need to correct this problem, and that is exactly what S. 2856 will do.

In fiscal year 2003, there were significant contributions being made by EQIP, Farmland Protection, WHIP, and the GRP to the Conservation Reserve Program and Wetlands Reserve Program. EQIP donated $57.6 million, Farmland Protection donated $18 million, WHIP gave $5.6 million, and Grasslands Reserve gave $9.5 million.

In my home State of Pennsylvania, these conservation programs are extremely important.

In fiscal year 2003, Pennsylvania received $8.4 million to fund 293 contracts throughout the EQIP program. There were actually 1,238 unfunded contracts totaling $35.4 million. In 2004, Pennsylvania received $11.9 million, a significant increase, but not enough to fund all of the contracts that are on hold.

The problem is the same for Farmland Protection, which is critical to Pennsylvania. In 2003, Pennsylvania received $4.9 million to protect 6,266 acres. In 2004, the State received less, approximately $4 million for the program.

Allowing vital programs such as EQIP and Farm and Ranchland Protection to be donors for other conservation programs only makes the funding backlog worse.

Therefore, I urge my colleagues to support S. 2856 and implement technical assistance funding for agriculture conservation programs the way in which Congress intended.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. HOLDEN) for his contribution, as well, to this effort, and also more especially thank him for the kind words he has extended to our colleague, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), who has served this Congress with distinction for 26 years, the last 8 of which as the ranking member of the Committee on Agriculture. He is known across the country as somebody who has helped American agriculture.

He worked with my predecessor, our colleague Congressman Combest, his neighbor, former neighbor in Texas, to write the last farm bill which has been a noteworthy success in the first almost 4 years now of its implementation. He is somebody that I will miss as my partner in working with American agriculture, and I thank him and commend him for more than a quarter century of service to the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I thank my colleague, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. HOLDEN), and I thank my chairman for the kind words. I do believe this is the last time that I will occupy this mike. I thought it was so a few weeks ago, but it was not; we had one more shot. But I do very much appreciate the kind words that have been said, and we will miss this place. Mr. Speaker, we will miss you. You do an excellent job of conducting House business. Every time you handle the gavel, you do it in a way that is very fair and very professionally done.

Mr. Chairman, it has been a pleasure serving with you, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE). I would be less than honest to not say that I would much rather have had the titles reversed, but that was not to be. And were it not to be, then I appreciate the fact that the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) has maintained the same bipartisan, nonpartisan activities on his part that has made the House Committee on Agriculture one of the few committees of this body that still works in the way in which I think our forefathers intended that it work: full consultation.

Listening to some of the previous comments about staff and what have you, I can honestly say that we have never had that problem on the House Committee on Agriculture, to the best of my knowledge. Our staffs, both committee and subcommittee, have always worked together in a way in which we put forward the quality work that I believe this committee has put forward to this House in the 26 years that I have had the privilege of serving here.

I want to thank my staff, those who are with me on the floor, and those who are not, who have worked and served with me, some of them my entire 26 years. We cannot do without staff. Many times they get the blame for things that go wrong, and we get the credit for things that go right. But day in and day out, this body cannot operate without the professional staff, and I want to thank my staff and thank the majority staff. Because I truly, truly mean it when I say what I already said a moment ago about the manner in which the House Committee on Agriculture has worked.

Mr. KIND. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of S. 2856. This important legislation clarifies Congress's intent in the last Farm bill—that administrative costs needed to implement voluntary conservation programs should flow from the Commodity Credit Corporation and not from the working lands programs themselves. It is crucial that we pass this bill today otherwise scarce conservation funds will once again be lost.

Mr. Speaker, USDA has diverted more than $200 million from four working lands conservation programs. Specifically, USDA diverted precious funds from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Farmland and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), the Grasslands Reserve Program, and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) to pay for administrative costs.

The 2002 Farm Bill clearly intended USDA to use mandatory funds from the Commodity Credit Corporation to pay for the administrative costs of two land retirement programs. The plain language of the statute and legislative history, including a critical colloquy, support this interpretation of the Farm Bill, and GAO concurred in a recent memo. But, government lawyers misinterpreted the 2002 Farm Bill and forced USDA to divert working lands funds.

Despite the funds provided by the 2002 Farm Bill, most farmers and ranchers offering to restore wetlands and grasslands or offering to change the way they farm to improve air and water quality are still rejected when they seek USDA conservation assistance. For example, farmers and ranchers face $3 billion backlog when they seek financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to improve water quality or wildlife habitat. These long lines only grow longer when funds are diverted.

By providing new funds for working lands programs like EQIP and WHIP in the 2002 Farm Bill, Congress provided needed resources to help farmers manage working lands to produce food and fiber and simultaneously enhance water quality and wildlife habitat. For example, EQIP helps share the cost of a broad range of land management practices that help the environment, including more efficient use of fertilizers and pesticides, and innovative technologies to store and reuse animal waste.

Lastly, because 70 percent of the American landscape is private land, farming dramatically affects the health of America's rivers, lakes and bays and the fate of America's rare species. Most rare species depend upon private lands for the survival, and many will become extinct without help from private landowners. When farmers and ranchers take steps to help improve air and water quality or assist rare species, they can face new costs, new risks, or loss of income. Conservation programs help share these costs, underwrite these risks, or offset losses of income.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important bill to America's hardworking farmers and ranchers and I urge my colleague's support.

Mr. STENHOLM. I have no further requests for time and, Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support S. 2856, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 2856.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the bill just considered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Virginia?

There was no objection.