

awards, and decorations, including the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the NATO International Security Assistance Force Medal.

Born on August 30, 1984, Adam was a native of Florence, where he grew up with a reputation as a performer who made his friends and family laugh with his quick wit. He and his older sister Sara would quote movie lines back and forth to each other in a blink of an eye, and Adam especially liked to entertain his younger sister Angela. "Adam was sarcastic with a dry sense of humor, and could get people to laugh all the time," says Adam's mother Diana. "I guess what I loved most about him was his love for his sister, who was born with Down Syndrome. He had unlimited patience with her, and I knew that when his dad and I were gone, he would take care of Angela."

Although Adam did not get a chance to have a family of his own, he loved kids. "He was like a second father to a lot of the other Marines' kids," says his sister Sara. Adam's mother certainly agrees. "He loved kids and thought that someday he would have a large family," she says. "He played Santa every year for his friend's family, and the kids loved him."

Adam attended Boone County High School, where he graduated in 2002. He then attended Thomas More College in Crestview Hills, KY. In school, he was active in the Alpha Delta Gamma fraternity, the Saints Club, the Education Club, and the Villa Players Theater Club. His mother Diana particularly remembers Adam's interest in theater. "He developed a love for the stage while in college at Thomas More," she says. "He started out behind the scenes, but his friends got him on stage for a play and he loved it. He appeared in many productions while at school."

Richard Shuey, a business administration professor at Thomas More, taught Adam in three classes. Adam "was one of those really nice, clean-cut northern Kentucky kids," Richard says. "Always polite and interested in doing well, and obviously a true patriot."

One of Adam's fraternity brothers, Caleb Finch, remembers him as "a big-hearted, free-spirited, fun-loving guy who would do anything for anybody."

After graduation from Thomas More, Adam enlisted in the Marine Corps in July of 2007. By December of that year he had been promoted to the rank of lance corporal. Adam's younger brother Sean enlisted in the Marines as well, and the two brothers served together in the same unit in Iraq in 2008. "Their personalities were night and day," says Robin Peak, Adam's sister-in-law. "But they always had each other's backs and were there together." In October 2009, Adam and Sean were deployed to Afghanistan, both as members of the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, Two Marine Expeditionary Force, based out

of Camp Lejeune, NC. Sean accompanied his brother back home for burial, and Adam was laid to rest with full military honors in Taylor Mill, KY.

Mr. President, we are thinking of Adam's loved ones today, including his parents Bruce and Diana, his brother Sean, his sisters Sara and Angela, his sister-in-law Robin, and many other beloved family members and friends.

The loss of LCpl Adam D. Peak is tragic. Indeed, it is only appropriate that this Senate pause to honor his service and recognize his sacrifice.

I hope his family can take some comfort from the fact that both the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the country as a whole are grateful for and honored by the heroism and courage Adam displayed in his entirely too short life. The example he set for his loved ones and his country will not be forgotten.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

AGRICULTURAL ACT OF 2014— CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. 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:

Conference report to accompany H.R. 2642, a bill 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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 12:30 p.m. will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

The assistant majority leader.

COMMENDING SENATOR BOOKER

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, before I address the farm bill, I would like to make two other points. The first is to commend the Presiding Officer. Yesterday he gave his first speech on the floor of the U.S. Senate. About 20 of us were here and listened carefully. I am glad I did. It was time well spent. It was a speech which the Presiding Officer clearly not only worked on but believes in, and it showed. He addressed the plight of working Americans, and particularly those who have lost their jobs, and the responsibility of this Congress and this Nation to stand by these families while they are in transition looking for new opportunities.

I sat here and listened and watched as the Presiding Officer spoke to this subject, addressing specific people he has met in his State who told him their stories. I thought to myself: I have met quite a few in Illinois in like circumstances. I wish every Member of the Senate would do what the Presiding Officer has done—visit the towns, the restaurants, the veterans centers, and other places where unem-

ployed people gather and listen to them.

The point the Presiding Officer made so convincingly was those who dismiss the unemployed as just lazy people have never met them. They are not lazy. They are workers who want to work again. What they are asking for is a helping hand, and the Presiding Officer made that point so eloquently yesterday.

What was particularly good for me, having served in the Senate for a number of years, was to hear a new Member of the Senate, in his first speech, really reach back to the values that inspired many of us to run for this position. It is easy to become jaded after you have been here for a while and been engaged in the petty political fights that take place here with some frequency. It is easy to forget why you asked your family to stand behind you when you ran, why you sacrificed to try to come to this place, and why each of us—some 1,200 or so who have had this distinct honor to serve in the Senate—should not miss the opportunity to bring our values and passion to the floor every single day.

So I thank the Senator from New Jersey, our Presiding Officer, for an extraordinary maiden speech, first speech on the floor of the U.S. Senate. It was one of the best.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Secondly, I would like to address the issue that was raised by my colleague from the State of Kentucky. The State of Kentucky is just south of Illinois. We have coalfields too. Almost 75 percent of our State has coal under the ground. We mine that coal—not like we used to, but we still mine it and use it, and we have coal miners and coal companies, and coal is an important part of the Illinois economy.

The Senator from Kentucky came to the floor today to really take exception to a decision by the Environmental Protection Agency as it affected coal country in Kentucky. I do not know anything about the particulars of his complaint involving the Cumberland Lake and the Endangered Species Act, so I will not address that, but I would like to address one, more general topic.

To argue that the Environmental Protection Agency is the enemy of coal country is to completely ignore what has been in the newspapers for the last several weeks. There are 300,000 people in the State of West Virginia who are afraid to drink the water because of a leak from a tank that had a chemical solution used for cleaning coal. These people worry that drinking this water, cooking with this water, even bathing in this water is a danger to them. And where did they turn for some indication of safety for their families? This part of America—West Virginia, coal country, just like Kentucky and Illinois—turned to the Environmental Protection Agency. Of course they did. Is it safe? Can my child drink this water safely? Can I use it for cooking?

So to argue that the Environmental Protection Agency is the enemy of coal country is to ignore the obvious. They can make wrong decisions. We all do. Agencies do. But time and again, when we are in trouble, when it comes to something as basic as the safety of our drinking water, we turn to the Environmental Protection Agency and the Centers for Disease Control and ask them to help us determine whether that water is safe.

Let me add parenthetically, Mr. President, your predecessor, Senator Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey, was a leader, and I was happy to be his partner in trying to get to the bottom of the danger of many of these chemicals. Most Americans mistakenly believe this government reviews the toxicity or danger of all the chemicals in use in this country. In fact, only a small percentage is ever reviewed by the government. We, in fact, trust those who make and sell these chemicals to do the right thing, and many times they betray that trust and sell something dangerous which we discover later after the damage has been done.

Again, the role of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Centers for Disease Control, the role of the Federal Government in monitoring these chemicals for the safety of businesses and families and individuals across America is essential whether you live in the cities of Newark or Chicago or coal country, USA. So if we are going to go to war against the Environmental Protection Agency, let's at least be honest about the critical role they play. I hope that is remembered as we reflect on some of the things said on the floor this morning.

Mr. President, this is the conference report for the Agricultural Act of 2014. Senator STABENOW was on the floor earlier. She has stepped off now. She has poured her heart and soul into this document and into this work. Two years ago we passed the farm bill on the floor of the Senate—2 years ago. She did it with Senator ROBERTS of Kansas. I voted for it, and I thought it was an exceptional effort on her part. It went to the U.S. House of Representatives—as is the custom under the Constitution—to wither and die 2 years ago.

Then a year ago they said let's try again. Let's pass the farm bill again in the U.S. Senate in the hopes that the U.S. House of Representatives will take it up—a year ago. So a year ago Senator STABENOW and Senator ROBERTS sent this measure to the House of Representatives for consideration, and again it languished. It may have been one of the longest running conference committees in the history of Congress, but thank goodness for the perseverance of Senator STABENOW and many others; they produced this document.

For those who do not live in farm country, this may seem like a foreign text, but for those of us who do live in farm country, just reading the table of contents will tell you the important

elements of this bill and why it is so critically important to Illinois and virtually every State in the Union.

I commend Senator STABENOW. As I said, she really poured her heart and soul into this document. There are provisions in here that many of us may never really appreciate that she fought for over a long period of time. I am going to acknowledge a few of those during the course of my formal remarks. But while she is here on the floor, let me give special credit to my colleague. She really took on this task and did it in an extraordinary way.

After years of expirations and short-term extensions, primarily due to the problems and inaction in the House of Representatives, this bill finally is going to provide farmers in Illinois and across the Nation with some guarantee of certainty on their future.

Compared to the presequeter budget levels—that is budget talk around here for past budgets—this bill is going to save \$23 billion over the next 10 years. This conference report before us works to do four things: invest in energy and research, help our rural communities grow—those of us who represent smalltown America know how important that is—ensure stability for our farmers who face the vicissitudes of weather and markets, and provides food assistance for those most in need both here and overseas.

These are amazing and important goals. I am glad Senator STABENOW and all the conferees applied themselves to make this happen. I am disappointed by one provision. I know Senator STABENOW will not be surprised. Despite modest reforms, we still provide extraordinary outside premium support for many farmers who buy crop insurance.

In fairness, this bill eliminates a price support program that was no longer defensible, a program that paid farmers in good times as well as bad. So it was not what it was designed to be, emergency help for farmers in need. She eliminated the direct payment program, by and large. That, to me, is a step forward.

Instead, this bill moves farmers toward crop insurance. Most of us, stepping back, say: That sounds like a responsible thing to do. A farmer buys an insurance policy, so if things go bad on the farm, a flood, a drought, some other problem, or the prices happen to be disastrous when the farmer goes to market, the insurance policy will make sure they can live to plant again. That is a good thing. But as I have said several times, any time you put the two words “Federal” and “insurance” in the same sentence, I advise my colleagues to step back and ask some questions. This is not insurance as you envision it. It is not a matter of automobile insurance, where the automobile owners pay enough in premiums to create a reserve to cover the exposure of accidents.

This is different. Under the Crop Insurance Program, similar to many Fed-

eral insurance programs, there is a massive Federal subsidy: 62 percent of the reserves that are necessary to make the program function are provided by the Federal Treasury, not by premiums paid by farmers. So it is a good program. It is a valued program. It is critically important. But let's keep our mind on the reality. It is heavily subsidized by the Federal Government.

Senator TOM COBURN of Oklahoma, a very conservative Republican, and I decided to offer an amendment which said: If you are a farmer whose income is over \$750,000 a year, we will reduce, slightly, the government's subsidy of your crop insurance. Over \$750,000 in income, we will reduce, slightly, the 62-percent Federal subsidy on your crop insurance. You will pay slightly more in premiums because you are able to. You are better off than most.

This passed not once but twice on the floor of the Senate. As it turned out, the conferees, primarily from the House, hated this provision like the devil hates Holy water. So they struck this provision from the bill. That is unfortunate. Not only did we pass it twice, the House had passed on the floor an instruction to conferees to include it. Members wanted to be on record saying they liked this idea. When the conferees got their hands on it, they lopped it right out of the bill.

Let me ask the Presiding Officer to hold on to that thought for a moment while I get into another section of the bill. The areas where the House conferees worked up an appetite was when it came to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the so-called Food Stamp Program.

Again, let me commend Senator STABENOW as chairman of the Agriculture Committee. She called me several times to tell me about the battles she had to wage to protect the food stamp program.

Let's talk about the program for a minute. Almost 15 percent of households across America have trouble keeping food on the table. SNAP, the food program, provides 47 million Americans with essential food assistance. Eighty-three percent of the households that receive food stamps include a child or a person with disability or a senior citizen. Nearly 1 million veterans use the Food Stamp Program each year in America.

In Illinois, over 2 million people, almost one in seven residents, rely on SNAP benefits to buy the food they need. Who are these people? Who in the world needs food stamps in a great State such as the State of Illinois? Let me tell you about two or three of them.

One of them was the elderly lady whom I met at the Irving Park Methodist Church food pantry. She was on a walker. She had a very short haircut, suggesting that perhaps she had been through some chemotherapy or radiation. She soldiered her way right up there to get a bag of groceries. She sat down and I talked to her.

I said to her: Can you tell me a little bit about how you are doing.

Sure Senator. I am doing OK. I get \$800 a month in Social Security.

I said: How in the world do you live in Chicago on \$800 a month?

Ain't easy, Senator. Got to pay the rent. Got to pay the utility bills and the basics. She said: I come to this food pantry and one other one. Each one of them gives me 3 days' worth of food. So I get about 1 month, 6 days' worth of food, out of the two food pantries. I thank them for that. I get food stamps worth about \$130 a month.

That is it, folks. That is what she lives on, an elderly person. When the House Republicans said what we need to do is cut \$40 billion—that was their original recommendation—\$40 billion out of food stamps, they apparently had never met this lady and what she was up against or they might have met a couple of workers whom I had a press conference with on Sunday in Chicago, working full time and qualifying for food stamps. One was a fellow who worked on the west side of Chicago at a used car lot. Does it all, he said—cleans the cars, shovels the lot, sells the cars, and gets paid \$8.25 an hour, which is our State minimum wage—four kids, his wife is sick and cannot work.

He gets food stamps. He needs them to put food on the table for the kids, for a full-time worker at a minimum wage job. Then on the other side was a lady who is a waitress. She told the story of being a single mom. Her son is now 19. She is heading him off to the City College of Chicago. That is a great deal. But she works a job which has a guaranteed minimum wage in Illinois of about \$4.50 an hour. That is what waitresses are guaranteed—tipped wage. Nationally, the tipped wage is \$2.13 an hour. She said: I do not work in a fancy restaurant. I am lucky to come home with \$10 or \$20 in tips in a day.

So do the math. She said: Some days they do not call me in to work. I get nothing. She relies on food stamps too, a woman who is ready to work and works hard, standing all day, waiting tables. So in come the House Republicans saying we need to come down hard on these people, these lazy people on food stamps. I wish they would meet some of those folks who use food stamps to get by, to survive. These people are our neighbors. They are hard-working people who lost their jobs or got sick. They are seniors living on a limited fixed income.

This bill does cut \$8 billion out of SNAP, the Food Stamp Program. I understand the cuts that were made. I think Senator STABENOW and others have done these carefully. I do not want any fraud in this program. She does not either. We think we have tightened it so it will not affect the payments to those who are truly eligible and those who need the help. Yet it will make sure the taxpayers are treated fairly as well.

But look at the contrast. Some of the conferees walked into this hearing and

said that farmers who make almost \$1 million a year should not have any reduction in their subsidy for crop insurance, but people such as the lady at the Irving Park Methodist Church food pantry, being paid \$800 a month, we ought to take a hard look at the \$130 a month we give this lady. That is upside down. That does not reflect the values of this country or the priorities we need to face.

I thank the Senator from Michigan. She worked long and hard, was a real champion when it came to SNAP, the Food Stamp Program. Incidentally, the good news is, as the economy improves and people get back to work, the number of people on food stamps is going down, which is what we want to see. But does it not say something about us as a nation, a caring, compassionate Nation, that we are going to be there to help those families living in our towns and our States, going to our churches, when they are struggling to put food on the table?

Why was that such an inviting target for some of the House conferees? I do not understand that. There is a lot of money that can be saved in government. We do not want to waste a penny of it. But let's focus primarily on those who can afford to pay and are getting a Federal subsidy as opposed to those who are just struggling to get by and are asking for a helping hand. This bill does so much. I could not even start to describe all of the different areas dealing with risk on the farm, key investments in energy and research, ag research, programs to help rural communities grow, and helping those in need.

Most importantly, this reauthorization gives Illinois farmers certainty about farm programs. They need it. That is something they have not had for the last 3 years. I am going to support this bill. I wish we had been able to preserve the provision that Senator COBURN and I included. But I believe, on balance, it is an important step forward in farm country across America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, as the Senate turns its attention this week to the farm bill conference report, my thoughts turn to the Wild West to put its provisions in context. Frankly, its 950 pages lend themselves to talking about the good, the bad, and the just plain ugly.

I mention the good, because while this farm bill falls far short of gaining my support, it is not entirely without provisions worth highlighting. Conferees, including a one-term extension of the Payments in Lieu of Taxes, or the PILT Program. That gives temporary predictability at least for counties with low tax bases due to Federal land ownership and provides Congress with time to chart a long-term solution in this regard.

In addition, the bill authorizes permanently the stewardship contracting authority. This is a critical land man-

agement tool that allows us to proactively reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires. It is one I have long called for. While reforms to the liability requirements are also included, the report fails to include necessary flexibility on cancellation ceilings. That is something I will continue to work on in the future.

Sadly, when it comes to the bad, there is not enough time to list all of the items in the report that should make any lawmaker cringe who is concerned about our crushing national debt or those of us trying to reform agriculture policy.

Rather than truthfully trimming the already generous agriculture safety net, taxpayers should prepare for yet another round of entirely new alphabet soup subsidy programs. The Senator from Illinois explained very well the Crop Insurance Program that is so heavily subsidized, 62 percent.

I think all of us with auto insurance or other types of insurance would love to have that kind of contribution from the Federal Government. This report does not even provide commonsense reforms that limit waste and largess to sustained hallmarks of agriculture subsidies. The report also fails to limit agricultural payments to those who are actually involved in farming.

It cannot even provide a reasonable income limit, as was discussed by the Senator from Illinois, for those who already receive crop insurance subsidies. Incomprehensibly, any renegotiation of the arrangement between crop insurers and the Federal Government would be required to be revenue neutral, despite billions of dollars in taxpayer savings having been found in previous renegotiations.

This bill is purported to be fiscally conservative because it saves \$16 billion or so in tax dollars. Before we pat each other on the back in this regard, we need to remember that Congress has a pretty dismal record of actually knowing how much farm bills are going to cost.

According to Taxpayers for Common Sense, "The last two farm bills are on pace to exceed their Congressional Budget Office score by more than \$400 billion, and there's no assurance that this farm bill will be any different."

Let's get to the ugly. For years, direct payments have been one of the clearest signs of what needs to be changed in Federal spending. The Federal Government has been handing out roughly \$5 billion a year to farmers regardless of whether they are farming the land. I want to pay tribute to the Senator from Michigan who has fought to end these direct payments.

The Senate did a pretty good job there, but the House did not. I myself have long sought to end these direct payments. I was encouraged with the Senate action to end these payments outright. But despite our fiscal situation, the best we could get in the House was allowing direct payments to continue, albeit slightly reduced for cotton, for 2014 and 2015.

This conference report purports to end direct payments but ends them in name only for cotton. Let's be clear. It simply renames direct payments for cotton for 2 years. They will now be called transition payments. Cotton growers will continue to receive payments until—wait for it—the other new subsidy programs created in this report come online.

Perhaps, instead of western movies, I should have conjured up images of Shakespeare to describe this fiscal tragedy: a government-funded handout by another name is still a government-funded handout. It is also worth recalling that when originally created in 1996, in the 1996 farm bill, direct payments went by the name AMTA payments or Agricultural Market Transition Assistance payments.

It would appear that for some commodities, there will always be a transition from something to something else that will result in a taxpayer-funded handout.

According to the CBO score, the report actually takes the zero cost from the Senate proposal and the \$443 million cost from the House proposal and compromises at a higher cost of \$556 million in 2015. That is some compromise, to go well above both the House and the Senate numbers.

While the 10-year score for the transition payments in the report is lower than the House proposal, the first-year costs are actually higher. It is at this point that one can simply stop being surprised at what will happen when it comes to farm subsidies. Sadly, rather than a blockbuster of fiscal sanity, taxpayers are going to be saddled with what looks to be another rerun of missed opportunities to reform Federal agricultural policy. Although livestock groups have decried the absence of fixes to ongoing regulatory problems, and fiscal conservatives are chafing at the continued waste in spending, this report is still likely to be adopted.

