

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, this is a landmark achievement. Let me indicate to my colleagues we have counted the votes—79 votes for this bill—and there are more votes for a farm bill than any farm bill going back to 1973, and that is with the Presidential candidates missing. That would have been another four votes. No farm bill has had more votes than this bipartisan bill since 1973.

That is a tribute to our leadership, the chairman of the committee, Senator HARKIN, who came to this bill with a vision for moving agriculture in a new direction. This is a good beginning—not everything the chairman would have liked, and some of us had interests that had to be addressed. So we were ready to follow his leadership, but we also had to deal with some of the realities of our individual States, and I know the chairman recognizes that. But we applaud him for his vision because this bill moves in a different direction.

We have additional resources, important additional resources for conservation and for nutrition. The people of this country will look back on this bill, and they will also see the beginning of very important reform. The end of the three-entity rule, the direct attribution, dramatic reduction in adjusted gross income for nonfarmers. It will go from \$2.5 million down to \$750,000.

This bill is good for the economy and it is paid for. So we all salute the chairman and his staff: Mark Halverson, the staff director, who has been so dedicated to this cause. Mark, we appreciate the extraordinary efforts and energy you have put into this bill. To Susan Keith, who is a fierce advocate and somebody who is a real pro. She knows these programs backward and forward. Susan, we appreciate all the contributions you have made.

To our ranking member, Senator CHAMBLISS—“Cool Hand Luke.” You couldn’t have a better ranking member for this committee, somebody who has been calm in the eye of the storm. This has been tough to do, and the occupant of the chair knows that is the case. Senator CHAMBLISS has been a remarkable partner. So SAXBY, we have enjoyed getting to know you and working with you, and thanks for the extraordinary professionalism of your staff: Martha Scott Poindexter. Outstanding. Unflappable. Always there. Very smart, very knowledgeable, and very committed to producing a good bill for this country. Vernie Hubert, an absolute pro. He has been on both sides of the aisle and respected on both sides and somehow is able to maintain that respect. That is exactly the way the Senate ought to function. Thank you so much for the good counsel we have received.

To other Senators on the committee, let’s say a special thanks to Senator BAUCUS, chairman of the Finance Committee, who helped us get very impor-

tant additional resources. Thank you, Senator BAUCUS. To other leaders on the committee, Senator LEAHY, especially on the dairy provisions. So many others.

Senator STABENOW, who led the fight for specialty crops. We deeply appreciate Senator STABENOW and all you did to help bring us together as well. Senator KLOBUCHAR. Senator KLOBUCHAR, who had special interest in renewable energy provisions. One of the exciting things about this bill is it is going to reduce our dependence on foreign energy.

A new Senator to the committee, Senator CASEY, who has been outstanding, a quick learner, and we appreciate his contribution. Senator SHERROD BROWN. Boy, he brings passion to this cause. You couldn’t have a better member of the committee than SHERROD BROWN, who has done his homework and is engaged.

To the other Members as well, we so deeply appreciate the contributions that have been made. My partner right here, the Senator from Colorado, Mr. SALAZAR, who has that gift for bringing people together when it is especially difficult to do so. He has a gift, and he is always there working to bring people in so we can reach conclusion. Certainly to BLANCHE LINCOLN. Boy, I tell you, you want her on your side when you are in a fight. She is fierce, she is determined, and she does not give up. Congratulations, Senator. We know you represented your people and you represented them well.

To the Senator from Nebraska, Senator NELSON, who is deeply knowledgeable. Of course, nobody knows more about crop insurance on our committee than BEN NELSON. He has been a huge help to us. We thank them all.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I wish to join my colleagues in their accolades for what has happened here today. This is a historic move forward, especially when you look at the votes we have for this legislation, because it is such a good piece of legislation. We had Republicans and Democrats coming together saying this is a new way forward for America, for food security, for energy security, for nutrition and all the rest of it that is good in this legislation.

I wish to thank everyone who has been involved, from Ranking Member CHAMBLISS’s leadership, to the chairman of the committee, TOM HARKIN, and all his staff, who have been so tireless and so patient with us as we have moved forward with this effort. It is always important, because there are so many staff involved in this effort, to say thank you, and I wish to thank my staff: Brendan McGuire, Tommy Olsen, Grant Leslie, and Steve Black, and to others who have been with me working on this legislation now for 2½ years.

