. I believe that increased transparency with these coal lease sales would increase the integrity of the process, not lessen it. It would be very helpful for the American people to be able to review this information. But even if that is not possible because of concerns about proprietary information, Senators should be able to review this information and debate it in order to ensure that taxpayers are protected. Unfortunately, we are not able to have that debate on the floor of the Senate for the American people. That is wrong and very troubling.

It is concerning to me that an agency would seek to withhold this sort of information from Congress. Without this information, we cannot make a legislative decision about whether the statutes governing coal leasing on Federal lands are working as intended and whether the Department is administering them properly.

Based on my staff's examination of the materials provided to me by the Department and included in the nonpublic report issued to me by the GAO, it appears that the Interior Department may be consistently undervaluing Federal coal leases. The GAO report found that the Interior Department is using information that is outdated in valuing coal leases. Based on