There are other issues addressed, and I am pleased that some of this will end up on the President's desk, but I cannot support this conference report. I will continue to push for real fiscal discipline and sound agricultural policy.

I should note I remember when I first came to Congress, or about 1 year after, I came to the floor of the House to rail against the farm bill at that time, the 2002 reauthorization. We had gone in the 1990s from the Freedom to Farm Act to the Farm Security Act. For those of us conservatives who talk about moving from freedom to security and all that means, that was actually in the title of the bill, and we haven't improved much since that time. That was more than a decade ago. I have to say we should have made progress that was simply not made in this bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHATZ). The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. I rise today to discuss legislation that benefits all Americans, and particularly my home State of Ohio.

I appreciate Senator FLAKE's comments. I admire his integrity and his focus on waste in government for the decade or so that I have known him—longer than that. I think he makes good points in this legislation. We come down on different sides in the end. Some of the things he had talked about, eliminating a lot of direct payments, were especially important and were made possible by legislation Senator THUNE and I introduced.

This is an ongoing process to improve this bill every year. Every 5 years I am hopeful we can do that. I thank Senator FLAKE for his comments.

This bill is bipartisan. It reduces the deficit, it helps farms, helps families, helps our economy, and it helps our environment. It saves 23 billion taxpayer dollars. It provides certainty and support to one of the Nation's largest job creators, agriculture. Food and agriculture together are about one in seven jobs in Ohio. Agriculture-related businesses such as food processing, fertilizer and feed sales also are part of Ohio's largest industry.

I thank Senator COCHRAN and Senator STABENOW for getting us to this point. They have been dogged in their support for our Nation's farmers and our rural communities.

I have spoken with Ohio's corn and soybean growers, as well as members of the Ohio Farm Bureau. On Friday I spoke and met with a group of 300 farmers, members of the Ohio Farmers Union, in Columbus. They have told me the importance of passing a 5-year farm bill. They especially emphasized the certainty, finally, of this bill. They can make the planning and planting decisions that business people and farmers need.

I have traveled across Ohio's 88 counties and listened to farmers from Minster to Millersburg, who have told me they want a leaner, more efficient, and market-oriented farm safety net. Taxpayers deserve that too.

This bill is a reform farm bill. It eliminates direct farm payments, links crop insurance to conservation compliance, and it reforms our risk management programs—all important things in agriculture policy.

Ohio farmers were clear they wanted a farm bill that eliminated those direct payments and provided the risk management tools they needed when times are bad, but without the market-distorting policies that ensure farmers are planting for the program and not the market. Unfortunately, that was happening far too often.

In the last 6 or 7 years during my time in the Senate, leading up to the 2007–2008 farm bill and the 2013–2014 farm bill, I held some 25 roundtables with farmers and rural development people around my State. Working with my colleagues Senator THUNE and Senator DURBIN, we were able to streamline the farm safety net and make it more market oriented. Our bill, the Aggregate Risk and Revenue Management Act, is the basis for the Agricultural

Risk Coverage Program, which was included in the commodity title. By reforming commodity programs to better align with the market instead of simply sending out checks—even when times were good and in many cases to people who don't need them—this bill will provide farmers with increased risk management tools while improving the integrity of these programs.

The bill incorporates many portions of the Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act that I introduced. We know too many farmers struggle to find local markets for their products. Too many Ohioans are also unable to access fresh and affordable food. This legislation helps to put them together. Whether by improving Farmers Market Promotion program, or the Value Added Producers grant, this bill makes a significant investment in local and regional food production and marketing.

We know what has happened in rural America in terms of development. While agricultural prices have been such that farmers have been prosperous enough and that many in rural America are doing OK, rural development is still an issue as people move out of these communities looking for jobs.

Whether it is bringing broadband to southeast Ohio or a water and sewer project in Henry County or a low-interest loan to Buckeye Power, this bill will make sure rural communities have the tools, the programs, and capital that they need to succeed.

My State is home to approximately 130 companies that use agricultural crops to make new biobased products, ranging from natural pet foods to paint, soy ink, toner, and plastics. Last week, USDA Secretary Vilsack and I toured a Columbus plastics factory, where they are working to make more of their products with biobased feedstocks instead of oil. We know what that means for renewable energy in our State. Our homegrown products can replace imported oil in our everyday products. This is a win for our local economies and for Ohio farmers.

We also know the importance of helping young farmers. If someone goes to any farm organization meeting, farmers are typically in their fifties, sixties, and seventies. We don't see enough in their twenties, thirties, and forties. In this legislation, we will help to recruit, train, and retrain the next generation of farmers. That is part of this conference report. USDA needs to redouble its efforts, particularly in making capital available, and ensure that young and beginning farmers are able to succeed.

The bill streamlines and, in my opinion, improves USDA's conservation programs. That is so important in the western Lake Erie basin of the Great Lakes. We have seen what has happened with algae blooms east of Toledo along places like Port Clinton and Sandusky. It is reaching almost as far east as Lorain. We are seeing the problems it causes to water quality, recreation, tourism, and to development along the lake that is so important.

The House wanted, on the SNAP issue, to slash food stamps by \$40 billion. We fought back. Our conference committee rejected every proposal passed by the House to cut off the assistance to workers and their families who have fallen on very hard times. When we couple what some in this body want to do with cutting unemployment, failing to extend unemployment insurance, failing to raise the minimum wage, making huge cuts in Food Stamp Programs, this was a huge victory in our conference committee.

This bill needs to pass. I urge my colleagues in the Senate to pass it and send it to President Obama so he can sign this bill at the end of this week or the beginning of next week.

Before I leave the floor, I do want to speak in great detail about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, and the nutrition title of the bill. SNAP benefits are very modest and are essential part of our nation's social safety net. The average SNAP household gets just over \$9 a day in benefits or \$1.46 per person per meal. Yet, for people that are food insecure, SNAP is the difference between putting food on the table or going hungry.

When there is an economic downturn, SNAP responds to support those who need assistance: the elderly, children, and working families. When we last strengthened the program in the 2008 farm bill, we ensured that a strong SNAP was there for families and communities. We saw the caseload rise from 28 million people in 2008 to over 47 million people today.

Too often, we forget that those who rely on SNAP are real people, and not just some statistic. I want to tell you about a couple of those people. Doris, from Reynoldsburg, is a 60-year-old who was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer in 2009. The doctors only gave her 6 months to live, but nearly 5 years later, she continues to fight. Because of her illness, she had to quit her work and she lost her health insurance. Doris has worked all her life and saves the little money she has to pay her bills and rent on time. Since she is on disability, she is eligible to receive \$16 a month in SNAP benefits. After the cuts to the program that went into effect on November 1, her benefit is now \$10 per month. She's too young to collect Social Security, so each week she and a friend drive to Columbus to the Mid-Ohio food bank for fresh produce.

Roxanne lives in northeast Ohio and is a home-health aide. She's a single mother and has four growing children under the age of 17. Roxanne works more than 60 hours per week, but relies on SNAP to help her make ends meet and ensure her children have enough to eat. For the past 3 years she has received about \$400 per month; after the November cut to SNAP, her family now receives \$335 per month. Unfortunately, this usually only lasts through the third week of the month. As she has tried to stretch her income, she has been forced to choose between serving

her family healthy fruits and vegetables or ordering off the dollar menu at a fast food restaurant. Roxanne never thought she would be in a situation where she would have to rely on a food pantry to help her feed her family.

I am proud that we were able to maintain a robust and responsive nutrition assistance program. The conference has rejected every proposal passed by the House to cutoff assistance to workers and their families who have fallen on very hard times. Rather than arbitrarily impose new and harsher time limits on how long unemployed workers may receive SNAP benefits, the bill strengthens SNAP employment and training program capacity. It provides modest but meaningful improvements in program administration and clarifies and codifies technical but important aspects of eligibility policy. The bill supports new anti-fraud initiatives, requires strong but efficient data matching in program administration, and supports keeping program retail operations up-to-date with the evolving food retailing environment.

There has been criticism about this bill's SNAP savings—which are far more modest than the House's proposal to cut \$40 billion from SNAP. I appreciate these concerns. This bill achieves savings by correcting a quirk in the SNAP benefit calculation that allows some State agencies to give households higher benefits by allowing them to deduct more income from their shelter costs.

SNAP benefits are based on the size of the household and how much money it has available to buy food. This amount is determined by subtracting out essential costs that households must pay and cannot use to buy groceries. For example, households with high shelter costs relative to their income have less money for buying food. Shelter costs include rent or mortgage payments and the cost of utilities such as heating and cooling. Rather than trying to document each household's utility costs over the course of a year, the rules allow States to set a standard utility allowance, "standard allowance," for households with these expenses. This standardization enormously reduces the time and paperwork required to calculate income. Almost every State uses the standard allowance, and most require it to be used to budget utility costs and do not allow any option to claim actual expenses.

Program rules have long recognized that the receipt of Low Income Household Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP, aid is a simple method of determining if households incur utility costs. A few States have authorized households to receive negligible LIHEAP assistance—generally only \$1—merely to get them higher benefits. This was not the intention of connecting the standard allowance to LIHEAP. This bill closes this loophole by requiring that a family's LIHEAP payment must be at least \$20 in order to qualify for the standard allowance

solely on the LIHEAP connection. LIHEAP funds are very limited and at this dollar level States would no longer be able to fund the broad-based benefits for SNAP households that some now offer.

This change does not affect anyone in my State of Ohio, but I recognize that this will not be an easy adjustment for households that are affected. I expect that the Department will ensure that State agencies do not summarily deny the standard allowance to households that received a nominal LIHEAP payment. State agencies and the USDA must work with families so they can determine whether they have any heating or cooling costs that would qualify for the standard allowance regardless of LIHEAP. These costs are most likely a bill from a utility company, but could be a charge from a landlord.

As I have said, this farm bill ends the policy whereby some States give \$1 of payment to most if not all SNAP households. I am concerned that many if not most of these households really do have heating and cooling costs and need the standard allowance to get an adequate and correct benefit. So I expect that USDA will work with State agencies to ensure that households have a meaningful opportunity to claim these costs so that they get the right amount of benefits.

Finally, I'm concerned about the very quick implementation requirement for this provision. If a State is not able to implement within 30 days, I don't think SNAP households should be held responsible. I hope that my friend Secretary Vilsack will find a way to ensure that households who may continue to receive higher benefits because the State agency was not able to implement this policy change within 30 days will not be held accountable for mistakes arising from such an aggressive implementation schedule.

There are a number of other provisions that do not result in benefit cuts to households, but change eligibility rules or codify common practices. I would like to turn to them now.

The title codifies longstanding SNAP student eligibility policy. While SNAP remains unavailable to most college students, low-income people on SNAP who are trying to gain skills and credentials needed for immediate employment can access SNAP.

Historically, most college students have not been eligible for SNAP and this bill does nothing to expand their eligibility. But at a time when workers need to continually acquire new and better job skills, States have concluded that many participants can be best served by enhancing their vocational skills through training offered by State career and technical education networks. These networks offer training and education that aims at enabling students to keep or qualify for new jobs. Many times the programs are offered by community colleges which are considered part of the higher education system. I want to be sure that SNAP

State education and training programs can connect SNAP recipients to this type of vocational education because in the long run it has the greatest potential to help people achieve lasting self-sufficiency. Giving people a stark choice between putting food on the table today or getting a job credential that will help them get a job tomorrow is counterproductive. By helping people stay in a vocational program, we can support them so they can better support themselves.

The bill clearly stipulates that the farm bill can support this type of education, and that students in these courses can continue to get food assistance. This reinforcement of current policy is an opportunity for the Department to work more closely with State agencies to establish better connectivity with their State career and technical networks to strengthen energy and training programs. We want worker training programs that will help people learn the skills necessary to get the good paying job they want so they will no longer need SNAP benefits. In the long run, this is a much better investment than supporting programs that result in procedural sanctions that churn households on and off the program in the short run but do little to improve self-sufficiency in the long run. Another provision tightens eligibility policy to make sure that people who enjoy substantial lottery or gambling winnings are ineligible for SNAP and will not become eligible until such time as they meet the normal income and resource standards for SNAP. This provision responds to a few isolated instances in which a SNAP recipient reaped a State lottery windfall. While such cases are extremely rare, we want to be certain that they are taken into account.

I expect that the Department will construct rules that will target these extraordinary cases without burdening State agency workers and recipients with unproductive reports. The first issue is how to define "substantial." I believe the intent of Congress was to identify really extraordinary windfalls that change lifestyles, and not winnings that reflect good fortune but will be rapidly dissipated by paying major bills or addressing overdue car or home repair issues.

Crucial to implementing this is how the State SNAP agency learns about these winnings. This bill requires State SNAP agencies to work with any in-State gaming authorities to establish a mechanism to report substantial winnings. We envision a process that will rely entirely on agency-to-agency reports. Our intent is twofold. First, the only truly reliable source of this information will be the State gaming or lottery commission. It will offer much more dependable and authoritative information about winnings than recipient reports. Second, we want to avoid cluttering notices on responsibilities for reporting and action on changes with items about extraor-

dinarily rare events such as a lottery windfall. This would run the risk of distracting participants from reporting much more frequent and important events such as changes in income and household membership. We want to maintain reporting requirements that are sharp, clear, focused, and short. We do not intend for this provision to trigger any additional household reporting or require additional questions on application and certification forms.

Another issue is regaining eligibility for those who had enough winnings to be disqualified from SNAP. The bill provides for applying the regular financial eligibility standards to these households if they apply for SNAP again. We intend this to mean the normal gross and net income eligibility guidelines and the dollar-limited resource eligibility thresholds specified in the Food and Nutrition Act, and expect that normal verification rules will be applied.

The bill reinforces policy on the eligibility of felons. Felons fleeing from law enforcement or violating their parole or probation are ineligible for SNAP. This bill highlights the ineligibility of those felons convicted of crimes such as murder and armed robbery who violate their parole or probation. Ex-offenders who have completed their sentences and comply with any parole conditions placed on their release, and who are otherwise eligible for food assistance through SNAP, remain eligible for assistance. But persons on the run from justice after committing one of these crimes should not be eligible based solely on technicalities about how the crimes are designated under some jurisdiction's criminal code.

This provision should not affect current application procedures which ask applicants about fleeing felon and probation violation issues. Rather, we believe that eligibility workers must receive clear guidance on especially serious crimes that should be treated as felonies.

The bill addresses program integrity concerns about multiple requests for electronic benefit transfer, EBT, card replacements. EBT cards are routinely replaced for a wide variety of valid reasons. State agencies need to be able to quickly replace them so families can continue to buy food. A small number of households frequently request replacement cards; we are concerned that a small subset of these households may be misusing their cards and benefits. The bill aims to require States to seek explanations from households with an excessive number of card replacement requests while preserving strong procedural protections for households. We envision it to work as follows: USDA is required to set a standard for excessive requests for card replacements. I think that the floor should not be fewer than 4 replacements over the course of a year. States must seek explanations from households that exceed this threshold as to why another card is

needed prior to re-issuing a card. The process must allow households the opportunity to immediately provide the explanation because of the critical importance of maintaining access to food assistance. Any delay in working with the household freezes their food purchasing. I expect the Department to monitor this process and examine how long households are going without cards. Even if a State's computer lists the household as eligible, if it cannot access its benefits, it might as well not be. Any policy that denies a household effective food assistance should be treated as the equivalent of an eligibility cut-off.

Replacement cards can be needed for a wide range of legitimate reasons. Cards can be stolen, damaged, or simply lost. Some people may not understand that the cards are reusable, or may confuse a PIN problem with a card problem. Because some people are particularly vulnerable to these problems, this bill requires that rules will establish protections for persons with disabilities, homeless persons, and crime victims. Some people with disabilities may require accommodations or authorized representatives.

The bill does not allow for using this process to suspend or terminate SNAP participation. Program rules spell out procedural standards for acting on evidence of intentional program violations. These standards enable State agencies to pursue recipient fraud in a manner that protects the due process rights of the accused. If a State believes that its evidence about multiple card replacements indicates an intentional program violation, it must replace the card and use its established disqualification procedures such as administrative disqualification hearings or court actions. It cannot force a household member to submit to an interview in order to get access to its benefits.

I want to highlight two areas where the bill provides more resources to improve program integrity. First, we are giving the Department more resources to enhance its retail store monitoring through more data mining and analysis. We recognize that the Department has been actively using its data base of retailer transactions and want to enable more activity in this area.

Second, we're authorizing funding for Federal-State partnerships to implement pilot projects to combat trafficking. I expect that the Department will seek and select State agencies that demonstrate sound and fair procedures for determining fraud.

The bill has several provisions that I worked on that will better link SNAP retailer policy to evolutions in retail technology and marketing. The Secretary is authorized to test the use of mobile technologies in SNAP. This could really help SNAP customers shop at retailers such as farmers markets and vegetable stands that are unable to install traditional debit card machines but may be able to connect to smart

phone applications. This provision was included in my Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act. But as we expand ways to accept benefits, we must maintain program integrity. That is why we are starting with a pilot project to test mobile technology in SNAP, including protections for recipients such as bans on any food price markups. We expect USDA to carefully examine program integrity issues as part of a required feasibility report, and would not expect any expansion of mobile technology unless the report shows a satisfactory level of integrity. The Department needs rock solid means of ensuring that mobile devices approved for a seemingly legitimate retailer do not end up in disqualified or other dishonest retailers' facilities.

This bill also allows pilot projects to test the feasibility of allowing the online purchase of food with SNAP benefits. More retailers are offering food delivery based on an online transaction. Food delivery can make the program more accessible to individuals who may have trouble getting out to shop. Again, any new way of redeeming benefits must meet high program integrity standards. The bill specifies that the Department must stop any growth of online transactions if we can't achieve the strong level of integrity that we expect. While the provision makes clear that delivery fees associated with online purchases may not be paid with SNAP benefits, I also expect USDA to set standards for the fees to ensure no adverse effect on food security. If consumers are paying an inordinate amount for delivery or other fees this could undermine food security. Most SNAP recipients are expected to spend a considerable amount of their own money to buy a nutritionally adequate diet, and if they are paying large delivery fees they may not be able to do that.

I would like to point out that in the mainstream retail environment these new mobile and online technologies do not rely on photo identification or other biometric information to authorize payments and maintain integrity, nor do standard credit or debit card transactions. A longstanding principle of SNAP benefit use has been that the SNAP retail transaction should look like any other debit card transaction to customers and retailers. I am concerned that USDA has approved State requirements for photos on SNAP cards to be presented at the point of purchase. This is not a condition for a regular credit or debit transactions—in many if not most cases, cardholders swipe their own cards without handing them over to a cashier. The SNAP retail environment should be consistent with general practice. The Department's regulations provide that, and they ought to be enforced.

While benefits have been issued and used successfully through EBT cards for years, there have been a few instances when cards failed to operate. In the event of a natural disaster or a

major crash of the EBT system, participants may be in even greater need of assistance and must be able to use their benefits to purchase food. This requires the capacity to quickly and efficiently issue manual vouchers to affected individuals. We expect USDA to allow a switch to manual vouchers when EBT card use is undermined by major systems failures or natural disasters. States must be able to understand the criteria for issuing vouchers so that they can act quickly when a problem threatens access to food assistance, such as the cancellation of cards affected by a data breach.

The bill requires State agencies to use the Department of Homeland Security system to validate immigration status. This system—the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements—is already used by most State agencies. This bill does not change immigrant eligibility, or require anything new or different from applicants in the certification process.

