

net—not a guarantee on farm prices—to pursuing policies that enhance the availability and affordability of all energy resources, I am glad to know Zippy Duvall will be leading in these and many other areas.

Agriculture is a strategic industry not only for Georgia but also for our Nation. I join our country's farmers and ranchers in the pursuit of a strong, safe, and abundant industry. Our kids and our grandkids depend on this. I am very confident that with leaders like Zippy, we can actually do this.

Congratulations to Zippy, his wife Bonnie, and the entire Duvall family as they begin this exciting chapter together. This election is a great victory not only for Georgia but also for all of agriculture. I look forward to working with Zippy and the members of the American Farm Bureau Federation to promote a strong, safe, and abundant future for our agricultural industry in the United States.

Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### BIPARTISAN SPORTSMEN'S ACT

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, I rise to thank and congratulate my Environmental and Public Works Committee colleagues on the Bipartisan Sportsmen's Act. This legislation will now join the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee's sportsmen's package that was approved last fall. I hope this legislation can now swiftly advance to the Senate floor for consideration and approval.

As a member of the EPW Committee and vice chair of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus, I am grateful for the opportunity to work with my colleagues on legislation to promote our country's hunting, fishing, and conservation heritage. The Bipartisan Sportsmen's Act includes a broad array of bipartisan measures that enhance opportunities for hunters, anglers, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts by preserving our Nation's rich outdoor heritage.

This bill also expands and enhances hunting and fishing opportunities on Federal lands by establishing a more open policy for recreational activities to gain access on public lands. The bill also provides States with more flexibility to build and maintain public shooting ranges, allowing greater opportunities for more Americans to engage in recreational and competitive shooting activities.

It prevents groups from restricting ammunition choices, which would unnecessarily drive up costs, hurt partici-

pation in shooting sports, and consequently decrease important conservation funding. I am especially encouraged by the fact that this bill includes a bipartisan amendment which is identical to the Sensible Environmental Protection Act that I promoted with Senators CARPER and CRAPO. It targets the duplicative permitting of pesticides under FIFRA and the Clean Water Act.

This duplicative process has created unnecessary burdens on resources for pesticide users such as private homeowners, businesses, golf courses, local water, and natural resource authorities, and of course the sportsmen's community.

All across the country sportsmen and outdoor enthusiasts utilize pesticides for critical habitat management by suppressing harmful pests and vector-borne diseases, which threaten outdoor activities of all kinds. Eliminating harmful and invasive pests is crucial to vegetation and ecosystem management.

This legislation clarifies that the NPDES permits should not be required for the application of pesticides that are already approved by the EPA authorized for sale, distribution or use under FIFRA. These products benefit outdoor recreation enthusiasts by protecting and maintaining natural habitats.

Another priority that I championed increases transparency for the Judgment Fund. This provision will help our efforts to track taxpayer-funded litigation that impacts public lands policies. As my colleagues may know, the Judgment Fund is administered by the Treasury Department and is used to pay certain court judgments and settlements against the Federal Government. Essentially, this fund is an unlimited amount of taxpayer dollars which is set aside for Federal Government liability.

The Judgment Fund is not subject to the annual appropriations process, and even more remarkably, the Treasury Department has no reporting requirements so these funds are paid out with very little oversight or scrutiny. This is no small matter, as the Judgment Fund disburses billions of dollars in payments every year. Since the Treasury Department is not bound by reporting requirements, few public details exist about where the funds are going and why.

The Public Lands Council has denounced the lack of oversight of the Judgment Fund, stating that "certain groups continuously sue the Federal Government and Treasury simply writes a check to foot the bill without providing Members of Congress and American taxpayers basic information about the payment." This kind of litigation can have a major impact on sportsmen and others who enjoy multiple uses of Federal lands. A GAO report regarding cases filed against the EPA showed a disturbing pattern where groups and big law firms are

suing under the same statutes to push a political agenda through the courts. The legislation I introduced with Senator GARDNER, known as the Judgment Fund Transparency Act, has been included as a provision in ENR's Sportmen's Act. It will bring these cases to light. Simply put, more transparency leads to greater accountability.

Members of Congress have worked hard on the Bipartisan Sportsmen's Act for the last 6 years. It is time for the Senate to take action. We have the opportunity to provide the sportsmen's community with the certainty that they need to allow important conservation work to thrive without fear of destructive Federal redtape.

I am proud to be the vice chair of the Sportsmen's Caucus, and I look forward to continuing our work to advance these important legislative measures.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator withhold her suggestion?

Mrs. FISCHER. I will. I see Senator BLUMENTHAL on the floor.

I thank the Chair.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, I thank my colleague from Nebraska, and I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

#### 43RD ANNIVERSARY OF ROE V. WADE DECISION

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, I come to the floor on two issues of great importance to our Nation, both involving the rights and opportunities of individuals to live in the greatest, strongest Nation in the history of the world, with the tremendous opportunity to fulfill their dreams and their rights—rights to enhance themselves and rights of privacy.

Tomorrow we will celebrate the 43rd anniversary of the Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*. As I recall well from my days as a law clerk to Justice Blackmun in the term following *Roe v. Wade*, that was a bitterly controversial decision, but it was one that we thought at the time would assure every woman of her constitutional right to make her own decision about whether and when to have a child, based on the fundamental right of privacy that decision enshrined and expressed and protected.

Unfortunately, those great hopes have been dashed. Over the last four decades, this constitutional right to reproductive care has been under attack throughout this country. Rather than advancing the health and well-being of women, legislators in a lot of States, and even in the Federal Government, have put themselves squarely between women and their health care providers, denying that fundamental right of choice that *Roe v. Wade* guaranteed.

