

The majority leader is trying to eliminate advice and consent from the process. We should wait until after the upcoming election. That will be a shorter time than Leader MCCONNELL waited in 2016, the last election year.

I am very concerned with the President's process. He is picking from an ideological list, with a history of personally attacking judges he disagrees with, while demanding loyalty from his appointees. At the same time, this administration is undermining due process across the board—along the border, for minority races or religions, for a woman's right to choose.

The Constitution requires a real advice-and-consent process. The majority leader needs to ensure one. If the McConnell rule was in place in the 2016 election year, it should be in place for 2018.

Given the President's attacks on due process and rule of law, we should let the people speak before we consider his next Supreme Court nominee.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

FARM BILL

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I am here on the Senate floor this afternoon to discuss, really, the farm bill but, more importantly, to discuss the current state of the farm economy in the place I call home, Kansas.

Every 5 years, we have an opportunity to develop farm policy, and this is my fourth time, I would guess, in being involved in farm bill discussions and negotiations and the passage of a farm bill. Each farm bill is developed at a time at which agriculture faces unique challenges, and rural America is in a different circumstance. Yet the farm bill is important to us. It is important to Kansans, and it is important to Kansans whether they are farmers or not. This is a way in which we provide certainty, security—a future—for the places that many of us call home.

The challenges farmers and ranchers face today are significant. They are tremendous. The ag economy is struggling, and commodity prices are low. Over the course of the 2014 farm bill—the one we are soon to replace—farm revenues have fallen by over 50 percent, and there continue to be those low commodity prices today.

In addition to low commodity prices, weather has not been our friend in Kansas and in many places across the country, especially in the Midwest with its continuing drought. So you end up with the worst of circumstances—low commodity prices and not much production.

It is important that we pass the farm bill. It is important that we provide certainty. It is important that we provide a safety net to those who struggle every day to feed, clothe, and provide energy to us and the rest of the world.

A primary motivation for which I asked Kansans to represent them here in the U.S. Senate and to represent them in Congress is the belief that rural America is a place worthy of keeping around for a while longer and I hope a long while longer. But when agricultural interests struggle and when farmers and ranchers are in difficult circumstances, every community across Kansas struggles, and, in fact, the United States of America faces tremendous challenges.

Again, you don't have to be a farmer or rancher in our State, but your community's future depends upon whether the farmers and ranchers are successful. The extended downturn in the economy has forced more and more ag producers to look for off-the-farm income. Many farmers and I would say most farmers in Kansas no longer earn a living solely by farming. Husband, wife, or both have to find off-the-farm income to keep the farm intact.

The Wall Street Journal indicates that 82 percent of income for U.S. farm households is expected to come from jobs off the farm this year. I highlight that because it is that struggle that farmers face every year, all the time, every day, to keep the farm intact.

I visit with farmers and ranchers on a regular basis, and it is apparent that the stress they are encountering is taking its toll. Many farm families are now stretched to the limit of their financial viability.

This week, the Senate has the opportunity to consider and to vote for legislation that will help address the challenges in rural America. The Senate farm bill provides a stable safety net for our farmers and ranchers; protects key risk management tools, crop insurance in particular; and ensures continued access to credit for producers, particularly for our young farmers, which is so important. You cannot borrow money from a bank or from a financial institution in the absence of the safety net that the farm bill provides. You cannot borrow money from a financial institution for a line of credit for your farm to pay for the seed or to buy the fuel in the absence of crop insurance that protects you in the loss or reduction in production on your farm.

I appreciate the strong focus in this farm bill on rural development and on conservation programs. The farm bill is mostly about SNAP, nutrition programs, but the title of the farm bill that is also important to our country is title I, which is the farm program, but you add to that conservation programs, add to that rural development programs, and this is one of the most significant opportunities we have to stand strong, side by side with those who live in rural America.