The bill also requires States to have a system for verifying income and eligibility. SNAP has longstanding, rigorous, and specific verification standards. We intend that States have a system for verification and believe that all now do. We are not mandating the imposition of any specific matching requirements such as the match requirements under section 1137 of the Social Security Act. These matches were required 20 years ago and were not productive. We made them optional in the 1996 welfare reform legislation and intend that they remain optional. We expect States will employ verification systems that employ timely and useful matches with reliable sources of data.

One of the most important measures in the bill is authority and funding for pilot projects to enhance the Employment and Training Program. This bill provides support for up to ten projects and a rigorous independent evaluation of the impact of the projects on SNAP receipt, employment, and earnings.

I know that all of my colleagues share the goal of seeing more Americans earning enough so they do not need SNAP. I believe that this is best achieved through strong work programs, and not arbitrarily cutting off food benefits to people who can't find jobs. People are not choosing unemployment and SNAP over gainful employment. There simply aren't enough jobs. The ratio of the number of unemployed persons to relative to the number of job openings has been improving steadily but remains at historically high levels—about 3 unemployed people for every job opening. As a comparison, when the recent recession started this ratio was 1.8 unemployed people per job. So I think we need to do more to help SNAP participants successfully compete for the increasing number of jobs that we hope will be there as the economy continues to recover.

Employment and Training, E&T, has been a component of SNAP since 1987, but very little is known about its effi-

cacy. E&T has afforded States substantial flexibility to design work programs and leverage Federal matching funds. The result has been a wide variation in the types and scope of services offered. While the most prevalent components are job search and job search training, followed by workfare, more States are offering career and technical education in recognition that many SNAP participants need significant skill building and education. In terms of funding, some States invest substantial amount of State funds to realize the Federal match, while many States rely exclusively on the 100 percent Federal grant to fund program components. So we have a program with huge variations but we don't know what works. And because we are not confident that we are getting results, fiscal support for the program has been tepid; the basic Federal grant was \$75 million in 1987 and is only \$79 million today.

What we do know is that SNAP reaches a very large number of employable low-income people. E&T presents a real opportunity to reach these Americans with better services. And this is a population we need to reach more effectively. A recent report by the Miller Center at the University of Virginia shows that low-income workers were much less likely to get skills training than better off workers. In other words, the people who most need training the most are the least likely to get it. So we need to do a better job of reaching low-income workers with training opportunities, and make sure that the services offered can help people get ahead.

What we want to do here is test different approaches to work and training programs and find which produce the best results. For far too long, we've reauthorized this program because we all want SNAP participants to be better off, but we haven't invested in learning if we are succeeding or how we can do better.

We envision a comprehensive approach to choosing the pilot projects that will incorporate a range of services and serve a range of SNAP recipients with different needs. This does not mean that every pilot must serve a wide range of participants with a wide range of services, but rather that USDA will approve a group of pilot proposals that as a whole will provide different services and reach different types of participants. The bill specifies that the pilots as a whole must reach able-bodied adults without dependents, people with low skills or very limited work experience, and people who are already employed.

Current law requires State E&T programs to be coordinated with their statewide workforce development systems. We expect that these pilots will at least be coordinated, and hopefully leverage existing infrastructure such as one-stop career centers and career and technical education networks. The bill provides for contributing funds from Federal, State, or private sources.

I want to briefly touch on employed persons who get SNAP. These are people who have shown that they can get a job but are not earning enough to make ends meet without help from SNAP. So we are interested in approaches that can help the working poor improve their circumstances. While hopefully many people will earn enough to no longer need or qualify for SNAP, others may increase their earned income but remain eligible for a smaller SNAP benefit. But they will be better off, and program costs will be reduced.

In many cases, stronger work supports could enable people to get a job or work more hours at their current job. For example, if some parents had better childcare, they may be able to take jobs that offer longer hours or better wages. Similarly, transportation support such as bus or transit passes may enable people to take a first job or get a better job. In many cases, people may be able to qualify for jobs without further training, but can't take the jobs because of issues like child care. So I see work supports—particularly child care—as a very promising E&T component that some pilot projects could support. I also believe increasing the minimum wage will help low-wage workers, but I will speak more on that issue at a later date.

Pilots may also test private sector employment as a component. This may be subsidized or unsubsidized employment. We expect USDA to ensure that any employment components adhere to the full range of worker protection standards in the Food and Nutrition Act and in other laws on issues such as workplace safety and health, wages and hours, workman's compensation, and family leave. In addition, the Department should examine whether any additional protections are needed.

If employment components are presented as an E&T requirement, new issues arise around sanctions because the State agency may not know the circumstances when an assignment does not work out. But the basic principle holds: no one should be sanctioned unless he or she willfully refused an assignment without good cause. People may not be able to keep up with jobs because of changes in schedules, transportation, child care, or sometimes because they lack the skills that an employer wants. None of these situations should lead to a sanction. Current program rules have addressed situations such as transportation and child care problems. In an employment component, a new issue arises if people are dismissed for a lack of competence. There is a real difference between refusing to work and not being able to work competently. If people are not working out in a job, maybe they need more training. Maybe they would be better in a different job. They do not deserve a sanction. We expect that State agencies—not employers—will make these decisions based on policies set out by the Department

that address very specific criteria for when a sanction may be invoked in an employment component.

To get the best results from pilot projects, I think that individual assessment of participants is going to be important to get people in the right component. Pilots need to assess people's work history, education, skills, and child care and transportation situation to understand which component can help them the most. I expect the Department to examine assessment procedures as part of its monitoring. We see a strong independent evaluation as critical to the success of these pilots. The Department may use project funds for this purpose, as well as for Federal costs of managing the projects and any evaluation contracts. We expect that the evaluation will look at the impacts of different interventions such as job search, workfare, vocational training, and remedial education on different types of SNAP recipients in different local labor markets. Most importantly, we expect that the study will identify impacts on SNAP receipt and impacts on employment and earnings, including whether reductions in SNAP are attributable to higher earnings. The bill also allows the Department to authorize State-initiated reviews of their projects which can supplement the Federal evaluation.

I am pleased that these pilots strengthen the work component of SNAP without creating incentives to end assistance for people who can't find work or curtailing the ability of States with struggling labor markets economies to secure waivers of current time limits. Pilot participation by participants may be mandatory or voluntary. It is my understanding that if participation is mandatory, an individual who fails to comply with any work requirements may lose his or her SNAP benefits under the same rules that would have applied if she or he committed the same acts while assigned to the E&T program instead of the pilot. As the bill authorizes unsubsidized work as an allowable pilot activity for the first time, we expect the Secretary to issue guidance describing what I think are very limited circumstances under which a working person who loses a job could be sanctioned. Only if a person willfully refuses to continue a job without good cause should sanction policy come into play.

I turn now to some other modest improvements in program implementation.

The bill requires State agencies to use the Department of Health and Human Services' National Directory of New Hires to check on whether SNAP applicants have jobs. Currently States may use this data base to check on the employment of SNAP recipients. The bill requires States to check the National Directory data when a household applies for SNAP to enhance eligibility determinations. There is no expectation of matching during the period of certification. We expect the Secretary

to issue rules to set standards to ensure that State matching practices are efficient and effective. As an example, it would seem prudent to focus matches on employable household members and not spend time and money on matches with children, elderly, and disabled members. The Secretary should work with the Department of Health and Human Services to fashion rules that balance the potential gains in payment accuracy with State administrative costs.

More Federal programs are implementing standards for exchanging information in an automated environment. This bill requires SNAP to develop these standards. More electronic data exchanges can help both participants and administrators. However, the strong privacy and confidentiality requirements of the Food and Nutrition Act must be preserved.

The bill tightens policy on using funds for program informational activities while preserving the authority to get information out so that people can make informed choices about the program. Let us review a little history. In the 1996 welfare reform law, we prohibited using Federal funds for recruitment. The idea was that support for information about the availability of help for grocery bills was okay, but we did not want to cross a line to persuade people to enroll if they already had learned about the program and decided to forego benefits.

Over the last decade, we have made enormous strides to extend food assistance to eligible families. USDA, States, and a wide range of community organizations have worked hard to inform low-income people about the availability of SNAP. And as we have changed the name of the program from the Food Stamp Program to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and States have branded their own programs differently, the need to get out clear information has never been greater. I want to commend USDA and its partners inside and outside government for helping to make SNAP a more effective anti-hunger program. In this bill we have drawn some bright lines for the Secretary to use in funding information efforts. First, no support for partnerships with foreign governments. Second, no contracts based on "bounties" that tie compensation to the number of people enrolled. And finally, re-affirmation that recruitment is not a legitimate activity for SNAP funding. I think the first points are clear and want to expand on the last one. Giving people information about the availability and benefits of the program to enable them to make informed choices about managing family food budgets to put enough food on the table is a legitimate use of Federal funds. If it crosses over into pushing people who have made an informed choice not to apply to apply, then we have a recruitment situation that the Conferees do not support. As long as households have

the knowledge and access to participate if they so desire, what they actually decide is up to them.

Providing positive information about the program and why or how to apply or assisting them in navigating a complex application process is not recruitment and remains an allowable activity and cost. We expect SNAP to continue to provide people with the information they need to make informed decisions about participation, while ensuring that all funds for public information are used responsibly and judiciously.

Finally, I would like to raise a problem about issuance that this legislation does not address—because we thought that earlier legislation did. Staggered issuance refers to spreading the issuance dates for loading benefits on to EBT cards over a period of time—generally 10 but sometimes 15 days or more. This way you don't have so many SNAP households shopping on the same day. It benefits both retailers and their customers because stores are less crowded. The Food and Nutrition Act provides two key participant safeguards when a State agency moves to staggered issuance: first, no household can go beyond 40 days without an allotment, and, second, no household's allotment may be reduced for any period. I have become aware that the Department has been approving plans that recognize only one of these provisions; plans simply extend some households for 40 days between issuances. This means that an allotment designed to cover 30 days must now cover 40 days. Benefits are simply inadequate to stretch this far.

When a 30 day benefit must be stretched over 40 days, the daily benefit is clearly reduced. And since we eat every day, the daily benefit is a meaningful measure of benefit reduction. I am troubled that this important protection in issuance law is seemingly being ignored, and urge the Department to re-examine this situation and require supplemental issuances when States are implementing staggered issuance. Staggered issuance should be beneficial to all concerned. It should not increase hunger during transition months. Referrals to food banks during those months are a poor use of food bank resources and completely unnecessary given the act's requirement that households not suffer a loss of benefits—which having to stretch the same allotment over a longer period certainly is. Food banks are already being stretched thin and it should not be policy for SNAP recipients to rely on local food banks because benefits are stretched over this longer time period.

All in all, this farm bill represents 2 years of hard work by both Agricultural Committees. The nutrition title is not my ideal; the benefit reductions obtained by requiring significant utility assistance in order to qualify for the standard utility allowance will be painful for those households affected by it. But I believe it is a narrowly tar-

geted way of strengthening the program, and with other modest improvements, makes the title worth supporting. I urge my colleagues to support the bill.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. INHOFE. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, it is my understanding Senator BENNET is going to be due here shortly. I should be done by that time and ask unanimous consent that I take about 15 minutes of Senator CORNYN's time.

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

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, January 2014 may go down on record as the coldest of the months in United States history. Between the freezing temperatures from last week's polar vortex storms, much of the Nation experienced record cold weather at least once or twice, and this has been going on now for the last 3 years. While we won't have official nationwide temperature data for January for a few more weeks, we do have preliminary figures. Throughout the entire month, over 2,387 daily cold temperature records were set around the country, and many of those were in my State of Oklahoma. At least 49 of these daily records occurred on January 6 and 7 when the first round of the polar vortex hit. In Tulsa yesterday it went down to 2 below zero. That was a recordbreaker—that had held since 1912. That was the last time it got that cold. The same day in Enid, OK, it got down to minus 3. In Bartlesville—and this may be wrong, but the figure showed it was actually minus 14, making it even colder than the South Pole, where it was only minus 11.

The cold weather is continuing into February. Many schools canceled classes today around the State of Oklahoma because of the cold weather. It snowed more than 2½ inches in Tulsa yesterday, 5.2 inches in Henryetta, just south of Tulsa.

There was an article in the Daily Oklahoman. They have a great zoo over there, but they reported that the grizzly bears refused to go outside their habitat yesterday because it was too cold.

I know many in the media cry foul when I talk about global warming when it gets cold outside, but is this really any different from the President talking about global warming on a hot day in June of last year when he announced his climate action plan? No one seemed to mind that, but there seems to be a different set of rules when we talk about how cold it has been, which it has been for the last 3 years.

When we experience extreme cold like we have had the last few weeks, everyone in their right mind takes a step back and wonders if global warming is really happening. When you look at the facts, you just have to wonder. Consider this quote from the journal *Nature*, which stated that over the last 15 years, "the observed [temperature] trend is . . . not significantly different from zero [and] suggests a temporary 'hiatus' in global warming."

This is something that has been a pattern for a long period of time. I can recall—and I am going from memory now—from the time they started keeping these temperatures, we started the first cold spell of recent history in 1895, and that lasted until 1918; 1918 turned into another warming area that went to 1945; and 1945 to 1975 was again another cooling spell and, of course, from 1975 to 2000. So we know what has been happening.

The President has not acknowledged this fact. In fact, on multiple occasions he has said—and this is something he has said over and over—"the temperature around the globe is increasing faster than was predicted even 10 years ago." Unfortunately for his talking points, the data that has been reported in *Nature* magazine, the Economist, and even in the United Nations IPCC report shows that is just simply not true.

Two weeks ago, in a hearing we had in the Environment and Public Works Committee, my friend Senator SESSIONS pressed EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy on this point, asking her whether the President's statement was true. Ultimately, after running around the question for a few minutes, she said, "I can't answer that." You may not think this is an important fact, but it is. The President's entire climate action plan and efforts to regulate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are built fully on the fact that global warming is happening and that we are all going to die if we don't do something about it.

What we all need to be aware of is that the impact of the President's climate action plan, when implemented, will be stunning. It will completely adopt global warming policies and the implementation of regulations like cap and trade. The President has already done a stunning amount of this work already. We have been able to uncover that in the first 4 years he was in office, he actually spent—and people are not aware of this—\$110 billion of taxpayer money on global warming-related activities.

The cap-and-trade legislation we have debated over the last 10 years carries a price tag of \$300 billion to \$400 billion a year. It would have been the largest tax increase in American history. It was soundly defeated—a bill in the Senate—but through the climate action plan the President is now trying to accomplish by regulation what he couldn't achieve through legislation.

We have heard the term "the imperial President" being used recently.

Well, listen to what was stated in the State of the Union Message, and these are the words he used: “We are going to set new standards on carbon pollution from power plants.” What he is saying is this: We couldn’t pass it for 12 years with four bills to do that. We can’t get more than 25 percent of the Members to vote for it, so we are going to do it through regulation.

The first round of greenhouse gas regulations was proposed in the first week in January. These regulations, if finalized, would impose strict regulations on new powerplants that would make it impossible to build a coal-fired powerplant. You may wonder: Do we really need coal anymore with all the new energy we have coming onto the market, with the natural gas and the shale deposits and all that? The answer is yes.

Before I go into that discussion, I think it is important to point out a problem with the timing of the new rules proposal. I had a chart here—I don’t have it with me right now—that showed that when I was ranking member of the Environment and Public Works Committee—and this would have been way back in October 2012—we released a report highlighting the administration’s actions to delay the finalization of costly environmental regulations until after the 2012 Presidential elections. Whether it was the farm dust rule or the ozone standard, the President punted regulation after regulation until after the election to minimize the influence it would have on voters. It appears that is exactly what is happening today with the first round of greenhouse gas regulations for the construction of new powerplants.

As we know, under the Clean Air Act new rules for powerplants must be finalized within 1 year of the proposal’s publication in the Federal Register—that is what kicks it off, when it is written in the Federal Register—or the proposed rule is invalidated. This is important because after announcing his climate action plan, the President ordered the EPA to “issue a new proposal by no later than September 20, 2013.” The EPA proposed a new rule on September 20, but it did not publish in the Federal Register until January 8, 2014—this past January. Had the EPA published this rule in the Register on the same day they proposed it on September 20, 2013, they would have been forced to finalize the rule by September 20, 2014, which would be 6 weeks before the 2014 elections.

This reveals an astounding double standard and is consistent with the remarks made at the State of the Union. On the one hand, the President says we don’t have time to delay action on global warming. He says we must act before it is too late. But on the other hand, his actions show that it is OK to wait to finalize rules that will harm the economy until after the elections. Ultimately, this hypocrisy reveals that the administration is fully aware that the EPA’s greenhouse gas regulations

will put a drag on the economy, and now that we are starting to see strains of our electricity markets develop, the cost is becoming real to consumers.

Consider American Electric Power, one of the country’s largest electric companies. They are the ones that actually supply the power for my State of Oklahoma. Last week, during the recent cold weather, they reported they were running 89 percent of the coal generation they scheduled to retire in 2015. But these coal-fired powerplants, which were critical to keeping homes all around the country warm during these cold temperatures, are going to be shut down because of President Obama’s environmental regulations.

American Electric Power said: What it should make everyone think about is, what are we going to do when the generation is not available? We need to be thinking about reliability and resilience in extreme times, not just the status quo.

If this recent cold weather occurs again in a year or two from now, once these plants are shut down, there simply will not be enough electricity available to keep homes and businesses warm. If cold weather pushes electricity demand up to the point where remaining powerplants are overloaded—the ones that haven’t been shut down by the President—it could result in massive blackouts, and when Americans need their electricity it won’t be there. It would be as if we were living in the 1600s and everyone will be cold. Again, the annual cost of this would be in excess of \$300 billion to \$400 billion that would be a hit on the GDP. And this does not even begin to measure the suffering we would have to experience.

The President, as he has done with ObamaCare, may just say that these plants can stay open, that he won’t enforce these new rules he is creating, but I don’t think that is realistic. American Electric Power’s warning comes in the wake of regulations the President has already finalized. The new ones that are being developed will make things even worse by making coal-fired powerplants impossible to build or keep open. What has been a steady source of cheap electricity will be gone in just a few short years.

I have long said the Clean Air Act was never intended to regulate greenhouse gas emissions; it was written only to include the most egregious, harmful air pollutants, not carbon dioxide and other harmless greenhouse gases.

Surprisingly, even some Democrats are starting to publicly agree with me. Last week, at an Energy and Commerce Committee meeting over in the House, Congressman JOHN DINGELL from Michigan, a staunch Democrat, said, “Like most members of this committee, I think the Supreme Court came up with a very much erroneous decision on whether the Clean Air Act covers greenhouse gases. Like many members of this committee, I was

present when we wrote that legislation, and we thought it was clear enough that we didn’t clarify it, thinking that even the Supreme Court was not stupid enough to make that finding.”

That is a direct quote from JOHN DINGELL. So I wish the Supreme Court would have sided with Congressman DINGELL.

As things now stand, the EPA is poised to put the Nation out of business with greenhouse gas regulations that would cost the entire economy some \$300 billion to \$400 billion.

Every year I always calculate the number of people in my State of Oklahoma who file Federal income taxes. This \$300 billion to \$400 billion cost would mean about \$3,000 per family of those who file Federal income tax returns. So it is a huge amount, and it would be the largest tax increase in history. Out of this concern, I am introducing a commonsense bill today, the Electricity Reliability and Affordability Act, which will allow States to keep their powerplants open if they believe it is necessary to maintain electricity, reliability, and affordability. In other words, the States can opt out.

American Electric Power’s announcement should cause all of us great concern, but the EPA is not listening. States have long protected and conserved their environments with great success, and State governments are in a much better position to determine which powerplants should and should not remain open, despite the regulations.