That practical reality means that *Roe v. Wade* has been far less effective

than it could and should have been, because those opponents have advocated and implemented dangerous laws that undermine and violate a woman's right to privacy and diminish her access to constitutionally guaranteed reproductive health care services. These restrictions fall disproportionately on minorities and many who live in rural or medically underserved areas. I have great respect for my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, but we are jeopardizing the health care necessary for millions and millions of women and their right to privacy in this great country.

I have introduced a measure that would help prevent these violations of rights at the State level. The Women's Health Protection Act would invalidate not only extreme laws such as the Texas law that is now before the U.S. Supreme Court but dozens of other restrictive legislative steps that States have implemented and introduced to block women from accessing safe and legal health care.

I am happy to celebrate this anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, but I think it is a moment to rededicate ourselves to the continuing task, more urgent and difficult than ever, to enable every woman to have the right of privacy, the right to make decisions about her own body, about whether and when to have children, and that fundamental right can help make abortion safe, legal, and rare.

#### DEBT-FREE COLLEGE

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, I wish to speak now about what should be a right for young people and all people in this country, which is the goal of debt-free college.

Over the last months, I have held roundtables around the State of Connecticut—all around our State—with young people at the college as well as high school level who are in danger of losing the American dream—their dreams, their choices about where they want to go to school, because college for them has become unaffordable. For many who have already been to school, the debt is crushing—in fact, financially crippling. It is approaching \$1.3 trillion, which affects not only those students who have graduated and who may be seeking to go to college but also our entire economy. Someone graduating from college with \$30,000, \$40,000, \$50,000 or \$100,000 of debt and then from graduate school or law school or business school with that same kind of financial burden can't save for retirement, can't start a family, can't buy a home, can't begin a business that may employ people.

College affordability is essential to creating jobs and advancing and fueling economic growth. It is an engine of economic growth. It enhances the talents and the gifts that young people bring to the economy. It provides the skills that are needed now on the assembly line and in business. I encour-

ter businesses across Connecticut—and I am sure it is true across the country—that tell me: We have jobs, we can't fill them, and we can't find young people with the right skills. That is why our community colleges play such an important role in our educational system.

The agenda that we have announced today as a caucus will meet this need in a number of important ways. It will make 2 years of community college tuition-free. It will enable students to refinance their debt when interest rates are lower, as they can now with a loan for a car or a loan for a home, but not for a Federal loan. It will assure that people are enabled a more affordable education by holding colleges accountable and make them responsible for the levels of debt their students incur, because they should be held accountable when those debts default.

It will take those measures and others that are part of a comprehensive agenda that will advance the affordability of college and make debt less burdensome, but it will also expand the availability of Pell grants and take other measures that will make debt less necessary, because the goal should be debt-free college.

Our ultimate aspiration is debt-free college. We are beginning with community colleges that are tuition free, but the ultimate goal ought to be debt-free college. That will require expanding Pell grants and other scholarship aids and financial assistance programs that now are available but simply unacceptable in too small amounts.

I have two measures that I have offered on my own to be taken as part of this total program although they are not part of the act. One would recognize students for the public service they perform. If they become firefighters or police officers or work at the YMCA or in local government, their community service ought to be recognized by reducing the debt they owe, not just at the end of 10 years as happens now but year by year, pro rata; not just if they stay in the same job but if they move from one job to another or even have to move homes, go across State lines, expanding the availability of public service recognition and credit to reduce college debt. It is much in the spirit of the GI Bill. I hope we will move forward to expand the availability of debt recognition and reduction for public service.

I also hope that when our needier students receive assistance for room and board when they go to college, they will not be taxed on that assistance. That happens now. Why should they be taxed on the room and board they need and that assistance to go to college? That is wrong. And scandalously and outrageously, it is wrong that the U.S. Government makes money off the backs of our students. We should be investing in one of the greatest assets in a democracy—people who want to raise their skills and talents and education so they can better

serve not just in the public sector but in the business world, so they can help create jobs themselves and become the entrepreneurs and the job creators. They can't do it if they are burdened with tens of thousands—some hundreds of thousands—in debt. The present levels of debt are a disservice to our Nation. They inhibit freedom, they undercut opportunity, and they destroy dreams.

Some of the most moving moments of my roundtables with young people are to hear them describe how they could not attend their dream school. They called their first choice their dream school and the reason it was their dream school is because they could pursue engineering or nursing or marketing or other kinds of vitally important skills at that place in the best way possible. That was their dream school not because the weather was good or because their friends were there but because the skill levels and the education offered was exactly the right fit for their aspirations. Some cried as they described the unbridgeable gap between what they could afford and what the school charged. With what they could afford—even with financial aid, even with help from their families, and even with debt—they still faced an unbridgeable gap. And those dreams dashed, deferred, destroyed for those students are a national tragedy. For them, it will shape their futures, although I have great confidence that their drive and perseverance will enable them to achieve great things. But for our Nation, it means a deferring and diminishing of our economy and our national quality of life.

We are the strongest, greatest Nation in the history of the world because we provide more opportunity and more freedom than any other country. We are stronger because of our diversity and because we create and we reward the dreamers who have the strength and the ability to set high standards, to aspire to be the best, and to want an education that enables them to achieve those goals.

The current levels of college debt are inconsistent with who we are as a Nation. That is why I am proud today to join my colleagues on this side of the aisle and to say to our friends across the way: Join us. Let's make it bipartisan. If you have a plan, if you have ideas, if you think there are other ways to accomplish things, let's work together, because those students, their families, our Nation, the businesses that are creating jobs and want these young people to fill them so we can drive the economy forward all depend on us working together, reaching across the aisle and making sure that we enable every person, every student who wants to go to college to fulfill that dream without the financially crushing burden of current levels of debt.

Thank you, Madam President.

I yield the floor.