One of the primary ways that I judge whether farm policy or a farm bill is of

value is the circumstances in which we allow for young farmers, young men and women who grew up on a farm, young people who want to be a farmer—do they have the opportunity to return to their home community, to their family's farm and become farmers? Is that increasing or decreasing? Again, I look at a farm bill and whether it is successful by looking at whether we are increasing the number of young men and women across Kansas and the United States who return to take over family farming and ranching operations.

The McCurry Bros. Angus farm in Sedgwick, KS, is an example of this generational operation that we ought to make sure continues into the future. I just saw and learned yesterday that this year the McCurry Bros. farm is notably celebrating its 90th anniversary. We need more aspects of American life like the McCurry brothers and other farmers and ranching operations where sons and daughters work alongside moms and dads and grandmothers and grandfathers. In agriculture, land, equipment, and livestock are passed down from generation to generation.

I care about farmers and ranchers because they are the economic future of most communities in my State, but I also care about farmers and ranchers because it is a way of life that allows us to pass on values, morals, integrity, and tradition from one generation to the next.

That opportunity to work side by side with mom and dad and the opportunity to work side by side with grandparents is a vanishing thing in our country. Agriculture is a place where it still occurs, and it has been important in the way in which our country has developed—that relationship, that passing of integrity, character, love of life, and understanding what is truly valuable in life. Knowing about farming and ranching and working with your parents and grandparents changes the way you see the world, and in my view, this country needs more of that, not less.

This farm bill is especially important now because of the uncertainty that exists related to trade. With low commodity prices and uncertain export markets now, providing risk management tools and a strong safety net through a farm bill is even more important than ever.

There are low commodity prices, poor weather, and now the uncertainty of where the United States will end up with regard to trade around the globe. We should be clear that no farm program safety net can replace lost exports and lost markets in agriculture. That is why it is critical that we successfully conclude NAFTA renegotiations and avoid a multifront trade war that will have a direct economic consequence for agriculture in rural Kansas.

In meetings across Kansas, sometimes I hear: Jerry, let's just forget the rest of the world. Let's just take care of ourselves.

But if a farmer thinks that or says that or if we think that is possible, I would say to those people: Which 48 percent of wheat acres in Kansas do you not want to plant and do you not want to harvest? We produce more in the United States in agriculture than we can consume, and we earn a living by selling that surplus to places around the globe. It is income to farmers and ranchers. It is the economic future of my State.

The trade uncertainty has already impacted markets, as countries that typically buy American-grown commodities have started to look to other suppliers, including to our competitors, especially Argentina and Brazil. Given the trade and market uncertainty, it is critical that we do our job and pass a farm bill this week as we work toward a finished product for the President to sign by the end of September, when the current farm bill, the current legislation, expires.

In that economic development aspect of the farm bill and in that rural development aspect of the farm bill, I want to mention a key provision of the Senate farm bill. I want to indicate some areas in which we can make some improvements, and I would like to do this in a highlighted way in a brief manner.

I want to talk about the importance of broadband to rural States like mine. I was excited to see that the fiscal year 2018 omnibus bill included a loan and grant program in the United States to bolster broadband across our States and bridge the digital divide between urban and rural. To ensure effective use of those Federal resources, I applauded the Senate farm bill for including critical guardrails to prevent duplication and overbuilding of broadband infrastructure for new and current USDA programs. We want to make sure those dollars are spent where there are no broadband services or where there is very little.

Access to broadband in agriculture is so important. It matters in our communities, schools, libraries, hospitals, and businesses, but to farmers in today's world, technology is the key, and broadband access determines whether your farm equipment can provide you with the latest technology and information to more efficiently and effectively and hopefully more profitably farm. Access to quality high-speed broadband will remain a necessary tool for rural communities to participate in an increasingly globalized economy.

I also want to mention something called ECP. I note my appreciation to Chairman ROBERTS that this bill includes an amendment that I offered along with Democratic Members in the Senate, to increase the level of support that ranchers would receive under the Emergency Conservation Program, ECP.