I know my friend from Colorado is waiting to take the floor, so the last thing I will say is that in the State of the Union Message, the President made the statement that he is going to go ahead and do this, regardless of the fact that we have killed this legislation four times over the last 12 years. And at that time, I was talking about \$300 billion to \$400 billion as the cost, but that would have been the cost if this had been legislation. Specifically, talking about legislation such as the Lieberman-Warner act and several of the others, that would regulate sources with at least 10,000 tons of CO₂ emissions. However, if you do it by regulation and not legislation, that would have to be under the Clean Air Act, which would regulate systems of 250 tons of CO₂ a year. So while the legislation would have regulated the CO₂ emissions for powerplants, refineries, and major factories, if the President is able to do it through regulations, that would cover every school, every church, and every apartment house in the Nation. So it is very significant.

I know that right now we are on the farm bill, but we have to remind people that this is something that has been just announced that they are going to be doing.

I remember when Lisa Jackson was the Director of the EPA. She was appointed by President Obama. I asked her the question: If we are to regulate this and one of these bills would pass,

which means we would be regulating CO₂ emissions, would this have the effect of reducing CO₂ worldwide?

She said: No, because that would only apply to the United States of America.

That is not where the problem is. The problem is in China, India, in Mexico, and other places.

So I remind my fellow Members this is something very serious and worthy of consideration at this time.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I thank my friend from Oklahoma for yielding.

I wish to speak about the farm bill which, thanks to months and months and actually years of tireless work by Chairwoman STABENOW, Ranking Member COCHRAN, and other conferees on the bill, Democrats and Republicans in both Houses of Congress—thanks to all of this work, we are going to be able to pass this bill this afternoon.

There are 16 million people working in agriculture in our country. These workers and our rural communities are demanding the certainty which comes with a long-term bill. I am pleased to say we are passing not a 2-month extension, not a 10-minute extension, not an “I hope we get it done tomorrow before we leave town” extension but a genuine 5-year farm bill, which is going to give us a lot of certainty.

This bill eliminates direct payments made to farmers regardless of market conditions or what they planted and prioritizes what is working for producers; namely, crop insurance.

I have spoken on the floor before about Colorado's battle against historic drought conditions. Some of our farmers lost half their corn yields in 2012. It is hard to imagine any business losing half its production in 1 year, but that is what has happened to many Colorado corn producers. Mr. President, 2013 was a little better for corn in our State, but it is hard to celebrate when producers still face significant losses fighting against this dry soil. The Crop Insurance Program is what is keeping these farmers and rural economies in business during these tough times. That is why it is a priority.

That is why we should have passed it 1 year ago, 2 years ago, but today we finally have the chance to do it.

Beyond crop insurance, another key highlight of this bill is its conservation title. I spoke last week on the floor about the revamped easement programs, and the important linkage between conservation practices and crop insurance which has been preserved in this conference agreement.

But beyond those highlights, the bill places a new emphasis on water conservation, which is so important to the West. Programs such as EQIP and the Regional Conservation Partnerships Program are going to be critical as the West faces record drought conditions brought on by climate change. New conservation tools, coupled with crop

insurance to help hedge risk, will help our producers as we move into a new normal of a drier American West.

The conservation title programs help producers, but they also help the fish in our rivers and the wildlife on our lands.

Here is a great illustration of why sportsmen groups support this bill. This is a photo taken of my friend John Gale hunting pheasants in Yuma County, CO. The Conservation Reserve Program, CRP—a program reauthorized through this farm bill—provides important habitat for pheasants and other upland birds all across the country. The land surrounding this photo is all CRP land.

The program protects habitat but also helps hold highly erodible soils in place—such as the soil in Baca County, CO, where over 250,000 acres are enrolled in CRP. As the Presiding Officer may know, Baca County in many ways was the epicenter of the area devastated by the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. Thanks to CRP, Baca County has weathered recent droughts a lot better than their forefathers did. Healthy grasslands, open landscapes, and abundant wildlife are a fundamental part of the West, to be a part of the West, and we need to preserve those grasslands, those open spaces, and our species. That is what the conservation title of the farm bill does. A lot of people don't know about it, but it is a very important part of the farm bill.

As a result, this farm bill is supported by over 250 conservation and environmental organizations—groups such as Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, National Wildlife Federation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the National Rifle Association, among others.

This legislation not only ensures we have healthy croplands and grasslands but also prioritizes the health of our forests—an issue of huge importance to western States as we deal with our massive wildfires.

Here we can see the Waldo Canyon fire from 2012. I chair the agriculture subcommittee on forestry, and we held a hearing on wildfires not too long ago. We looked at the terrible fires which have raged across the West, the budgetary nightmare they have caused, and Washington's inability to understand what we are actually facing out there. My clearest takeaway from this hearing was that when it comes to our forests, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

If we prioritize the fuel mitigation work on the front end, we will save on fire suppression and recovery costs on the back end. If we don't, we will break our budget and not preserve our forests. The Congressional Budget Office has found that for every \$1 we invest in forest health, we save \$5 in costs associated with wildfire.

This farm bill conference report makes these investments and gives the Forest Service new tools to treat areas in need of restoration and mitigation.

This bill makes commonsense reforms, reduces the deficit, and will bring certainty and continued prosperity to rural America. It passed the House last week with broad bipartisan support.

I strongly urge a “yes” vote when we vote on the farm bill conference report later today. With all the uncertainty our farmers and ranchers are facing in these tough times, in these drought times, it is the least we can do.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, I thank my colleague and friend from Colorado for his words about the farm bill. He and I are an example of how this bill is important to every region of the country. His kind of farming is very different than our kind of farming, but they are equally important to our States.

I rise to talk about the farm bill. This bill is a long time coming. There has been back-and-forth between the two Chambers, the House and Senate, and between various regions, probably most famous, South versus Midwest farming, but that is not the only one—different types of crops and different types of farm products. It may be sugar, milk, soybeans or corn. Who knows what it is going to be.

Nonetheless, I am happy to report that finally this bill overcame the partisan gridlock we have seen in Washington. I am sorry it took so long. I know last year the House basically blew up this bill on kind of “my way or the highway” politics. I thought that was very unfortunate. But here we are with a bipartisan farm bill, one that got a huge vote in the House and I hope will get a huge vote in the Senate.

I am glad this cut, cut, cut ideology did not prevail, because when we look at this bill and how important it is, not just to my State but to every State in the Union and so important to the U.S. economy—this bill is very important to the Nation's economy and to the future of our Nation.

Agriculture is something we do in this country better than anybody else in the world. We do a lot of things great in this country, and we should be proud of those, but no one does agriculture better than the good old United States of America. Our farmers, our producers, our agribusiness do incredible work. We literally are the envy of the world. It is a core strength of the U.S. economy.

It is critical to keeping our Nation's economy strong that we have a strong agricultural sector. It is critical to our Nation that we have strong rural communities and to a large extent—not completely but a lot of what this bill is about is helping rural communities.

Not everyone in this country lives in the big cities or lives in the suburbs. This bill will help every American in lots of ways, no matter where they live, whether they live in the biggest city in the country or the smallest town out in the countryside. But it will

also help millions and millions of hard-working people and their families in rural America. Why in the world would we want to let ideological fights and partisan bickering jeopardize this economic powerhouse we built for ourselves? Nonetheless, today we have overcome that.

This legislation is a win-win for everyone. We have seen Democrats and Republicans from all regions of the country come to the floor to talk about this farm bill, why it is important to them and why it is important that it pass.

Just a few of the provisions in there:

There are market protections for our farmers and ranchers all over the country.

The PILT Program is so critical to a number of western States but certainly a number of our counties in Arkansas. We have counties in our State where literally half or more of their land is Federal. They can't get any tax base off of it, so PILT helps to fix that.

The Catfish Inspection Program. We don't subsidize catfish, but we have the inspection program to make sure imported catfish meet U.S. standards. This is critical. We want a safe and good food supply. There is a big emphasis on exports. We all know we have a terrible trade deficit. Our trade deficit would be horrendous if it wasn't for agriculture.

Of course, there is nutritional assistance for hard-working families in this country. We have the richest, most bountiful, most blessed Nation in the history of the world, and we have people who are hungry. These nutrition programs in many cases are the difference between life and death.

This bill also focuses on conservation. Not everyone is a farmer, but there are millions of people all over this country who love to enjoy the great outdoors. They like to go hunting, they like to go fishing, and other activities. Conservation programs are critical to keep habitat where it is and critical for large sections of our economy. Hunting and fishing is a huge part of our economy, not just in Arkansas but all over the country.

The rural development programs are essential for rural America. We know there is everything from wastewater programs in here to rural housing, to all kinds of programs. But rural development programs are critical for the quality of life in rural America.

I am the first to say this bill isn't perfect. I think all of us agree this is a series of compromises. There are probably things each one of us would do differently if we could change a provision or two in the bill, but it is a good bill. It is going to provide and stabilize good jobs and economic security for our country.

Our agricultural producers not only feed us and clothe us, but they feed and clothe the world. In the Senate we hear every day from the business community. They want more certainty. They want more stability. This bill provides

that in the agricultural economy. Our farmers, producers, and others deserve that same certainty and stability, and this bill provides that.

In closing, I would read a quick passage from James 5:7. I was going to read it from King James, but I will paraphrase it. Be patient, therefore, brothers . . . see how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the Earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and late rains.

Our agricultural producers have been patient long enough. They have waited and waited and waited on this legislation. I sincerely hope all of us will give this bill strong consideration. This bill provides good common ground. It provides economic security. It continues the safe and abundant food supply that we have in this Nation.

I hope Members on both sides of the aisle will join me in voting yes for this conference report today.

I yield the floor.

MILK PRICING FORMULA

Mr. KING. Mr. President, I commend the Senator from Michigan, her committee and staff for their tireless work that has brought this farm bill to fruition. Further, I greatly appreciate the Senator's willingness to discuss an issue that is absolutely critical for dairy farmers in the Northeast: prehearings to review the Federal pricing formula for class III and class IV milk.

Ms. STABENOW. I want to thank the Senator from Maine. This legislation addresses many aspects of agriculture including dairy. During our deliberations we heard clearly from various dairy stakeholders who argued that the class III and class IV milk product pricing systems are outdated and not responsive to the needs of producers or consumers.

Mr. KING. The senior Senator from Maine and the junior Senator from New York authored the provision included in the Senate farm bill which required USDA to address the pricing formula for class III and class IV milk through a public, transparent prehearing process. Their work has been essential in moving this conversation forward.

As the Senator from Michigan well knows, milk pricing policy is a complex, convoluted, and controversial business and challenging to handle in a package such as the farm bill. Does the Senator believe that the USDA, which is charged with stabilizing farm income; conserving soil, water, and other natural resources, and ensuring the availability and quality of food and fiber products, should provide an opportunity for a thoughtful, balanced process for addressing essential dairy pricing structure?

Ms. STABENOW. Yes, the USDA has the economists and experts that can analyze various alternatives to the current system of pricing milk—and if the system is not working well for most of the players in the dairy industry, especially the farmers, the Department

should make changes. A public, thoughtful and thorough discussion of those alternatives needs to take place, guided by nonbiased people who are focused on the goal of creating the best policy.

Mr. KING. I thank the Senator for her response. The dairy producers in Maine have told me that they believe that it will take just such a thorough review of proposals from interested parties, to help address concerns from industry, assist with the stabilization of the price of milk and provide greater certainty for dairy producers.

Does the Senator agree that the Secretary has the authority and ability to conduct a prehearing procedure to consider alternative pricing formulas for class III and class IV milk products?

Ms. STABENOW. Yes, I believe that not only does the Secretary have the authority to act upon a petition, but as was said earlier, the USDA has the ability to conduct a thoroughly researched prehearing procedure to consider alternative pricing formulas for class III and class IV milk products and that would be welcomed by the Senate Agriculture Committee.

Mr. KING. I understand that the Dairy Industry Advisory Committee has recommended that the Secretary take such action and review interested party proposals to address class III and class IV pricing formula changes in a participatory and transparent manner.

Ms. STABENOW. Yes, that is correct; the Dairy Industry Advisory Committee has recommended such action. Further, I believe that a study of pricing alternatives, followed by a rigorous prehearing process, would cut to the heart of the issue. This would not only clear the air on many of the disagreements that plagued the farm bill debates but might even reduce the reliance on temporary stopgap government supports through better financial connections for all sectors of the dairy industry with the consumer value of dairy products.

Mr. KING. The dairy producers that I have spoken with are calling on the USDA Secretary to undertake a study of alternatives and to agree to hold prehearings on such alternatives as a basic component of the USDA's fundamental mission to the dairy industry. They believe it is time for Congress to direct the USDA to take the bull by the horns and to ensure that all regions of the United States can sustain viable dairy sectors and meet local, national and international demand for high quality U.S. dairy products.

Ms. STABENOW. I am happy to assist dairy farmers in their efforts and will contact the Secretary to ask that he take action on a prehearing request.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, today, I will vote nay on the Agricultural Act of 2014, also known as the farm bill.

Florida's economy and the livelihoods of many family-owned businesses and workers rely on a vibrant agricultural industry. Unfortunately, this farm bill goes far beyond agricultural

programs and includes antipoverty programs and renewable energy programs, among other spending measures that total nearly \$1 trillion.

With Washington facing a \$17 trillion debt and another debt ceiling increase in a few weeks, this bill does not undertake any fundamental reforms to ensure every taxpayer dollar is being properly spent to secure our Nation's food supply instead of needlessly growing government or continuing the status quo on programs that need reform.

For example, Food Stamp Programs are an important part of our safety net, but we should have a separate debate on these and other antipoverty programs with the goal of empowering States to better design these programs to help their people escape poverty.

While energy innovation is an important debate and will be a key economic growth driver in the 21st century, we should be discussing renewable energy and biofuels programs in the context of energy policy, not lumping them in to this bill that is supposed to be about securing our Nation's food supply.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, today we will pass the final conference report for the farm bill, called the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2013. This important bipartisan bill protects jobs and identifies new reforms that will ensure the long-term success of our Nation's agricultural industry. I would like to thank Chairman STABENOW for her leadership and commitment to getting this bill passed. In addition, I would like to thank Senator COCHRAN for his work on this bipartisan bill.

The U.S. citrus industry is facing a devastating disease called greening, for which we know no cure and which kills the citrus tree within 5 years. The disease is spread by an insect called the Asian citrus psyllid. Citrus greening spreads quickly and, because of its dormancy period, has often already destroyed surrounding groves once it has been discovered.

In a 2012 report, University of Florida researchers found that the disease cost Florida's economy \$4.5 billion and 8,000 jobs between 2006 and 2012. Florida was ground zero, but the disease is spreading to every citrus-producing State, including Texas, California, and Arizona. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has already affirmed this emergency with the citrus quarantine for Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Hawaii, Louisiana, and Mississippi as well as parts of California, South Carolina, and Arizona in October 2012. If we don't do something, soon we won't have a domestic citrus industry.

The farm bill sets up a new research initiative especially for the citrus industry within the existing Special Crop Research Initiative, which is called the Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program. The primary goal of this program is to help fund research to find a cure to citrus greening and save the U.S. citrus industry.

The new Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program will ensure the

close collaboration between the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the citrus industry stakeholders, and the relevant entities engaged in scientific research under this program. The farm bill directs the U.S. Department of Agriculture to consult closely and regularly with the industry stakeholders in the formulation, consideration, and approval of research projects and grants performed under this program and will give great weight to input from these stakeholders. This close coordination will ensure the research program will advance the research for citrus greening and other threats to the U.S. citrus industry.

Because of the devastating nature of the citrus greening disease, I worked to make sure the citrus program established guaranteed funding in the farm bill. Senator STABENOW agreed and worked with other members of the farm bill conference to include \$125 million in mandatory funding for the citrus research program. Money in this grant program will go toward scientific research aimed at addressing diseases, domestic and invasive pests, and other challenges to the U.S. citrus industry, helping to also disseminate the research findings to growers.

In this age of economic uncertainty, Congress should be doing everything it can to improve our economic situation. In this case, we are doing just that by saving an industry that is vital to not only Florida's economy but to Texas, California, Louisiana, Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, and the Nation as a whole.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, while this is far from a perfect bill, I am pleased that the Senate will pass the Agriculture Act of 2014. This legislation—a result of more than 2 years of deliberation—reaches a compromise that protects small farmers, fights hunger, and saves taxpayers more than \$16 billion.

I thank Chairwoman STABENOW and Ranking Member COCHRAN, along with leaders in the House of Representatives, for their hard work in reaching this agreement.

This year's farm bill makes targeted investments in our Nation's agricultural and nutrition sectors while eliminating some of the wasteful subsidies that cost taxpayers billions of dollars. The bill supports our rural economies and helps protect our farmland and forests for generations to come. And it makes historic investments in fruit and vegetable farming and in organic agriculture.

During negotiations on this bill, I worked with Chairwoman STABENOW and Senator LEAHY to ensure that new dairy programs will adequately protect New Hampshire's small farms, which are struggling to deal with high feed costs and volatility in milk prices. I am hopeful that the new dairy program will provide stability for New Hampshire's dairies and create an environment in which these family-owned businesses that are so important to our State's economy can grow and thrive.

I am particularly pleased that the conference report includes language nearly identical to my bipartisan legislation, the Oilheat Efficiency, Renewable Fuel Research and Jobs Training Act.

This important provision will reauthorize the widely supported National Oilheat Research Alliance, NORA, the oilheat industry's national program for research and development, consumer education and technical training. It will allow the industry to continue funding vital national oilheat efforts for 5 years—at no cost to local, State or Federal governments.

Consumers will benefit from the development of improved and efficient equipment, increased safety through technical training, and the availability of up-to-date information regarding safety practices and fuel conservation. Importantly, these objectives will be achieved without raising consumer costs. NORA provides a direct path for responsible, domestically produced and efficient energy consumption without raising consumer costs. Its inclusion in the farm bill is good for consumers, American businesses, and the environment and will provide tangible value for the country for many years to come.

I also thank Chairwoman STABENOW and Senator WYDEN for working with me to preserve the Environmental Protection Agency's treatment of regulating forest roads as nonpoint sources through State-adopted best-management practices. This approach will allow for the continued sustainable development of working forests in New Hampshire.

In New Hampshire, more than 100,000 people rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program each month to keep from going hungry. The farm bill reauthorizes SNAP and other critical programs that help millions of American families put food on the table. The bill also contains important reforms that will provide food for our Nation's food banks and improve low-income Americans' access to fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods.

The legislation also improves consumer access to local foods with increased funding for farmers' markets. In recent years, interest in supporting local agriculture has grown significantly. New Hampshire currently has more than 70 farmers markets across the State, with nearly 30 open through the winter. Americans want to know where their food comes from, and farmers want to be able to sell their products in their communities.

The farm bill significantly increases funding for programs that support small and beginning farmers, including greater support for grant programs that enable small farmers to invest in improving the value of their products.

One dairy farmer from Landaff, NH, accessed these programs to help her grow her cheese-making business. Because of the grant, she was able to hire two full-time employees and several

part-time employees, and her second-generation farm now sells award-winning cheeses in stores and restaurants around the country. These are the kind of job-creating investments we need to be making in rural America.

However, while the legislation implements some reforms to subsidy programs that will save taxpayer dollars, it does not go far enough in cutting wasteful spending.

Senator McCAIN and I worked to repeal a duplicative catfish inspection program at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which has already cost taxpayers \$20 million over the past 5 years and has yet to inspect a single fish. Unfortunately, this bill does nothing to end this unnecessary and wasteful program.

