

small oil well production such as we have in Kansas. We need to encourage this domestic production. Let's have a tax credit for these marginal oil wells that produce less than 10 barrels a day. You get positive comments from the administration, but then nothing happens. On biofuels or Central Asia, there is enormous capacity in that region for oil and gas. Yes, this takes place, but what are you going to do to cause this to happen? What is your strategy? Nothing is put forward.

Here we are with high gas prices and high heating oil. My parents burn propane to heat their home. They are paying a significant premium price now. All of these things are taking place, and then their answer is to tap this 1½ day supply, instead of dealing with fundamentals which they have failed to do over a period of time. So we have been warned. I hope we can press the administration, and I hope this is something to which people pay attention.

Mr. SESSIONS. I thank the Senator for those comments, and I do think it is important for America. The average citizen doesn't have time to watch debate here and hear what goes on in committees, but this has been a matter of real contention for a number of years. There have been warnings by people such as Senator MURKOWSKI, who chairs the Energy Committee, and others, that this would occur, and it has now occurred. I think it is particularly a condemnation of the policy when you have been told about the consequences and warned about it publicly and still you have not acted. That, to me, is troubling. I appreciate the Senator's comments.

I yield the floor.

THE PACKERS AND STOCKYARDS ENFORCEMENT IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2000

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I rise to address something about which the occupant of the chair has a great deal of concern. A bill was introduced recently by Senator GRASSLEY from Iowa. I support his bill, the Packers and Stockyards Enforcement Improvement Act of 2000. I think this is a commonsense approach to a very difficult agricultural antitrust concern taking place. I applaud Senator GRASSLEY's approach and endorse his Stockyards Enforcement Act of 2000.

Concerns about concentration and market monopolization have risen in recent years, with the remaining low prices that farmers have received and the struggle that we have had to adopt and adapt to the globalized commerce that we see taking place.

I was visiting yesterday with my dad, who farms full time in Kansas, and my brother who farms with him, about concerns regarding the concentration and the low prices taking place and what is happening around them.

What Senator GRASSLEY has done is request a GAO study, and he found that the USDA has not adequately put for-

ward efforts of enforcement in the packers and stockyards field, and that needs to take place. He is taking the GAO study and putting it into legislative language. I believe it would be prudent and wise for this Congress to pass that language.

Senator GRASSLEY's bill spells out specific reforms that will make a direct difference in the way antitrust issues and anticompetitive practices are dealt with. Specifically, the bill will require USDA to formulate and improve investigation and case methods for competition-related allegations in consultation with the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission; integrate attorney and economist teams, with attorney input from the very beginning of an investigation, rather than merely signing off at the end of the inquiry.

It turns out that the GAO study reports that the economists are looking at the cases early on but the attorneys are not. The attorneys need to be involved at the very outset. By the nature of these charges, they are legal issues and should be looked at by attorneys at the very outset. It would establish specific training programs for attorneys and investigators involved in antitrust investigations. It would require a report to Congress on the state of the market and concerns about anticompetitive practices.

Senator GRASSLEY, today, chaired a hearing that further illuminated the problems, needs, and solutions.

Senator GRASSLEY's bill comes after a thorough examination of USDA's enforcement of the Packer's and Stockyards Act by the GAO. That report, released last week, found numerous problems in the way the agency approaches these investigations. I have to say, as somebody whose family is directly involved in farming, who has been secretary of agriculture for the State of Kansas, it troubles me when the Department is having difficulties enforcing this very important area of the law.

This bill simply puts into law these GAO recommendations for USDA reform. This bill is necessary because USDA has been struggling to address many of these concerns raised by the GAO in terms of antitrust enforcement over the past 3 years. This issue has been raised in the Kansas State Legislature this last session with a great deal of concern about really who is watching. Are they properly prepared and adequately staffed to look into these antitrust investigations and allegations? This bill gets reforms done within a year and ensures that the law is being enforced.

Today's agricultural markets are in tough shape. Prices are too low. We cannot, however, make assumptions about concentration as the cause without having accurate information and thorough investigations. Under Senator GRASSLEY's bill, this process will be greatly improved because it requires USDA to retool and devote more re-

sources to the area of antitrust enforcement.

This bill avoids the pitfalls of lumping the innocent in with the guilty and instead sorts out anticompetitive practices where they occur. These reforms are necessary to restore producer confidence in the Packers and Stockyards Act and USDA's ability to police this increasingly concentrated industry.

Again, I thank Senator GRASSLEY for his wise approach on this tough issue and his continued sincere concern for the farmers of this Nation. This has been an excellent effort to move forward by Senator GRASSLEY.

THE VETERANS CLAIMS ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2000

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Veterans' Affairs Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 4864, and the Senate then proceed to its immediate consideration.

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

The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 4864) to amend title 48, United States Code, to reaffirm and clarify the duty of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to assist claimants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to the consider the bill.

AMENDMENT NO. 4189

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, there is a substitute amendment at the desk submitted by Senators SPECTER and ROCKEFELLER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kansas (Mr. BROWNBACK) for Mr. SPECTER and Mr. ROCKEFELLER proposes an amendment numbered 4189.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

(The text of the amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Amendments Submitted.")

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought recognition to explain briefly an action that I, as chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, propose to take today with respect to a House-passed bill, H.R. 4864. I take this action with the concurrence and support of the committee's ranking member, Senator JAY ROCKEFELLER and Senator PATTY MURRAY, the original sponsor of Senate legislation, S. 1810, to reinstate VA's duty to assist claimants in the preparation of their claims.

In 1999, the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans claims issued a ruling, *Morton v. West*, 12 Vet. App. 477 (1999), which had the effect of barring the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from offering its assistance to