In 2016 and 2017, I talked about how weather wasn't our friend, but that drought then caused fires to consume thousands of acres of grassland in our State, causing great damage to cattle

producers. Ten thousand miles of fence was destroyed in Clark County, KS, alone. The ECP provided assistance to producers but in many cases fell well short of providing the level of assistance needed to replace the miles of fence that ranchers lost in the fire. It wasn't just fencing that ranchers lost; it was their entire herd in many instances.

We also learned of areas of ECP that ought to be improved as a result of those fires. This legislation incorporates those provisions, and I am appreciative that is the case.

Farmers and ranchers have been frustrated by the long delays they have encountered in receiving reimbursement for building those fences under ECP. In many instances, the ranchers didn't have the money to pay for the fencing in the beginning. So this is a significant improvement, and I am grateful it is here. When a ranching family has lost everything in a fire, including cattle, fence, rangeland, and their homes, taking over a year to provide emergency assistance is unacceptable. Further, because they lost everything, many of the ranchers do not have any collateral necessary to get a loan to cover the significant costs of rebuilding fencing.

I also want to compliment the Senator from South Dakota for legislation in an amendment that he has offered regarding livestock hauling. We have a significant problem in our ranching world where, in many communities, truckers—those who haul cattle from market to market, from feed yard, to market, to processing plant—that is an important way to earn a living. The Senator from South Dakota, Mr. THUNE, has offered an additional 150-mile radius exemption for agriculture at the end of that drive.

Cattle are transported across this Nation to Kansas each year, and we need to make sure that the hours-of-service rules for those haulers allow that to occur safely and humanely, yet allow the transportation to continue to occur. I am a cosponsor of legislation to address this issue, and I hope that amendment is included in the farm bill.

Again, I appreciate the chance to have a conversation with my colleagues this evening to highlight the importance of this legislation. This is about the future of America. It is about the future of rural America.

I always look forward to working on a farm bill that allows us an opportunity to enact and improve on policies that help the farmers, ranchers, and the rural communities they live in and support. This farm bill will provide stable farm policies during a time of high uncertainty in agriculture.

I thank Senator ROBERTS, the chairman of the Agriculture Committee, my colleague from Kansas, and I thank the Senator from Michigan, Ms. STABENOW, the ranking Democrat on the committee, for working together. I hope at the end of the day or by the end of this

week we will see the benefits of their work.

I look forward to supporting this bill and continuing to work to improve the final version as it continues its march through conference with the House.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I commend my colleague for his focus on the farm bill and thank him for the work we are doing together on the Consumer Protection Subcommittee of the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. I look forward to continuing that work together, which involves so closely and importantly the rule of law.

FAMILY SEPARATION

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I come to the floor on a separate issue involving the rule of law. We have been reminded literally within the last 24 hours about the importance of the rule of law as applied to the families who have sought to cross the border and experienced extraordinary cruelty and inhumanity when their children were taken from them. A court, literally in the last 24 hours, issued an order requiring that those children be reunited with their families. That decision is not only a humane and moral one, it is also in accord with constitutional and statutory requirements. Those children never should have been separated from their parents, but now, because of the court, an excessive and abusive use of power will be corrected.

We are living in a time of unparalleled threats to the rule of law and fundamental rights and liberties from a Chief Executive who seems to have no respect for them. The courts are exercising their traditional role—in fact, the role the Founders envisioned for them as a check on unbridled Executive power.

We also learned just today that a key figure in the judicial system, Justice Kennedy, will be retiring this summer. This retirement is earthshaking and gut-wrenching, and his departure means a historic challenge is ahead. The American people should have a voice. My Republican colleagues should follow their own precedent. A confirmation vote should take place after the new Congress is seated. A historic decision—one that will literally shake the decisions of the courts for years and likely decades—requires deliberate consideration that simply is impossible in the short months we have between now and the election; indeed, politically charged months.

The future of privacy protections, women's healthcare, and many basic civil rights, including healthcare—whether young people are on their parents' insurance until the age of 26, whether people are vulnerable to pre-existing condition abuses, whether people have basic healthcare rights that