I am also disappointed that this bill continues the Federal Sugar Program with no changes. Taxpayers were forced to pay nearly \$300 million last year to bail out the sugar industry, in addition to the \$14 billion this wasteful program has cost consumers and businesses over the past 5 years. The high price supports and strict trade restrictions continued with no reform in this bill will ensure that sugar remains the most tightly controlled commodity in America.

This bill also continues the wasteful practice of providing subsidies to large and wealthy farm businesses with no meaningful payment limits. Some programs in the bill will allow huge farming operations to receive unlimited subsidies, and the new crop insurance program includes no individual caps or means testing requirements.

The Senate-passed bill would have reduced subsidy payments for the wealthiest farmers, but this provision was removed from the final conference report. And there was no consideration of implementing a provision I offered with Senator TOOMEY to place a reasonable cap on crop insurance subsidies that would have saved taxpayers \$3.4 billion over the next 10 years.

As we confront our Federal debt and deficit and as millions of families across the country are tightening their belts, we cannot justify unlimited subsidies for wealthy farmers and giant agribusinesses.

While I will continue working to end wasteful farm bill programs and protect taxpayers, I support this legislation because it supports New Hampshire farmers and our State's rural communities, reduces the deficit, invests in healthy foods, and helps prevent low-income Americans from going hungry.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, reauthorization of the farm bill presented an opportunity to make much needed changes in our agriculture policy to rein in taxpayer subsidies for big agribusiness, support the growth of small farms and local food systems, and ensure that our constituents in need do not go hungry. Unfortunately, despite the extraordinary efforts of Chairwoman STABENOW, the reforms in-

cluded in the bill before us today fall much too short.

Most troubling is that the bill cuts more than \$8 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. I cannot support reducing hunger assistance for the most vulnerable Americans while creating new crop insurance programs, increasing crop insurance spending by \$5.7 billion, and continuing to subsidize the wealthiest farmers. As such, I will oppose this bill.

The nutrition cuts are particularly challenging in my State, where roughly 1 in 6 Rhode Islanders receive SNAP benefits—a reflection of the challenging economic times in our State, where the unemployment rate remains above 9 percent, the highest in the country. According to a survey by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, more than 15 percent of Rhode Islanders are food insecure, meaning they do not always know where they will find their next meal and thus are at risk of hunger. And this number has grown over the last 5 years, from 58,000 households to more than 66,500 today. Many local food banks like the Rhode Island Community Food Bank—are struggling to keep pace as the need for food assistance grows. The SNAP cuts in this bill cannot be easily made up by food banks and other charitable organizations even with increased funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program.

While the conference agreement does not include the far more damaging policy changes proposed by the House, it will reduce benefits for about 850,000 low-income households by an average of \$90 a month, according to the Congressional Budget Office. This is on top of the across-the-board cut that hit all SNAP households last November when the benefit boost under the 2009 Recovery Act expired. When these cuts went into effect, families of 4 lost an average of \$36 a month, while single-person households lost an average of \$11. Without the Recovery Act boost, SNAP benefits will average less than \$1.40 per person per meal in 2014. Now we are asking some of our most vulnerable constituents to get by with even less—all while growing the safety net for the wealthiest farmers and the crop insurance industry. This is unacceptable.

As I noted, these remain trying economic times, with many Americans still struggling to find work or working low-wage jobs that do not provide the resources necessary to meet basic needs like food. This is not the time to cut a lifeline benefit like SNAP. I am deeply disappointed that some of the savings generated in this bill were not reinvested into SNAP to help meet the need for food assistance across this country.

Unfortunately, the conference agreement also maintains the duplicative USDA catfish program—a program that both the House and the Senate have voted to repeal, the Government Accountability Office has called wasteful, and the administration proposed defunding in its fiscal year 2014 budget.

This program would require seafood processors to comply with USDA regulations for catfish while the FDA would continue to oversee inspections for all other seafood. According to the GAO, repealing this program would avoid duplication of Federal programs and save taxpayers millions of dollars annually. We should be finding ways to make government processes more efficient, not less.

While I am unable to support the conference report because of the deep cuts to SNAP and inadequate reforms to crop insurance and farm subsidy payments, I would like to acknowledge several provisions in this bill, including several that will support the development of local and regional food systems and improve the affordability of and access to fresh fruits and vegetables for low-income families. I am particularly pleased that the bill includes many measures from a bill that I cosponsored, Senator BROWN's Local Farms, Food and Jobs Act, that will increase funding for specialty crop block grants to support research and promotion of fruits, vegetables, and other specialty crops. Another measure is the enhancement of the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program to aid direct producer-to-consumer marketing channels and local food sales to retailers and institutions.

The bill also allows Community Supported Agriculture operations to redeem SNAP benefits and creates Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive grants, providing \$100 million over 5 years for a national pilot to incentivize the purchase of fruits and vegetables at farmers markets by SNAP participants. A similar program has already been successfully implemented in Rhode Island. Farm Fresh Rhode Island runs the "Bonus Bucks" program where every \$5 in SNAP benefits spent at a farmers market allows low-income individuals to receive an additional \$2 to spend on fresh vegetables, fruit, eggs, fish, meats, and cheeses produced by local farmers and fishermen. Within the first year that "Bonus Bucks" was implemented, Farm Fresh Rhode Island saw a 675 percent increase in the amount of SNAP spent at their markets. In 2013, 22 Rhode Island farmers markets up from 8 in 2008, have booths that can accept EBT cards.

It is exciting to see the ingenuity of our States replicated at the national level in ways to help ensure that low-income families have access to nutritious local foods. These types of programs also help grow local food economies by encouraging purchases from local producers. A win-win.

The bill also makes several changes to enhance and promote conservation. Requiring farmers to comply with conservation practices in order to receive taxpayer-supported subsidies on crop insurance will help further the conservation of natural resources and ensure that our farmers remain good stewards of the land.

Thankfully, the conferees rejected a harmful amendment included in the

House bill that would have had far-reaching consequences by prohibiting States from regulating agricultural products within their jurisdiction. This bill also makes it a federal crime to attend or bring a child under the age of 16 to an animal fighting event—a slightly modified version of a bill I cosponsored that was introduced by Senator BLUMENTHAL.

The conference report also includes legislation to reauthorize the National Oilheat Research Alliance, NORA. I have cosponsored bills to reauthorize this program during the last several Congresses and am glad it will now become law. NORA seeks to strengthen and improve the oil heating industry through education and training and improving home heating efficiency. With more than 1 in 3 Rhode Islanders dependent on fuel oil to heat their homes this winter and heating oil prices on the rise, it is important to reauthorize NORA.

While Chairwoman STABENOW's efforts helped to ensure some positive provisions and reforms, the bill simply does not go far enough. It wisely eliminates direct payments but restores some of those cuts by creating new crop insurance programs, while not going far enough to limit commodity and crop insurance subsidy payouts. The bill does not even include an amendment that I cosponsored and was passed in the Senate to set income limitations for crop insurance making a very modest 5 percent reduction for farmers making over \$750,000 annually.

We must do more to ensure that farm subsidies are available to the small and medium-sized farms that need it most and rein in the taxpayer subsidies to large, wealthy farming operations. And we certainly should not be paying for expensive farm programs by cutting SNAP, thereby placing additional burdens on those who are struggling to make ends meet.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I rise in support of the bipartisan farm bill conference agreement before us today. This 5 year bill provides certainty to both the producer and the consumer. It's a jobs bill supporting 16 million jobs across the Nation. It also is a reform bill that cracks down on fraud and abuse and ends direct payments.

Agriculture is the No. 1 industry in Maryland. We have 12,800 farms and 350,000 Marylanders employed in the industry. Poultry is Maryland's largest agricultural industry followed by nursery grown plants and dairy.

Maryland's Eastern Shore is home to a \$1.4 billion poultry industry responsible for over 5,000 jobs. There are nearly 1,000 chicken farms and three processing plants. In fact, one in seven jobs on the Eastern Shore is poultry related.

For poultry growers, this bill continues the supplemental agriculture insurance assistance which provides disaster aid. This program lapsed in 2011, and this bill makes the program retroactive to 2012. This means Maryland's

chicken farmers will continue to get disaster payments. The bill also continues to allow farm operating loans for poultry growers who do not qualify for operating credit at other lenders.

This farm bill requires country-of-origin labeling, which I have long supported. Every consumer has the right to know where their food comes from on their dinner table. I acknowledge there are some in the poultry industry that oppose these requirements. I think it is the right thing to do.

For Maryland's 500 dairy farms, the bill creates two new price and income support programs. The Dairy Production Margin Protection Program takes into consideration the high price of feed costs. This is a first for dairy programs and a win for dairy farmers struggling to survive with escalating variable and fixed operation costs. The premium cost to participate in this program will be very low for Maryland's small dairy farmers. The Dairy Production Donation Program will guarantee a profit for dairy farmers when the market becomes over saturated.

This legislation is important to the Chesapeake Bay conservation efforts. It includes the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, a new competitive program. The bill provides \$100 million annually for this program. The Bay Watershed will compete with eight other regions for these critical conservation dollars. This bill also ties farmers' conservation compliance to crop insurance. This means if your land is not compliant, you will not receive a premium subsidy.

For sugar producers and refineries, the bill continues the existing Sugar Program. The U.S. Sugar Program supports over 140,000 American jobs, including 500 jobs at Domino Sugar located at the Port of Baltimore. Significant reforms to this program will put these jobs at risk and they may be shipped overseas.

This bill helps Maryland's growing specialty crop and organic farmers by gradually increasing specialty crops block grants from \$55 million a year in 2014 to \$85 million in 2018. Maryland receives more than \$1.7 million from this program. The bill also increases organic research funding to assist farmers transitioning to organics.

The bill makes modest reforms to the food aid program following a similar path as the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014. I support the reforms in the bill and believe this is another step in the right direction to allow more locally purchased food.

Finally, I would like to address food stamps, now called SNAP. I am for food stamps and always will be. We have approximately 800,000 Marylanders receiving food stamp benefits. In November, I visited the Maryland Food Bank with my House Democratic colleagues. We announced that we were standing up for SNAP and opposing the House's harmful cuts to the program.

During my visit, I met Tracey Coleman, a hard-working Marylander

whose husband was laid off through no fault of his own when the steel plant in Baltimore closed last year. Tracey has three kids, including a daughter with special needs. She shouldn't have to choose between her son's asthma medication and a family meal. Tracey had nowhere else to turn. She signed up for SNAP benefits to keep food on the dinner table for her family.

I personally thank Senator STABENOW for working so hard to protect SNAP families in this bill. She fought off the House Republicans that wanted to gut the program, cutting \$40 billion from SNAP and axing SNAP benefits for 4 million people, including putting 77,000 Marylanders at risk. I am happy to report no American will lose their benefits under this bill—not one. Most important to me, no Marylander will see their benefits reduced from the reforms in this bill.

I know some of my colleagues are going to vote against the bill because of the changes to the standard utility allowance calculation that will reduce benefits for their constituents. I understand. But what we all have to understand is that a compromise is a compromise and Senator STABENOW fended off the worst. I was recently in her shoes negotiating the appropriations bill with the House. It is tough.

I commend Senators STABENOW and COCHRAN for their hard work on this bill. I urge all my colleagues to support this bill. It is good news for American farmers and consumers.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, today I will support final passage of the conference report of the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2013. The conference report is particularly important to my home State of Michigan, where agriculture, the State's second-largest industry, supports one in four jobs.

While the legislation presented contains many laudable provisions, I am deeply disappointed that the final conference report includes cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP. SNAP benefits provide nutrition assistance to millions of families. It is distressing that we are reducing food stamp support for those families.

While I oppose the SNAP cuts, the positives of this legislation are important enough that it deserves support. I applaud the work of my colleague from Michigan, Senator STABENOW, whose leadership as the chair of the Agriculture Committee helped craft this important compromise. This legislation makes critical reforms, reduces our deficit, and brings certainty to farmers and business owners.

This legislation is more than just a farm bill. This legislation covers conservation, nutrition assistance, crop insurance, international food aid, forestry and so much more.

This legislation makes significant modifications to help farmers better manage their risk by eliminating direct payments to farmers and replacing

it with two new risk management programs. This will ensure farmers receive support only when there is a drop in farmers' income. This legislation also creates a new and voluntary insurance program to protect dairy farmers from losses. It also includes valuable reforms to disaster assistance. Of note is the creation of a permanent livestock disaster assistance program and retroactive coverage for orchardists and nursery growers who have recently been affected by droughts and winter storms.

Importantly, this legislation also strengthens agriculture research programs, such as the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. This investment in specialty crops is vital to Michigan, which leads the nation in growing a wide variety of specialty crops including tart cherries, blueberries, cucumbers, dry black and red beans, and cranberries.

I am pleased the conference agreement retains important conservation provisions that will help protect our water and air quality, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and improve flood control. The agreement consolidates 23 existing conservation programs into 13 programs which should streamline implementation. Further, conservation compliance is tied to crop insurance, which should ensure that basic conservation practices are implemented more broadly. Conservation provisions in the farm bill will help prevent soil erosion, reduce water runoff and pollution, and shift production away from sensitive lands. In addition, the conference agreement retains the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, which should benefit Great Lakes water quality and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

The bill also includes a 1-year extension of the Payments in Lieu of Taxes—PILT—Program, which provides funding to rural communities to help offset losses in property taxes due to nontaxable Federal lands within their boundaries. Each year, Michigan typically receives about \$2.5 million under PILT, funding that is vital for providing essential services such as education, law enforcement, and emergency response.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I too rise to speak on the farm bill.

Similar to many Nebraskans, I am relieved that a final conference agreement has been reached and will provide much needed certainty for both producers and consumers. This legislation accomplishes a great deal. It provides risk management and disaster assistance programs. It promotes environmental stewardship. It bolsters export opportunities. It encourages rural development, advances research, helps beginning farmers and ranchers, and delivers nutrition assistance to our needy families.

While the bill is not perfect, it is the result of compromise and a long collaborative legislative process.

One of the most challenging issues for lawmakers was addressing nutrition assistance programs, which comprise 80 percent of the farm bill's total spending. With one in every seven Americans receiving supplemental nutrition assistance, it is important to strengthen the program's integrity and its accountability, while better targeting programs to serve those in need.

I am also pleased the bill empowers States to help capable adults enroll in work programs to reduce reliance on taxpayer assistance. The bill provides tools to reduce waste, fraud, and abuse, including cracking down on trafficking through data mining, terminal ID, and other measures.

While these are all steps in the right direction, it is disappointing that the bill will not achieve additional savings from nutrition programs, which are projected to cost more than \$756 billion over the next decade.

True farm programs—the commodity programs and crop insurance—only comprise about 14 percent of all of the farm bill spending, but they account for more than half of the savings under this proposed bill. In fact, the commodity title contributes more savings than any other title in the entire farm bill.

The legislation makes significant reforms to farm policy. Direct payments are repealed and replaced with risk management that offers protection only when warranted by significant price or revenue declines. In Nebraska, agriculture is our No. 1 industry, and it is one of which we are very proud. Our farmers and ranchers take on an enormous amount of risk. They endure the elements every day as they work to feed the world and responsibly take care of our natural resources.

I am pleased this farm bill maintains and strengthens one of the most important risk management tools for our farmers, and that is crop insurance. This is a very successful public-private partnership that helps farmers invest in their own risk management by purchasing insurance policies so they are protected from adverse weather or market conditions.

This legislation also provides needed disaster assistance to livestock producers. Unfortunately, the Livestock Forage Program and the Livestock Indemnity Program both expired in 2011 under the last farm bill. In 2012, livestock producers experienced the most devastating loss of pasture, rangeland, and forage in decades due to widespread drought, affecting approximately 80 percent of our country.

Then, in October of 2013, an unexpected early fall blizzard killed more than 20,000 cattle, sheep, horses, and bison in the Dakotas and in my State of Nebraska. While those affected by these hardships have been without assistance for more than 2 years, this farm bill will now help producers to rebuild those herds and sustain their ranching operations.

I also appreciate that this farm bill continues our commitment to strong

conservation programs. The bill consolidates and streamlines those programs, providing landowners with incentives and assistance to protect and improve our land, our water, and our air.

Agriculture continues to be a bright spot for U.S. trade, thanks in part to the successful export promotion programs, and those are reauthorized in this bill as well. An independent study conducted for USDA in 2010 found that for every dollar expended by government and industry on market development, U.S. food and agricultural exports increased by \$35. Through the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development Program, we can expect increased demand for U.S.-grown agricultural products and commodities.

This farm bill also continues investment in rural development, providing assistance to communities to build that very critical infrastructure and access to credit to help grow small businesses.

Also supported by this farm bill are critical agricultural research initiatives which allow American producers to innovate, to become more efficient and productive with fewer and fewer resources. Moreover, the bill also provides support for developing technologies that reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

Finally, this bill provides some needed regulatory relief for the agricultural industry. I am very pleased the bill includes an amendment I offered to fix bureaucratic hurdles impacting farmers' access to seeds. This bipartisan amendment, cosponsored by Senator CARPER, ensures that EPA does not treat biotech seeds as pesticides when those shipments are imported.

I was disappointed, though, that the conference did not include language to address one of the worst regulatory challenges confronting farmers: EPA's overregulation of on-farm fuel storage under its Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure Program.

The House farm bill included an SPCC relief provision, and the Senate unanimously passed a similar amendment which I cosponsored to reduce farmers' SPCC compliance burdens during consideration of the Water Resources Development Act. There is bipartisan agreement on both sides of the dome that this regulation needs to be fixed. The farm bill did provide the perfect opportunity for getting this relief enacted into law, but that chance was missed. However, I stand ready to work with my colleagues to ensure we don't miss another opportunity to address this issue—to fix this issue—and we can do that during the WRDA conference.

As I said, this bill is not perfect, but on balance this farm bill goes a long way in promoting opportunity and providing certainty for both producers and consumers. I encourage my colleagues to join me in supporting the final passage of the farm bill.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I come to the floor for the third time to express my opposition to the farm bill—obviously not in total, but to certain provisions of it, particularly provisions I had a hand in writing—and to set the record straight, once again.

I come here because several of my colleagues have approached me indicating confusion on whether the payment limits provisions I fought for are in this bill or not in this bill. People are going to tell colleagues there are payment limitations in this bill, but I am here to set the record straight with facts. They don't accomplish what I tried to accomplish, and they are even much more liberal than in existing law in regard to my amendment.

My original payment limit provisions included a \$50,000 individual/\$100,000 married couple cap for the shallow loss programs shown as Price Loss Coverage—PLC—and the Agricultural Risk Coverage—ARC—programs. In this bill farmers will have to pick one of those programs for the next 5 years.

The conference report allows individual farmers to get \$125,000 and married couples to get \$250,000 from the PLC and the ARC programs.

This is where this has really exploded because what I just referenced is a 150-percent increase over what my limits allowed—the limits that passed the Senate without discussion and limits adopted in the House of Representatives on a 230-to-194 vote. That is just a plain, simple fact—a 150-percent increase over what my limits allowed. The conference report allows the PLC and ARC programs to pay out 150 percent more than my limits did.

This intentional change by the conference committee allows each farmer to get significantly more from these new countercyclical programs that are not even World Trade Organization—or, as we say around here, WTO—compliant.

Another way of looking at this, under the 2008 farm bill, an individual farmer could only get \$65,000 from the countercyclical program. Under this bill, they can get \$125,000 from the countercyclical program. That means they almost doubled what the countercyclical program will pay out compared to current law.

Furthermore, some university analysis has already shown the high target prices for certain crops in this bill will likely have a 70- to 80-percent chance of triggering payments through the PLC program any given year of this farm bill.

