

extraneous to the debate. And for those who may still be unclear what a partial birth abortion procedure is, it is this: a fully formed baby—in most cases a viable fetus of 23–26 weeks—is pulled from its mother until all but the head is delivered. Then, a scissors is plunged into the base of the skull, a tube is inserted and the child's brains are suctioned out so that the head of the now-dead infant collapses and is delivered.

Partial birth abortion is tragic for the infant who loses his or her life in this brutal procedure. It is also a personal tragedy for the families who choose the procedure, as it is for those who perform it—even if they aren't aware of it. But partial birth abortion is also a profound social tragedy. It rips through the moral cohesion of our public life. It cuts into our most deeply held beliefs about the importance of protecting and cherishing vulnerable human life. It fractures our sense that the laws of our country should reflect long-held, commonly accepted moral norms.

Yet this kind of tragedy—can be an unexpected catalyst for consensus, for new coalitions and configurations in our public life. The partial birth abortion debate moves us beyond the traditional pro-life/pro-choice lines of confrontation to hollow out a place in the public square where disparate individuals and groups can come together and draw a line that they know should not be crossed.

The stark tragedy of partial birth abortion can be the beginning of a significant public discussion, where we define—or redefine—our first principles. Why is such a discussion important? Precisely because it throws into relief the fundamental truths around which a moral consensus is formed in this country. And, as John Courtney Murray reminds us in *We Hold These Truths*, *Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition*, a public consensus which finds its expression in the law should be “an ensemble of substantive truths, a structure of basic knowledge, an order of elementary affirmations . . .”

If we do not have fundamental agreement about first principles, we simply cannot engage one another in civil debate. All we have is the confusion of different factions locked in their own moral universe. If we could agree publicly on just this one point—that partial birth abortion is not something our laws should sanction, and if we could then reveal the consensus—a consensus that I know exists—against killing an almost-born infant, we would have significantly advanced the discussion about what moral status and dignity we give to life in all its stages. Public agreement, codified by law, on this one prohibition gives us a common point of departure, a common language even, because we agree, albeit in a narrow sense, on the meaning of fundamental terms such as life and death. And it is with this common point of departure and discourse—however narrow—that we gain a degree of coherence and unity in our public life and dialogue.

I truly believe that out of the horror and tragedy of partial birth abortions, we can find points of agreement across ideological, political and religious lines which enable us to work toward a life-sustaining culture. So, as hundreds of thousands of faithful and steadfast citizens come together to participate in this year's March for Life let us remember that such a culture, the culture for which we hope and pray daily, might very well be achieved one argument at a time. ●

PRESIDENT'S BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR AVIATION

● Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I rise today to express my deep disappointment in the President's 1998 budget re-

quest for critical aviation safety and infrastructure purposes. Most notably, the administration proposes to fund the Airport Improvement Program [AIP] at only two-thirds of its current level. This represents a drastic cut to our Nation's airport grant program, which supports airport safety, security, and capacity programs.

Mr. President, the administration has assured the American public of its commitment to a safe and secure aviation system. Without adequate resources, this assurance rings hollow.

For instance, the White House Commission on Safety and Security is due to report tomorrow on a number of steps we should take to enhance the security of the aviation system. I expect the Commission will offer valuable insight on where we should go from here to implement additional security enhancements. How we pay for these enhancements is a significant issue.

In addition, Congress approved and the President signed into law the Federal Aviation Reauthorization Act of 1996. Administration officials hailed the importance of the bill's safety and security initiatives. We all joined together at the signing ceremony in praise of the legislation's security improvements. However, these improvements are meaningless without adequate financial support. For politicians to praise their own efforts in a press conference and yet fail to provide sufficient resources is cynical, at best.

Again, I want to be clear. The administration's actions and assurances are only as good as the resources allocated to implement them. Unfortunately, the administration submitted a budget request significantly short on aviation capital improvements, so that he can use these resources elsewhere in the budget to support his spending initiatives. Meanwhile, he knows he can count on Congress to step up to the plate and restore funding for vital aviation initiatives. Such budget chicanery is neither serious nor responsible.

Past experience bears out this point. When President Clinton took office, the Airport Improvement Program was a \$1.9 billion program. Every year, Congress has funded the program at a level higher than the request. For example, in fiscal year 1996, the AIP request was for \$1.3 billion, and Congress enacted a \$1.45 billion level. In fiscal year 1997, the administration requested \$1.35 billion and Congress responded with a \$1.46 billion appropriation. At the same time, the administration claimed record-level investments in transportation infrastructure improvements.

The AIP funds more than just airport construction projects, which make airports safer and enhance the system's ability to handle ever increasing levels of air traffic. Airports also use these funds to support their security programs and purchase security-related equipment.

The Administration's budget request also proposes reduced funding for the FAA facilities and equipment account.

This account is the principal resource for modernizing and improving the air traffic control system, providing enhanced baggage screening equipment, and enhanced weather detection programs.

I recognize that the Administration has made efforts to bolster its safety and security work force. Even so, a significant funding source for FAA operations depends on an unspecified user fee for which the FAA has no statutory authority to collect.

Mr. President, this is not a serious budget proposal. The Administration should back up its safety and security recommendations with enough funding to put them in place. The Nation's air travelers have paid taxes dedicated to support the aviation system. They rightfully expect the Government's commitment to spend these funds on their intended purpose. ●

RESTORING INCOME AVERAGING FOR FARMERS

● Mr. HAGEL. Mr. President, today I am cosponsoring S. 251, a measure that will provide farmers and ranchers with a valuable tool—income averaging—to help manage their agricultural operations, improve profitability, and reduce the tax burden on a crucial Nebraska livelihood. I commend Senator SHELBY, the bill's principal sponsor, for his leadership on this matter.

Today's Federal Tax Code is hardly a friend to the family farmer.

For example, farmers and ranchers do not have access to company or government pensions and retirement plans, in which many other Americans have the ability to participate. Farmers and ranchers will receive fewer Social Security benefits than workers in most other careers since they plow much of their income back into the farm. And, as self-employed workers, farmers and ranchers are charged with payroll taxes that are nearly double that of most any other private business employee. Even retirement can be a painful proposition for agricultural producers who have spent their lives building a security nest egg only to be faced with onerous capital gains tax rates and, later, with a confiscatory estate tax when they want to pass their farm along to their children.

The American consumer still enjoys the most plentiful food supply at the lowest cost in the developed world—thanks to our Nation's agricultural might. Population growth, rising per capita incomes, expanded trade opportunities, along with new production and marketing technologies, are a few of the reasons why the future of American agriculture is so bright. However, flexibility in our U.S. Tax Code is still needed to strengthen our position as the world's leader in production agriculture.

Before 1986, agricultural producers were allowed to average their income over a 2-year period, which allowed greater flexibility in both profit potential and management decisions. This