So, I say to my colleagues, please don't buy what my opponents are selling on this issue, or at least trying to sell. My payment limits are not in this bill. The result of that is going to be a countercyclical program that will be much more market-distorting than the current ones for a few crops. How can

it not be more distorting? The PLC program is designed to trigger more often and pay out larger amounts than the old countercyclical program for certain crops in the 2008 farm bill.

That is just a plain, simple fact. I am sorry if proponents are having a tough time acknowledging that publicly, but that is what this bill actually does. Their bill does lots of things, but brilliantly reforming Title I is not one of them.

I am sure we have been told that this bill reforms. It is like some of the opponents of payment limits still thinking this is 1975 or some year back then. Back then, the national debt was still measured in billions and the WTO didn't even exist. Unfortunately for them, things are very different today. Recently, the WTO declared our cotton program noncompliant, and we happen to have a \$17 trillion national debt. But worse than this, I say to my colleagues, is the fact that these amendments were adopted on the floor of the Senate, and they were adopted in the House of Representatives by a 230-to-194 vote. They should not have even been subject to negotiations.

The moral authority of the people of the United States was behind what both Houses did. Because we have a \$17 trillion national debt, we ought to be able to save this \$387 million that this amendment would have saved. It had the moral authority of a majority of the House and the Senate, which moral authority should not have been overriden by a handful of people sitting in conference.

I stress this latter point for one simple reason: Rule XXVIII of the Senate says if things are the same in both Houses, they should not be conferenceable. I say this to my friends, not that this bill is going to go down to defeat and we start over again and maybe accomplish what I want to accomplish, but to make sure other conferences do not abuse the Senate rule like this conference abused the Senate rule; and also to tell my colleagues here that, both working with what rules maybe we can get through the U.S. Department of Agriculture or on some other piece of legislation, I intend to pursue these goals that I sought, and I intend to keep reminding my colleagues of Senate rules being violated by conferees that should not have been violated.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to discuss the many ways ObamaCare continues to negatively affect Americans.

Yesterday, the Washington Post published an article exposing yet another problem with healthcare.gov. I would like to share a couple of excerpts from that article. The article begins:

Tens of thousands of people who discovered that HealthCare.gov made mistakes as they were signing up for a health plan are confronting a new roadblock: The government

cannot yet fix the errors. Roughly 22,000 Americans have filed appeals with the government to try to get mistakes corrected.

Those mistakes, according to the Post, include being overcharged for health insurance, being directed to the wrong insurance program or being wrongly denied coverage.

So what is the status of those appeals?

The Post reports:

For now, the appeals are sitting, untouched, inside a government computer. And an unknown number of consumers who are trying to get help through less formal means—by calling the health-care marketplace directly—are told that HealthCare.gov's computer system is not yet allowing federal workers to go into enrollment records and change them.

So let me summarize here. Mr. President, 22,000 Americans are either without insurance or are paying too much for insurance as a result of mistakes made by the Federal health exchange.

Healthcare.gov contains no appeals process. Attempts to find recourse by other means have been unsuccessful, and the administration's response is basically: Tough luck.

President Obama was interviewed by FOX News' Bill O'Reilly this weekend. One of the topics they covered was healthcare.gov's problems.

The President said:

The goods news is that right away we decided how we're going to fix it. It got fixed within a month and a half. It was up and running, and now it's working the way it's supposed to.

Let me repeat that The President of the United States said: "... now it's working the way it's supposed to."

Well, tell that to the 22,000 people wondering why there is no appeals process on the Web site or why their paper appeals are stuck in a computer system at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, where, the Post says, the appeals process is currently stopped because "the part of the computer system that would allow agency workers to read and handle appeals has not been built."

When Bill O'Reilly asked President Obama about the Web site problems, the President responded by saying that—and I quote again—"I don't think anybody anticipated the degree of problems that you had on healthcare.gov."

That is not an excuse. It was the President's job to ensure that people in the administration were anticipating the problems that would occur, and the President owes the American people an explanation of why he did not because this is not just a story of bureaucratic incompetence. It is the stories of the tens of thousands of individual Americans who are suffering as a result of the Web site glitches and who are wondering how they will afford their health care under ObamaCare—Americans like Addie Wilson, whose story is highlighted in the Post article.

Addie is a 27-year-old who makes just \$22,000 a year. She was sure she would

qualify for a subsidy on the exchanges, and she was absolutely right. She did—only healthcare.gov did not tell her that.

So Addie phoned one of the call centers, which told her to sign up at the more expensive price she was quoted and to appeal the decision later.

Since her old insurance plan was on its way out and she needed surgery in January, that is what she did. Now she is stuck paying \$100 more a month than she should be paying, along with a deductible that is \$4,000 higher than it should be. That too-high of a deductible is of particular concern since she incurred huge hospital bills in January when she was forced to have surgery. If she does not get relief from the appeals process, she could end up paying \$4,000 in medical bills that she should not have to pay and cannot afford.

But it is not just the Web site that is driving up Americans' medical bills—it is the law itself. As awful as Addie's situation is, at least maybe she will get help eventually. For millions of other Americans, their high deductibles are no mistake.

For too many Americans on and off the exchanges, the reality of the so-called Affordable Care Act has been a staggering increase in health care costs.

Some family plans on the exchanges carry deductibles of almost \$13,000. That is more than some families will spend this year on their mortgage.

Upper-income families may be able to absorb these costs—and some limited help is available for lower-income families—but what middle-class family can afford \$13,000 a year in medical costs?

Too many families around the country will be putting on hold their plans to buy a home or send their kids to college because they have to devote every spare dollar to paying their health care bills.

On top of crippling cost hikes, many of these same families are facing the loss of doctors and hospitals, as insurance companies narrow their networks in response to ObamaCare's mandates.

So far I have only mentioned the personal devastation ObamaCare is causing. But ObamaCare is not just affecting families' pocketbooks; it is affecting the economy as a whole.

In response to ObamaCare's burdensome mandates and new taxes, businesses are cutting employees' hours, declining to hire new employees, and abandoning their plans to expand. That means fewer jobs available for the millions of Americans looking for work and fewer opportunities for career growth and advancement.

In fact, just this morning, there was a story in the Wall Street Journal, and it references the Congressional Budget Office report that estimates now that the impact of this law through the year 2024 will mean 2.5 million fewer jobs—2.5 million in job losses as a result of ObamaCare. It is so much so that you see many of the very labor unions that

supported and wholeheartedly endorsed ObamaCare when it passed coming out now and saying “[i]t would be a sad irony”—and I am quoting from a letter that went out from several of the labor unions—“[i]t would be a sad irony indeed if the signature legislative accomplishment of an Administration committed to reducing income inequality cut living standards for middle income and low wage workers.” The letter also says that the ObamaCare law “undermines fair marketplace competition” and that they are “bitterly disappointed.” This comes from labor unions in this country that wholeheartedly endorsed this law when it passed several years ago.

The American people have endured 5 years of economic stagnation, and ObamaCare has been making things worse.

The President has called for 2014 to be a year of action, but I have seen no evidence that he plans to address the causes of our sluggish growth or provide relief for the millions of Americans struggling with crippling health care costs.

Republicans have a number of health care proposals, from comprehensive plans like that proposed by Senators COBURN, HATCH, and BURR, to common-sense ideas to lower costs by allowing businesses to pool together to negotiate lower rates, and by allowing insurance companies to sell health care plans across State lines to promote more competition and give people more choices.

If the President really wanted to make health care more affordable and accessible, he would abandon this government takeover of one-sixth of our economy and work with Republicans to pass real health care reform. But given the President's record, I am not holding my breath that is going to happen.

But at the very least—the very least—I hope the President will see his way to supporting bipartisan proposals to improve the economy and to open new jobs and opportunities to struggling Americans.

Just last Friday, the Obama State Department released its fifth environmental impact study on the Keystone XL Pipeline. Once again, the review found that the pipeline would have no significant impact on global carbon emissions. Senators and Representatives of both parties support this job-creating measure. It is high time for the President to approve the pipeline and open the 42,000 shovel-ready jobs it will support.

He should also pick up the phone that he keeps talking about to call the Senate majority leader to tell him to stop obstructing bipartisan trade promotion authority legislation that would help American farmers, ranchers, entrepreneurs, and job creators gain access to a billion new consumers around the globe.

The President and the majority leader held a White House meeting yesterday, we are told, yet an aide reported

that there was no discussion of the majority leader's antitrade comments last week.

Given this legislation's importance for increasing American jobs, it is difficult to understand why the President would not bring this bill up at that meeting.

Finally, the President of the United States also should join the vast bipartisan majority in the Senate that supports repeal of the job-killing ObamaCare medical device tax, which is forcing American companies to send jobs overseas.

The President will be visiting the Democrats' retreat tomorrow, which would be a prime opportunity for him to get on the same page with his party in support of these bipartisan measures.

Republicans are ready and willing to work with the President and with Democrats, and we hope we will have willing partners to do the things that are necessary to get people back to work, to create jobs, to grow our economy, and to help provide and build a better future for middle class families in this country.

The American people should not have to wait any longer.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

MR. CORNYN. Mr. President, once again, the President of the United States has failed to meet the statutory deadline to propose a budget. In fact, he has missed the deadline so many times that people hardly notice anymore. Failure seems to become the rule, not the exception. The President has now missed the budget deadline five times since he took office in 2009. By comparison, his three White House predecessors missed the deadline a total of four times in 20 years. Five times under President Obama; four times in the last 20 years under his three immediate predecessors.

All totaled, it is now the 18th time that the Obama administration has missed a legal deadline related to the Federal budget. I guess the President and his administration consider the law purely an advisory matter not binding on them. The law is for other people, not for this President and for his administration, seems to be their attitude.

The reason this is so important is because, as we all know—whether it is a family budget or a budget for your business—setting a budget is where you establish your priorities: the things you have to have, the things you would like to have but maybe need to put off, and then those things you really cannot afford. That is how you budget. That is why it is so important.

But if your budget includes massive amounts of new spending, along with firm opposition to major reforms, you would have no choice but to ask for a huge tax increase. The President, I do not think, wants to put himself on record again, like he did last year, for

another huge tax increase, nor does he want his party's members, who are running for election in 2014, to have to cast the hard vote on the President's own budget.

Last year, his 2014 budget proposal would have raised taxes by roughly \$1 trillion—a trillion-dollar tax increase. That is on top of the \$1.7 trillion that taxes have gone up during the last 5 years under this administration.

It looks as if the President's priorities are more taxes, more spending, and more debt.

But if those sorts of priorities led to robust economic growth and job creation, we would see one of the strongest economic recoveries in American history. But the truth is more taxes, more spending, and more debt are not a recipe for economic growth and job creation—just the opposite.

We are seeing the evidence of that right now. We are suffering through the weakest economic recovery since the great recession in modern history. Actually, we are seeing the weakest economic recovery since the Great Depression right now. There are a lot of reasons, but the Congressional Budget Office has given us some reasons that I want to talk about just briefly.

They talk about ObamaCare and its impact on job growth and economic growth. As a matter of fact, the Affordable Care Act, the President's signature legislative accomplishment—the Congressional Budget Office said the number of full-time workers will go down by 2 million in the coming years as a result of the Affordable Care Act. So in addition to people getting cancelled policies or sticker shock and finding out that their health care costs did not go down, they went up, or finding if you like your doctors you cannot keep them, what we are finding is that these same people may find themselves out of work as a result of the policies in the Affordable Care Act.

The Congressional Budget Office looked primarily at how employers would respond to a new penalty for failing to offer insurance to employees who worked more than 30 hours. That response would include cutting people's hours, hiring fewer workers, and lowering wages for new jobs. I know my friends on the other side of the aisle agree with the President when he said we ought to raise the minimum wage.

Well, one of the problems is the President's own health care policy that they all voted for is killing full-time work and putting people in part-time work, meaning that their weekly wages have been depressed. For them the answer is not to deal with the source of that problem, which is ObamaCare, but to fix wages at 40 percent higher than they currently are per hour, which we know—economists tell us and it is intuitively true—is going to put more people out of work, put more pressure on workers.

Perhaps one of the most distressing things about the Congressional Budget Office's report today is what they said,

what the prospects look like for the President's remaining term in office. The Congressional Budget Office does not see unemployment falling below 6 percent for the rest of President Obama's term—6 percent for the remainder of his term.

Yet, despite all of this, the President still will not get behind genuine progrowth reforms. He will not support genuine reforms of our existing programs such as Medicare and Social Security that would actually save them and put them on a fiscally sustainable path. He has no plan for controlling our national debt.

I went back and looked. Last time Congress came within one vote of passing a balanced budget amendment, do you know what the national debt was then? It was \$4.85 trillion. Do you know what it is today? It is in excess of \$17 trillion, with no end in sight. So the truth is Republicans have put forward ideas for streamlining Federal regulations, for mitigating the negative effects of the Affordable Care Act and for replacing ObamaCare with patient-centered reforms that would cut costs, broaden quality insurance coverage, and improve patient access. But so far, the majority leader and the President have shown zero interest in trying to work with Republicans to solve our Nation's most serious economic challenges, which are having a direct impact on the American people.

Instead, the President said he is going to go it alone. He has a pen; he has a phone. But as I have suggested before, one of the things he could do that would put Americans back to work almost immediately and make us more North American energy-independent would be to sign the Keystone XL Pipeline.

I know my time is expired. I ask unanimous consent that the three articles I was referring to on the CBO report be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the Washington Post, Feb. 4, 2014]

CBO: HEALTH-CARE LAW WILL REDUCE JOBS
BY TWO MILLION

(By Zachary A. Goldfarb and Sarah Kliff)

The Affordable Care Act will reduce the number of full-time workers by more than two million in coming years, congressional budget analysts said Tuesday in the most detailed analysis of the law's impact on jobs.

After obtaining coverage through the health law, some workers may forgo employment, while others may reduce hours, according to a report by the Congressional Budget Office. Low-wage workers are the most likely to drop out of the workforce as a result of the law, it said. The CBO said the law's impact on jobs mostly would be felt after 2016.

The agency previously estimated that the economy would have 800,000 fewer jobs in 2021 as a result of the law. In that analysis, the CBO looked primarily at how employers would respond to a new penalty for failing to offer insurance to employees who work more than 30 hours a week. That response would include cutting people's hours, hiring fewer workers and lowering wages for new jobs.

On Tuesday, the agency released a more detailed estimate that includes how ordinary Americans would react to those changes by employers. Some would choose to keep Medicaid rather than take a job at reduced wages. Others, who typically do not work full-time, would delay returning to work in order to keep subsidies for private insurance that are provided under the law.

As a result, by 2021, the number of full-time positions would be reduced by 2.3 million, the agency said.

The reduction in employment from the health care law "includes some people choosing not to work at all and other people choosing to work fewer hours than they would have in the absence of the law," the CBO said.

The law also estimated that the botched rollout of the health law's Web site may reduce the number of people who will sign up for coverage by 1 million through March 31, the CBO estimated. Initially, the agency predicted 7 million would have signed up by then.

In its new analysis, the CBO said it had reduced its estimate of how many Americans would sign up for the insurance through the online marketplaces "in light of technical problems that impeded many people's enrollment in exchanges in the first months of the open enrollment period."

The CBO said that the program would catch up over time, with a total of 13 million Americans signing up in 2015 and 24 million by 2017.

Late last month, the Obama administration announced that about 3 million Americans had signed up for private health plans so far under the federal health exchange and separate exchanges that are being run by 14 states.

The administration and the CBO agree there should be a surge of sign-ups near the March deadline to apply for coverage in 2014.

The CBO estimated that 84 percent of the U.S. population would have health insurance in 2014, rising to 89 percent within a few years. Medicaid, the program for the poor expanded under the law, should add 6 million more people this year.

At the same time, the CBO reported that the federal budget is rapidly shrinking and is projected to decline to \$514 billion this year, providing fresh evidence that the problem that has been Washington's obsession for the past several years has become far less urgent.

Tax hikes, spending cuts and faster economic growth have helped close the deficit, which topped \$1 trillion for several years following the onset of the Great Recession.

The budget deficit would equal 3 percent of the total size of the nation's economy this year—what many economists see as a healthy level. The deficit is expected to decrease to \$478 billion next year, or 2.6 percent of the size of the economy.

One of the more troubling aspects of the CBO report was its assessment of long-term economic growth.

The CBO said that the economy will continue to enjoy a solid recovery for the next several years, but will slow to a pace of expansion of 2.2 percent a year from 2018 to 2024.

Much of the slowdown has to do with fewer workers active in the economy—mainly a result of baby boomers retiring.

The slow growth the economy will reduce taxes by \$1.4 trillion of the next years, leading to a larger than expected deficit by 2024 \$1.07 trillion, or 4 percent of the size of the economy.

The CBO said it would still take until 2017 for the unemployment rate, currently at 6.7 percent, to fall to 5.8 percent, and may not reach 5.5 percent until 2024.

Today, the agency said the economy is about six million jobs short of where it should be.

[From The Hill, Feb. 4, 2014]

CBO: O-CARE SLOWING GROWTH,
CONTRIBUTING TO JOB LOSSES

The new healthcare law will slow economic growth over the next decade, costing the nation about 2.5 million jobs and contributing to a \$1 trillion increase in projected deficits, the Congressional Budget Office said in a report released Tuesday.

The non-partisan group's report found that the healthcare law's negative effects on the economy will be "substantially larger" than what it had previously anticipated.

The CBO is now estimating that the law will reduce labor force compensation by 1 percent from 2017 to 2024, twice the reduction it previously had projected.

This will decrease the number of full-time equivalent jobs in 2021 by 2.3 million, it said. It had previously estimated the decrease would be 800,000.

It said this decrease would be caused partly by people leaving the workforce in response to lower jobs offered by employers, and increased insurance coverage through the healthcare law.

It also said employer penalties in the law will decrease wages, and that part-year workers will be slower to return to the work force because they will seek to retain ObamaCare insurance subsidies.

The healthcare law isn't the only reason the CBO is projecting slower economic growth between 2014 and 2023, however. It also cited inflation and lower productivity as reasons why it was lowering its projections.

The slower growth will mean less tax revenue, which will add to the deficit. Instead of adding \$6.3 trillion in deficits from 2014 to 2023, the government will add \$7.3 trillion, CBO now projects.

By 2023, the gross debt of the United States will be \$26 trillion, up from a projected \$25 trillion. A year later the debt will rise to \$27 trillion as the \$1.074 trillion deficit for fiscal 2024 is added in.

"Most of the increase in projected deficits results from lower projections for the growth of real GDP and for inflation, which have resulted in projected revenues between 2014 and 2023 by \$1.4 trillion," CBO explained.

CBO now thinks the economy will grow at 3.1 percent in this fiscal year, which ends in October, rather than the 3.4 percent growth it predicted last year.

The unemployment rate is projected to fall to 6.7 percent by the end of the year, much lower than the 7.6 percent CBO saw for 2014 previously. The budget office does not see unemployment falling below 6 percent for the rest of President Obama's term, however.

In the near term, the CBO is projecting smaller deficits.

The budget office says that legislation enacted since last May has reduced deficits by \$400 billion.

For 2014, the deficit is slated to be \$514 billion, an improvement of \$46 billion from last year's projection.

In 2015, the deficit falls to \$478 billion. That is still higher than the last full year of the Bush administration when the deficit was \$458 billion, but it is a steep drop from the \$1 trillion deficits of most of the Obama years.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I rise today to join my colleagues in asking for the passage of the farm bill that we are going to have a vote on shortly. I thank my colleague from Michigan,

the Chair of the Agriculture Committee, for her unbelievable work on this very important policy for America. I know she understands these issues well because, while everybody thinks of Michigan as a manufacturing State, it also is a very big agricultural State. We share a lot of the same crops, being kind of on a northern plateau: apples and wine and a variety of others. I certainly thank her for her help and support in getting an important new program in our school lunches for very nutritious peas and lentils, called pulse crops, and to thank her for her input.

I rise today to talk about the importance of the farm bill, because it is a jobs bill for our Nation. Two years ago I joined my colleague Senator JOHANNES from Nebraska and sent a bipartisan letter with 44 Senators saying it was time to act on the farm bill because we thought it was so important for our economy as we were still struggling coming out of a recession. Today it is finally here, that opportunity to put all of that hard work into a bill that goes to the President's desk.

Agriculture employs 16 million Americans, and it produces exports worth \$115 billion of agricultural products to markets around the world. I do not think we always focus on that. A lot of times we come out here and we talk about the individual crops in our State or the individual focus. But what we really need to understand is it is a very big product for the United States.

We live in a very competitive global economy. One of the biggest advantages we have in this global economy is that we in the United States of America know how to grow things. So the emerging middle class around the world can now afford to eat higher quality products. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce CEO Tom Donohue put it best in a speech he gave about the global marketplace last year. He said:

You play to your strength. You leverage your advantages and then you find ways to improve them. And one of the greatest strengths in America is agriculture.

Mr. Donohue said those remarks as an example of what innovation is driving in American agriculture. He is absolutely right, because not only do we know how to grow things but we also know how to innovate. There is a lot of innovation going on in the ag economy. In fact, there are some people in the Pacific Northwest who say now there is as much investment going into new innovations in agriculture as there was recently in high tech or even green energy. So people get it. It is a great investment.

I have seen in Washington State cutting-edge research done at our lab in Prosser for new wheat rotation crops in the Palouse, to savvy entrepreneurs making connections like getting Washington cherries into the new Korean market. So simply put, this is a growing, growing opportunity for the U.S. economy.

American farmers and businesses are seeing demands for their products rise

on two fronts: First, American consumers want to buy their products directly from the farms in their communities, so that means the farms are creating products for exactly what their end customer wants. Because they are doing that, they can make more money on delivering to the end customer exactly the kind of product they want.

Secondly, a rising middle class in places such as Asia to South America wants to use their new-found spending power on purchasing our products as well. So this farm bill helps on both of those fronts. Again, thanks to the chairwoman from Michigan. It helps get more goods to the market, whether that is a farmer's market around the corner from your local supermarket, or whether that is a new market in South Korea.

In 2030, China's middle class will have 1 billion people. That is up from 150 million today. India's middle class will grow by more than 800 percent. Maybe because we sit on the Pacific, just like the Presiding Officer, he knows how important it is to get products to those marketplaces.

In 2012, the United Nations reported that the world will need 70 percent more food by the middle of the century. This is a tremendous opportunity but only if Congress acts today and passes the farm bill. We need to maintain our investment in research and exports so American farmers can thrive and win in the expanding global marketplace. I am confident if we do that, our farmers and our businesses—and we make sure that they have a level playing—will win.

But other countries are playing for keeps too. Every farmer around the world wants access to that rising middle class. The European Union spent \$700 million on export promotion for food products in 2011. That is nearly three times as much as America spent. China is planning to boost its agricultural investment over the next decade. It is a sentiment that I heard in October when I visited one of our wholesalers when he was talking to an overseas client. He was talking about export and agricultural leaders in Washington State and how other countries were starting to use particularly the apple market to try to open new opportunities.

That is why we need to increase opportunities within the farm bill and to move forward on trade deals that help open the door to new agricultural markets. That will help unleash an entrepreneurial spirit we need to be aggressive about. Many people have heard of Walla Walla—or maybe you have not or maybe you thought that was a term. But Walla Walla is a great community in the southeast corner of our State with 30,000 people. It is deeply tied to the global economy. It has wine and wheat and peas and lentils. The farmers there, I know, are very appreciative of the Colombia Free Trade Agreement. They thanked me many times for making sure that got passed. I can

tell you that many of those farmers went to Bogota to try to sell wheat to the growing Colombian middle class. That is what entrepreneurship in America is all about.

So Congress must not dampen our entrepreneurial spirit. Farmers need to start this season and make sure they can put long-term plans in place. Then the seeds that will be planted, the fields that will be harvested, the crops that will be shipped, the smart, targeted investment toward those new international markets will be done. That is what this farm bill is about.

The bill, I can tell you, is a compromise. Again, I thank the chairwoman for her hard work, because I know how hard she worked on forging those compromises. I can tell you that it cuts SNAP far more than I would have cut it. I was one of 26 Senators who voted for the amendment by my colleague from New York offered to restore those cuts. But it is time we move forward.

I want to take a second to talk about three reasons why people should be for this farm bill. First, as I talked about, it continues to expand the export programs that are so important for America's new markets. While I might have been for a more robust program, some of my colleagues obviously have not quite understood why this is such a great benefit to market U.S. products around the globe. I think some people think of big global corporations and things; why do we need that?

Well, I can tell you, when I am talking about apples or cherries or pears, these are not big corporations. They are a collection of hundreds or thousands of farmers working together. When MAP helps target getting people in the Asian market to consume those products, it is a win-win situation for America.

Secondly, this bill funds research, making our crops stronger and healthier and more competitive.

Third, it starts initiatives on products such as a pulse crop that I think can be so beneficial to us over the long run with new, as I said, school lunches, but just healthier products.

Our new farm bill will do the research on specialty crops that are so important for us in the Pacific Northwest. This is the first time in this farm bill that the reauthorization makes long-term investments in specialty crop block grant programs and specialty crop research initiatives. Again, I thank the Senator from Michigan for her help on that, understanding how important these specialty crops are.

I think everybody in America and around the world knows the brand of Washington apples. I can tell you, I have been in the Chinese marketplace and seen how people took off the Washington label, particularly on Fuji apples, and tried to stick it on other apples, because they knew if that sticker was on that apple, everybody in China would consume those apples even though they were not really Washington Fuji.

So what this specialty research initiative does is say we are not going to let apples and pears and cherries basically constantly fall off the radar as it relates to research, but they will be a permanent part of a program for research and have a block grant program so they can basically continue to do the research that is needed.

Again, if any of my colleagues have ever had a chance to visit the research facilities within their State, they will know what I am talking about. If they haven't, they should go and do it.

But when we are fighting against or upon a competitive field with Israel, China, or anybody else when it comes to apples, we constantly have to answer questions about phytosanitary issues, and we have to constantly talk about ways we can make sure we gain access to those marketplaces. Science and research are the only ways we can fight some of these trade barriers that exist when our products can't get into those countries. So we need to make sure we continue to fight that.

Lastly, I am very pleased about pulse crops—peas, lentils, things like chickpeas. I am sure a lot of people ate a lot of hummus over the weekend while they were watching the Super Bowl and the Seattle Seahawks victory. Hummus is a crop that has exploded 500 percent in the last 15 years. It is definitely a product people have been consuming all over the world for a long time, but we in the United States are starting to consume more of it. The fact that product has had such a huge increase has given our farmers in Washington State great opportunity. But this product is also a very healthy product and one that we fought hard to make sure would be included in a new school lunch program, something where students could get access to a high-protein, high-fiber product that certainly is more affordable for our schools. With the research that is going to go on on pulse crop derivatives and the fact that school lunches are now going to have the opportunity to serve pulse crops more aggressively, we are very excited about this farm bill.

I thank my colleagues in the Senate, Senators CRAPO and RISCH. I also thank my colleagues from South Dakota and North Dakota for helping because both States are very big on these pulse crops. They certainly helped to make sure this stayed in the conference report.

To all of my colleagues, please vote for a bill that will really help our economy, will help us tackle the growing middle class around the world and keep America putting great products on those market shelves and help create more jobs in the United States.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I am proud of what we were able to accomplish in the nutrition title of the Farm Bill. It achieves important reforms in

SNAP, but also protects food assistance for families, many of whom never dreamed that they would need help putting food on their table. We are adopting important reforms to clarify the law or rules in a few places where members had legitimate concerns. At the same time, and perhaps more importantly, we are rejecting many draconian proposals that would have caused serious harm to program participants by slashing benefits or kicking families off of SNAP, undermining the primary purpose and the basic framework of the program.

Let's start by reviewing some of the improvements we made to SNAP to address concerns around minor eligibility issues.

In Michigan, we discovered two lottery winners were continuing to receive benefits after winning a million dollars. In a program with 46 million participants, this really is an example of a very rare problem. Nevertheless, we want to make absolutely clear in federal law that individuals who win the lottery are not eligible for SNAP. So we tightened rules in a way to ensure that not even one lottery winner can get SNAP. But we also wanted to make sure that this prohibition does not result in a burdensome new requirement to ask all applicants and participants if they had recently won the lottery.

The provision requires that State SNAP agencies and local lotteries and gaming commissions set up data-sharing to ensure that the SNAP agency is informed when individuals win substantial sums of money. A SNAP agency can then take action to contact the winning participant and review their eligibility in light of these major winnings. I'm pleased that we managed to find a way to address this problem without imposing new requirements on the millions of struggling low income households who participate in this program. There is no need to put questions about the lottery or gambling on the application form, and we expect USDA to ensure that won't happen. In other words, this change allows us to use our data and technology to prevent this extremely rare event from happening again without putting new burdens on participants.

States will apply regular income and asset tests apply to lottery winners—if someone has winnings that make them ineligible, they can be disqualified from SNAP. But if that person paid off debts or was able to finally afford costly home repair or health care and now had income that made them eligible, they have every right to receive SNAP benefits.

Another area of eligibility that follows the same principle on implementation is eligibility for ex-offenders felons who are fleeing criminal justice. Current SNAP law prohibits people with criminal records who are fleeing from law enforcement or violating the terms of their parole from participating in SNAP. Because criminal law

is a complicated mix of federal and State statutes and definitions, members wanted to make very clear that people committing odious crimes would be ineligible for SNAP if they were fleeing or violating their parole. This does not apply to any convicted criminal who satisfies his or her debt to society by serving out the sentence and complying with any court order. So, it's a narrow group of people that we're highlighting. For that reason, we do not expect any changes to the SNAP application and eligibility process. Applicants are already asked about their fleeing felon status, so we expect that additional inquiries about applicants' criminal records will not be necessary.

We did include one provision that will result in a cut to SNAP benefits for some households. Some States have been providing as little as \$1 in heating assistance for the sole purpose of qualifying recipients for higher benefit. While I agree that SNAP benefits are often insufficient to cover a family's food needs over the course of a month, the very structure of SNAP is meant to award benefits based on how much money a family has available to purchase food. Providing \$1 in heating assistance skews benefits away from this income and expense based system. So the change we made means a SNAP recipient now must receive \$20 in heating assistance to qualify for the Standard Utility Allowance. If you do not receive at least \$20 in low income heating assistance, you will need to produce a utility bill. This is intended to make the energy assistance a real contribution to the actual expenses of a poor household. Congress never intended to permit households that don't have heating or cooling costs because they are included in rent or covered by the landlord to get a deduction as if they did have expenses. The law is ambiguous on this point, so this bill would clarify the issue.

When we decided to make this change, I insisted that we do it in a way that did not harm any household that had actual heating or cooling costs, including costs passed on by a landlord or shared with another family. That means we expect USDA to make three things a priority when overseeing State implementation of this change. One priority is that anyone currently getting this \$1 in energy assistance must be given a chance to show whether they have energy costs of any kind. I think many of these households will have these costs and qualify for the deduction that raises their benefits. That's how the current program works in the majority of States that do not offer this minimal energy assistance. States must give households a chance to document actual costs. I expect USDA to provide guidance to States to ensure that reflects many different living scenarios that low-income households experience are taken into account when implementing this change.

The second priority for USDA is to make clear that this change should

have no effect on anyone currently receive a more typical LIHEAP payment. We continue to support the connection between SNAP and LIHEAP and do not expect these changes to cause problems for the majority of people who rely on and receive LIHEAP, or are applying and are likely to receive it, in getting the SNAP utility deduction. I know this puts the burden on States to make sure their application process and benefit calculations are performed in a way that allows them to determine everyone eligible for the deduction based on receiving energy assistance. We expect households to be given the opportunity to attest to their participation in LIHEAP. Many States offer that option to households now, and we do not intend to change that. We expect that a State SNAP agency could certify that its State State does not provide LIHEAP payments of less than \$20 per year. This would mean there is no need for households to provide information about the amount of LIHEAP they receive or the method or frequency of those payments. We expect the Secretary to monitor this change closely and help States come up with the least burdensome implementation options available. Because CBO did not assume any savings from reduced benefits in States that have not implemented this practice, we expect the Secretary to implement this change in a way that is consistent with the intent to not impact those States.

Although we did provide States the flexibility to phase in the provision for most participating households, I remain concerned that the timetable for implementation of these changes is short. For new applicants and households, the provision is effective just 30 days after enactment. Under SNAP regulations, States will be protected from being cited for errors during the first few months after enactment. However, low-income households do not have the same administrative protection. It is possible that they could receive higher benefits as a result of the State not being able to convert its systems quickly enough. I urge the Secretary to work with States to waive any household liability that results from receiving slightly higher benefits because States were unable to implement the provision in a timely manner.

Let me turn now to a significant outcome in the nutrition title. I am particularly pleased with the reforms that we have proposed to SNAP's employment and training program. A key element of that effort is a new demonstration project to test innovative strategies to help build individuals' skills and employability. The majority of adults enrolled in SNAP who can work do. Even more work just before or just after their participation in SNAP. Nevertheless, all of the conferees had a shared goal of exploring whether there were ways that SNAP could more affirmatively support SNAP participants' desire to work and improve their and their families' situation. We

agreed to look for ways to help adults get the training, support and encouragement to find suitable employment. Of course, we had to do this in an environment with very constrained resources.

We worked on a package of ideas that would make better use of existing federal resources, provide modest new sums of money for SNAP employment and training and provided funding to test innovative new approaches. We wanted to be sure that by the time of the next reauthorization we would have a better sense of what kinds of services States were offering, what was producing results for families, and that USDA would have more capacity to oversee an employment and training effort.

The bill provides \$200 million to for up to 10 State pilot projects that will test new strategies to support individuals to return to work, enhance their skills to improve their earnings, and address households' barriers to work. The pilot will operate within SNAP's employment and training program framework, but we have also expanded the types of activities that can be offered. Now States will have the option to include activities offered through the State's cash assistance as well as supportive services that are allowed under SNAP. States can use the funding to cover the mandated supportive services, such as child care, for participants in the pilot. Moreover they can test whether supportive services such as child care or transitional housing are appropriate interventions on their own. After all, a mother with safe, stable high quality child care is far more likely to be able to look for and maintain employment than one without such help. Similarly an individual with a place to live is far more likely to find and keep employment than someone without housing.

It was important to me to include unsubsidized employment as an allowable activity because that's ultimately what we want all job training participants to find. This required some careful consideration. Private employment is a different kind of activity than a class or program run and monitored by the State. States, very understandably, will have very limited ability to oversee private employment situations. So we wanted to ensure that the kinds of protections that exist in the private labor market, such as workplace protection laws, health and safety standards and wage and hour protections also apply to any private employment programs under SNAP employment and training programs. We also made clear that placements into unsubsidized employment cannot displace an existing worker at the employment site. That has long been the rule under other types of SNAP employment and training programs, and we expect the same here. I expect that USDA will issue comprehensive standards that incorporate all existing SNAP protections as well as the appropriate private employee protections such as the Fair

Labor Standards Act into the requirements for offering unsubsidized employment. Despite that responsibility, I hope USDA shares my excitement that including unsubsidized employment as an education and training activity is an unprecedented opportunity to support low-income individuals as they enter or rejoin the workforce.

I specifically focus on one challenge in offering unsubsidized work. The pilot projects will allow States to apply SNAP's sanction policy to any individual who is assigned a work activity, but willfully refuses, without good cause, to take an action that he or she could safely take. In the traditional education and training setting, it is usually—though not always—relatively straightforward to determine whether an individual has complied. Did the person participate in the required activity? If not, did the person have good cause, like sickness, not to do so? But in the unsubsidized work placement, it may be difficult to make the correct assessment when an individual does not meet the work requirement. The private employer may have reduced work hours or transferred the individual into a position for which they are clearly not qualified. Such action does not speak to the individual's willingness to work. Because of the inherent challenges in determining compliance with unsubsidized work activities, the pilot program requires clear evidence that an individual willfully refused to take a safe and proper action without good cause before the State can subject him or her to sanctions. I also encourage the Secretary to issue guidance about the very limited circumstances under which a person who is working could be sanctioned for losing his or her job. When someone who is working loses the job for reasons beyond their control, we want to ensure they are not doubly punished by losing SNAP benefits as well.

The only way we will know if the pilot projects are succeeding is if we have a high quality, longitudinal evaluation. So any State applying to conduct a pilot must also participate in a comprehensive evaluation to determine what works and what doesn't. We want to measure actual outcomes—employment and changes in earnings, as well as documented improvements in a participant's skills, training and experience, since successfully completing a job training program is not a guarantee of immediate employment. We also want to better understand how to ensure that the assessment of each job training participant helps match the individual with the training or support best suited for their needs. After all, if a job training volunteer really just needs help with child care or transportation in order to accept a job offer, we don't want that person assigned to job search or workfare. Assessment is already a requirement under federal rules. Gaining more insight into how a good assessment and assignment system can improve participant outcomes

may be one of the most cost-effective lessons we can hope to gain from this effort.

This is an area where I want to thank my fellow conferees for all of their hard work. We came to the conference with very different ideas about what the issues facing the program and clients are, and what SNAP's approach towards promoting work out to be. We spent a tremendous amount of time educating ourselves about the issues, the opportunities and the risks of various approaches. I believe we ended up with a stronger program that encourages work without penalizing those who are willing to work but unable to find a job in this economy. The pilot program represents a true compromise and an important step forward in helping low-income Americans succeed in the labor market.

In addition to the pilot projects, the bill requires States to begin measuring actual individual-based outcomes from participating in job training. We directed USDA to compile and analyze this information so we can learn what kinds of services work best to provide SNAP participants with the skills and experience they need to find employment. Because matching an individual's employment needs to an appropriate program or service is critical to positive employment outcomes, this review should include a focus on the individualized assessment that is required of SNAP work registrants. As I mentioned earlier, this is an aspect of employment and training that is already required. Understanding individuals' needs and abilities is crucial to matching them to a job training or work program where they can succeed. That is the first important step in making future improvement in the program. We were very clear that successful outcomes can mean more than a full-time job placement. We expect that the State outcome data reflect this by including measures of improved employability, like educational attainment, credentials and work experience. We also expect USDA's analysis to acknowledge the reality that getting suitable employment may take more than the completion of a job training course. This admittedly increases the attention both USDA and the States must place on their education and training programs, but it will give us invaluable information about how best to meet the needs of SNAP participants.

Another area of the legislation where we made some important investments is enhancing USDA's efforts to combat fraud. The agency has done a remarkable job of identifying and preventing fraud and trafficking; even as household and retailer participation grew drastically, fraud remained at a historic low percentage. So we targeted every small area we could to improve the integrity of the program.

We've increased funding for USDA to address retailer fraud through data mining and expand State and federal

partnerships to combat retailer fraud. Historically, States have pursued household fraud and USDA has dealt with retailer fraud. But, in some cases, the fraudulent activity involves both types of parties, so we're creating pilot projects to see how collaboration can help stretch resources. While States have done a good job with their responsibility to prevent and prosecute fraud, some States have developed troubling techniques that pressure innocent low-income households to admit wrongdoing. When USDA selects States to partner with, we intend that they prioritize States that have a record of addressing fraud through investigations, hearings and actual third-party findings of fraud. We urge USDA to take a close look at States that have a high number of disqualifications that come from client confessions in the absence of investigations. States that are ready to take on new responsibilities under the pilot must be those that ensure their disqualifications are in fact a result of documented fraud.

Another provision deals with a rare, but important, participant integrity issue. SNAP benefits are paid on a debit card we call Electronic Benefit Transfer or EBT cards. Clients use these at the grocery store to buy food just like any other consumer. Clients who lose their card can request replacements. That's an important customer service feature which ensures needy households don't lose the assistance they need. However, some households requesting multiple replacements may raise red flags. Multiple care replacements might be an indication that the household needs help in how to use the debit card. In other cases, multiple replacements could be an indication that an individual in the household is trying to sell the card.

The farm bill requires the household to provide an explanation when they request an excessive number of replacements in a given year. In order for this to be helpful in fighting fraud, rather than become a burden on innocent households that struggle to keep their cards, we added a set of protections that USDA must implement. After consultation with the Department, we expect they would consider it excessive if a household requested more than four replacement cards per year. USDA's own analysis indicates that fraud is only an issue when the requests are that frequent. Second, the provision requires that households be given the flexibility in how they want to provide their explanation. In particular, States may not require households to go to the local SNAP office or to be interviewed about their card loss. The goal was to avoid undue burdens on households, including those who are working, are homebound, or who may not have the means to travel to a SNAP office. This provision also does not empower the State to withhold household benefits based on the household's explanation. If the State questions the validity of the household's reason, we

encourage the State to pursue a fraud investigation. SNAP has processes in place already for program violations and we expect these processes to be followed. This provision does not expand or alter that authority.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that this process is not just a way to identify potential fraud; it's also a way to identify households that need help in using the benefits they are eligible for. There are many perfectly legitimate reasons to need a new card, and we intended that this integrity measure not entrap households that have done nothing wrong. That's why we require USDA to include specific protections for the homeless, people with disabilities and victims of crime. My colleague, Senator HARKIN, has led the way in championing the needs of people with disabilities and making clear that federal programs have an obligation to provide such individuals accommodation. We expect this provision to result in States' intensifying their efforts to identify and assist individuals who would benefit from more assistance.

SNAP retailers operate within a rapidly changing food retail environment. We've seen fundamental changes in the way food is sold since the last farm bill, so the conferees sought to make some changes in the way SNAP benefits can be redeemed. This farm bill will direct USDA to conduct pilots to test both mobile technologies, like smart phone apps, and online technologies. These pilots offer an exciting opportunity for farmers markets and other small retailers who find the point-of-sale EBT equipment to be too expensive or cumbersome. They also provide access to SNAP recipients that may have real physical or geographical challenges in getting to the store. But one of the risks of embracing new technology is that bad actors will find a way to defraud the program. So we included a set of protections, for both recipients and retailers, and expect USDA to carefully monitor the pilot programs for evidence of fraud. This may require USDA to develop standards of transparency and recordkeeping for mobile technologies that differ from those used in traditional brick-and-mortar stores. Most online retailers charge a fee for the delivery of food. For low-income SNAP participants, fees like that can really cut into their food budget. We were clear that SNAP benefits cannot be used to pay for any delivery fee or premium, and we required that the cost of food be the same as the in-the-store price, but we cannot prevent retailers from charging for delivery. So we urge USDA to pay special attention to these fees and be willing to deny participation to entities that cannot ensure that fees will be minimal. We also want USDA to assess whether fees undermine the ability of a household to afford an adequate diet with SNAP benefits.

Since we are moving towards adapting SNAP to emerging retail trends, I'd like to note what we did not do in this

bill. First, we have not removed the requirement that SNAP households be treated the same as other customers. Whatever steps States and USDA take to modernize benefit redemption methods cannot result in overt identification of SNAP households, such as SNAP-only lanes in grocery stores.

Because technology continues to evolve, we included several provisions that have to do with "data matches." Data matching is where the SNAP agency or eligibility worker can check information about SNAP participants' household circumstances with third party data bases. When done well, this is a cost effective means to test the veracity of client statements as well as to catch information that client may fail to provide the program. If done poorly, data matching can result in lots of confusing data matches that do not actually improve verification. We don't want States to undertake data matching for data matching's sake. The point is to empower States with good information at the right time to inform effective eligibility processing.

First, we include a provision to add federal standards for data exchanges to SNAP so that SNAP can more easily share data with other programs. This is a commonsense provision that will ensure that across the various State and federal programs, our systems can "talk" with one another. SNAP law and the privacy act protects client's personal privacy and this authority does not change that obligation.

Second, we required States to use the Department of Health and Human Services' National Directory of New Hires (NDNH). This database primarily is for State child support agencies to learn information about the employment of noncustodial parents who live or work in other States and States currently have the option to use it for SNAP. By requiring its use at the time a household is certified for SNAP, we believe it can help States determine eligibility and the correct level of benefits. We do not, however, dictate how States must use the data.

Third, the bill codifies the existing State practice of verifying immigration status by using the Citizenship and Immigration Services database for immigrants' status through the federal Systemic Alien Verification for Entitlements program. Currently in SNAP, States have the option to use SAVE and nearly every State currently does. The Food and Nutrition Act references SAVE and another database, the Income Eligibility Verification Systems, or IEVS, in the same place in the Social Security Act. I want to make clear that we are only mandating States use SAVE. We did not intend to change anything about how States use IEVS—use of that database would continue to be optional for States. Longstanding SNAP policy has required rigorous verification procedures, and IEVS is one of many ways to get information to ensure correct eligibility decisions.

We want States to have a plan for using the data available to them. The

goal is not to require data matches that States know to be unhelpful, or where they determine it is not cost-effective to do so. Moreover, we are not pressing States to run afoul of simplified reporting and check these databases between reviews. In our last two farm bills, we took great pains to reduce needless paperwork burdens on States and households between certifications. These changes are not meant to override the framework of simplified reporting. Instead, States will use third-party data to make periodic reviews as accurate as efficiently possible while always providing participants the ability to challenge data matches they believe to be inaccurate.

The nutrition title also takes steps to ensure that federal funds used to inform Americans about the SNAP cannot be used in inappropriate ways. To be clear, USDA has done a fine and necessary job getting information about SNAP to low-income households that struggle to put food on the table. The program cannot be effective if those who may need it are unaware of its existence or believe they are not eligible. Moreover, outreach and program promotional materials can be helpful to improving program integrity. Applicants and clients who are informed about their responsibilities and educated about what the application process entails will be better prepared to complete the application and renew process. That's likely to increase program accuracy, reduce fraud and enhance overall efficiencies.

It's important that we provide low-income households with accurate information about the program, just as we do with Social Security or Medicare benefits. That's the only way that individuals can make the right choice for them about whether or not to apply. In this bill, Congress continues to support this kind of information sharing, while clarifying that aggressive recruitment, including recruitment outside of the United States, is not permissible. Recruitment is trying to persuade or convince someone who has made an informed decision not to apply to change his or her mind. That hasn't been a permissible activity, and the bill simply codifies that practice. Providing and producing positive information about the program and the benefits of applying or assisting households to navigate the complicated application process would still be permitted. We expect the agency will continue to provide necessary information while ensuring that education funds are used appropriately.

As I said at the start, this bill is not perfect. I much prefer to be discussing more ways we could better ensure SNAP benefits were adequate to help families have enough healthy food throughout the month. However, I continue to believe this farm bill protects SNAP, which is the best defense we have against hunger in our communities. We have continued the long tradition in the Agriculture Committee of

bipartisan support for the program. This was not an easy task, given how far apart the House and Senate were just a few months ago. This farm bill is an important step in dealing with the most important food and agricultural issues facing the nation today. I urge my colleagues to support it.

I understand we will recessing for lunch in a moment, but there are some very important people I would like to thank today. I wish to take this moment before we have the final vote to do so. I know, listening to other colleagues, as we come to major pieces of legislation, at the end they talk about the importance of their staff. I have come to realize just how powerful those words are. I have been blessed with an incredibly talented, hard-working staff. They are the reason we are here today talking about the Agricultural Act of 2014. Every single one of them should be very proud of their contribution, as I am proud of them.

This certainly starts with our staff director Chris Adamo. We have been on speed dial for so long, I am sure I will be doing that probably out of habit from now on, day and night. I appreciate his incredible leadership, tenacity, talent, and hard work. Chris deserves a tremendous amount of credit for leading us with his team. I thank him.

I also thank Joe Schultz, who is our chief economist. No matter what the problem, he seemed to make the numbers add up, whether it is the commodity title, crop insurance, or dairy. When at the very end it became very clear that after 3 years of hard work and passing a dairy policy, it wouldn't get the support of the House Republicans and we were going to have to rewrite it in a week and a half—which was no small thing—Joe continued to give us the right kind of advice. I am proud to say that we started with a commitment to have \$23 billion in deficit reduction, counting our sequestration and spending cuts, and we have ended with \$23 billion in deficit reduction and spending reductions in agriculture. Joe has been a huge reason why we have been able to get there.

I thank Jonathan Cordone, who is our chief counsel. He made sure we were right on the process and worked specifically on issues such as trust funds with many colleges and around the complex areas to help them to be able to meet the issues of their States. There were important issues, such as payment reforms and a number of legal issues. He has been an incredibly valuable and important member.

Russ Benham is our counsel on regulatory issues. Some of the trust fund issues we had to address related to regulatory issues and forestry issues. We are very proud that in this bill there is an agriculture advisory committee to the EPA, moving forward on rules. It is extremely significant to have the voice of agriculture involved with the EPA in a formal way. In this and so many other areas, Russ has been very instrumental.

To our conservation team, Tina May is amazing. She is going back to the USDA next week to help lead the implementation, which gives me confidence that this is really going to be done as we intended. Tina May's brilliance in strategy, negotiation, and commitment on these issues is unmatched. Her team is Kevin Norton and Hanna AbouElSeoud. The area of conservation is really landmark in reforms, protecting our land, water, conservation compliance, and setting real standards around strong conservation practices and in forestry as well. These are important areas that we have addressed in forestry and international food aid—America's opportunity to fulfill our values around the world and create more flexibility for us to help feed a hungry world.

Karla Thieman is also on speed dial. The very last phone calls I was making and emails before we wrote and finalized the conference report were with Karla and Chris. Our energy title is about jobs and about energy efficiency. I am so proud of what we were able to do; a landmark energy title; livestock disaster assistance, all of the areas that support livestock and, again, dairy. Karla was our lead on dairy. I think we may have finally stopped waking up in the middle of the night, dreaming about dairy policy. I am not sure, but we are getting there.

Cory Claussen led our efforts on farm credit and beginning farmers. I am so proud we have added our veterans to the support there. I thank him so much.

Brandon McBride—rural development, jobs, and quality of life in rural America. Brandon led our effort to make sure we were strengthening tools for businesses and local units of government and all of those who count on rural development; also research, a new research foundation and partnership, a real commitment to research in a way we have not seen before. I thank Brandon for leading that effort.

Of course, on nutrition, fruits and vegetables, Jacqlyn Schneider and Katie Naessens led an extremely complicated area. Jacqlyn had to negotiate some very difficult areas. I am proud to say that we rejected every harmful policy in the House bill. Because of Jacqlyn and Katie's efforts, we have a strengthened commitment to organics and farmers markets, fresh fruit and vegetables for our children's schools, and so many other areas in which we are beginning to change the paradigm about local food systems and strengthening opportunities for local markets for our farmers.

Grant Colvin has worked so hard on commodities as well as livestock and trade and, of course, exports. They are so very important to us. It is an area of real strength and jobs for our country. I thank Grant for all of his expertise.

As staff assistants, Alexis Stanczuk and Kyle Varner helped the entire team every step of the way. They have been there to help us on every single

project, every single effort we needed help with. I thank Alexis and Kyle.

Jessie Williams and Nicole Hertenstein are clerks. Their entire team basically kept the whole thing together. They made sure we were doing the right thing on point. I thank Jessie, Nicole, and their team as well.

Finally, I would like to thank my personal staff.

Bill Sweeney, my chief of staff, has been with me in a multitude of different capacities—from telling the story on the floor with our charts to making sure we had a coordinated team between the Agriculture Committee staff and all of the talented people on my personal staff, as well as wonderful strategy advice. Bill, as my chief of staff, I am proud to say, has been invaluable in this process.

Matt VanKuiken, my legislative director, worked as a team every single step of the way.

Our press team, when we looked at telling the story of the new farm bill approach, Cullen Schwarz, Ben Becker, Alex Barriger, Will Eberle, and Matt Williams—they were telling this story and getting the facts out every step of the way.

My State team, led by my State director Teresa Plachetka, Kali Fox, Mary Judnich, Brandon Fewins, Korey Hall, Jeremy Hosking, and Adrian Walker—they made sure Michigan's voice was heard in every part of this bill, a tremendous amount of hard work. This bill is better, certainly, for Michigan as a result of all their efforts.

Kasey Gillette in Senator REID's office worked as our partner on everything.

Gary Myrick, Trish Engle, Tim Mitchell, and all of our floor staff—I thank them for all of their patience as we have passed this once, passed this twice, and finally we are going to pass the conference report this afternoon.

I also thank legislative counsel Michelle Johnson-Wieder and Gary Endicott.

I thank Senator COCHRAN's staff of T.A. Hawks and James Glick for their partnership and excellent work.

Finally, I thank Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack and the USDA. The technical expertise we have received on every single section has been absolutely invaluable. When it came to the final days on dairy, the Secretary played a very critical role in helping us get the compromise that will allow us to meet the goals and address farmers all over the country.

Last but not least, I thank the Congressional Budget Office, which we called on day and night. We appreciate their efforts.

I appreciate the patience of the Presiding Officer, who allowed me to speak at this time to make sure we had a chance to say thank you to a lot of folks who deserve, as usual, a tremendous amount of credit for getting this done. They are the folks behind the scenes who have made this happen. I am very proud of each and every one of them.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:43 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. BALDWIN).

AGRICULTURAL ACT OF 2014— CONFERENCE REPORT—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 20 minutes equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees. If no time is yielded, time will be equally charged to both sides.

The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, we have heard a lot from colleagues the last 2 days about just how important this farm bill is, and that is because there is so much more in this bill than what we would call a farm bill. It is really 12 different pieces of legislation, from farm to research, to fruits and vegetables, to energy across the board all put together in something we call the farm bill.

This is, most importantly, a major bipartisan jobs bill that makes sure the 16 million people who work in agriculture—from Michigan to Mississippi, to Minnesota, to Oklahoma, and everywhere in between—have the support they need.

This is an exports bill that will help expand opportunities for American agricultural exports, one of the few areas where our Nation maintains a healthy, robust trade surplus.

This is a research bill that will make a permanent long-term commitment through a new public-private foundation and other investments that will allow us to find solutions to pests and diseases and focus on innovations for the future.

This is an energy bill that will help create the next generation of biofuel to reduce our dependence on foreign oil and will help farmers and rural small business owners generate their own power to improve energy efficiency and lower their costs for their businesses.

This is an economic development bill that will help rural businesses and communities get broadband Internet access so they can find new customers and compete and connect around the country and around the world.

This is a conservation bill that helps farmers and ranchers protect our precious land and water resources. This is our country's largest investment in conservation on private lands that we make as Americans. Most of our land is privately owned. It includes a historic new agreement between commodity and conservation groups that ties conservation compliance with crop insurance so we are being the best possible stewards of our land.

This bill will save taxpayers money and conserve our lands and waters for years to come by preserving millions of

acres of wildlife habitat, which in turn has helped rebuild populations of ducks and quail and pheasants, among others. That is why the bill has the strong support of the National Wildlife Federation, Ducks Unlimited, the Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, and the World Wildlife Fund, which are only a handful of the more than 250 conservation groups that have endorsed this farm bill.

This is a nutrition bill that makes sure families have a safety net, just as we do for farmers. The savings in food assistance comes solely through addressing fraud and misuse while maintaining and protecting critical benefits for those who need help, most often temporarily, putting food on the table for their families while they get back on their feet after having lost their job.

It strengthens the integrity and accountability of SNAP, making sure every single dollar goes to families in need while they get back on their feet. It gives our children more healthy food options in schools and will help bring more healthy, locally grown food into our communities.

This is a deficit reduction bill that will save taxpayers \$23 billion. All together we have cut spending, a portion of it accounts through sequestration, the rest in additional spending in this bill, where we have voluntarily—as I have often said—voluntarily agreed to cut spending in our own area of jurisdiction. By the way, that \$23 billion is more than double the amount of agricultural cuts recommended by the bipartisan Simpson-Bowles Commission.

This is a reform bill that contains the greatest reforms to agricultural programs in decades. We have finally ended direct payment subsidies which are given to farmers even in good times. Instead, we move to a responsible risk-management approach that only gives farmers assistance when they experience a loss. This farm bill is focused on the future, not the past. This bill is taking a critical step toward changing the paradigm of agriculture and the broad range of agricultural production in this country.

This bill has the support of over 370 groups and counting from all parts of the country and ideological backgrounds. That is because as we wrote this bill we worked hard to find common ground to develop a bill that works for every kind of agricultural production in every region of our country. We worked hard and together—and I want to thank my ranking member, the distinguished senior Senator from Mississippi, for his leadership and partnership in this effort—we have included valuable input from both sides of the aisle and from the House and the Senate. I wish to thank all of our colleagues for their ideas, for their willingness to put partisanship aside and work together. This is an example of how we can get work done, and I hope it is just one step of a productive year moving forward.

Thanks to all that work, we have arrived at a farm bill that works for all

of America—for families and farmers, for consumers, for those who care so deeply about protecting our lands and our water. This bill will strengthen agriculture for years to come. It is time to pass it. It is time to get it to the President for signature.

Every single Senator in this Chamber has constituents who work and benefit from agriculture, and certainly just coming from lunch today we should each be thanking a farmer for the safest, most affordable food supply in the world.

After 491 days without a farm bill, our constituents need us to get this done. I urge colleagues to join in a bipartisan way, as we have throughout this process, to vote yes on this farm bill and to give our farmers, our ranchers, and the rest of the 16 million people who work in agriculture the farm bill they deserve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. COCHRAN. Madam President, I first of all want to commend the distinguished Senator from Michigan for her outstanding leadership of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. As we proceeded from the hearings to review those suggestions being made for change and modernization of our agriculture act to the final days of committee hearings and now full debate in the Senate and in the House, it comes to this final vote.

Last night there was a decisive vote of 72 to 22 to end debate on the farm bill. That reflects the appreciation and respect the Senate has for the work of this committee, led by our distinguished chairman, the Senator from Michigan. So I thank her, as well as our House committee counterparts, FRANK LUCAS of Oklahoma and ranking member COLLIN PETERSON of Minnesota, as well as the members of their staff, as we worked our way through the conference between the House and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry leadership.

I wish to thank, too, our majority staff director Chris Adamo and all of Chairwoman STABENOW's staff for their hard work in developing this farm bill. Our committee clerk Jessie Williams and her staff have also provided great assistance throughout this process. They have worked diligently and competently and thoughtfully on this legislation. Their dedication to developing the bill and the conference report led to long days, many working weekends, and we do owe them a very strong debt of gratitude and commendation for this work product.

My staff director T.A. Hawks has been at the job, it seems like, day and night for a long time to help make sure we pass a bill that reflects the sentiment and the suggestions for this Congress for modernization of our agriculture legislation. James Glueck also worked closely with T.A. Hawks and has been a trusted adviser. I am grateful for his good help as well.