Also, I wish to thank the staff of Senator HARKIN, Mark Halverson, and

Susan Keith, for their great work and leadership, as well as Senator CONRAD’s staff, Jim Miller and Tom Marr. Without them, it would have been very difficult to get finalization on this legislation. Thanks also to Senator CHAMBLISS’s staff, Martha Scott, who had a wonderful job of making sure we put all this together and Vernie as well. Thank you.

I think it is important also for us to put this in the context of what has happened in the Senate. We ought to be very proud of what this Chamber has done under the leadership of Senator REID, who, coming into this week, had a very tough agenda. When you think about it, the American people should be proud of the Senate today because we have passed a historic energy bill, which is a giant step forward in terms of our quest for energy independence, and we have passed a Defense authorization bill, to make sure we have the right strength in our military forces who will defend our country and our homelands and our world. Today, passing the farm bill, we have taken a huge step, making sure we lead the world in terms of security.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TESTER). The Senator from North Carolina is recognized.

Mrs. DOLE. Let me add my congratulations to Senators HARKIN and CHAMBLISS for their hard work and many accomplishments in passage of the farm bill. I congratulate all involved.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for about 10 minutes as in morning business.

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

HUNGER PROVISIONS IN THE FARM BILL

Mrs. DOLE. Mr. President, there has been a great deal of debate regarding many aspects of the farm bill; but, there is one issue that has received relatively little attention on the Senate floor, yet it is one of the most important matters facing our country. That issue is hunger, and it affects 1 in 10 U.S. households, including nearly 1 million of North Carolina’s 8.8 million residents.

Fortunately, the farm bill we have just passed contains a number of provisions that will support efforts to help the hungry. Take for example, the Food Employment Empowerment and Development Act, or the FEED Act, which Senator LAUTENBERG and I have worked on together. I am very pleased that this measure has been included in the managers package. The FEED Act helps fight hunger by combining food rescue with job training, thus teaching unemployed and homeless adults the skills needed to work in the food service industry. This provision will provide much-needed resources to community kitchens around the country.

Successful FEED-type programs already exist. For example, in Charlotte,

NC, the Community Culinary School, which I visited last month, recruits students from social service agencies, homeless shelters, halfway houses and work release programs. Just around the corner from the U.S. Capitol, students are hard at work in the DC Central Kitchen's culinary job training class. This is a model program, which began in 1990, and it is always a privilege for me to go over to the Kitchen and meet with folks who have faced great adversity but are now on track for a meaningful career. Earlier this year, I visited on their graduation day, and the graduates were so excited they were dancing in the kitchen. They were ready to start good jobs.

Of course, for the DC Central Kitchen, Charlotte Community Culinary School and other hunger relief organizations to carry out their mission, they must have food. To this end, I am very pleased that Senator GRASSLEY and Senator LUGAR have joined me as co-sponsors of my food donation amendment included in the managers package. My thanks to Chairman BAUCUS, and a special thank you to Ranking Member GRASSLEY, as well as their staffs, for working with me in this effort. My amendment addresses four tax issues that will encourage food donations and volunteering to help the hungry.

First, my amendment extends a provision from the Pension Protection Act that allows any taxpayer to claim an enhanced deduction for donations of food. This deduction is set to expire at the end of the year; my amendment extends it for 2 additional years.

Second, my amendment allows restaurants to qualify for this deduction. Unfortunately, a drafting error excluded most restaurants from utilizing this deduction due to their tax structure. My amendment corrects this problem and provides restaurants with an extra incentive to donate food for hunger relief.

Third, it simplifies the rules that allow farmers and ranchers to take advantage of this deduction for donating their products.

Finally, my amendment allows volunteers to receive a tax deduction for mileage incurred while transporting food donations. As a former President of the American Red Cross, I know first hand the importance of volunteers—there would be no Red Cross without the 1.3 million volunteers—and I understand that many charities, like Meals on Wheels, depend on volunteers using their personal vehicles to deliver food to countless tables across the country.

In addition, volunteers who glean and transport food could benefit from this tax deduction measure. Excess crops that would otherwise be plowed under or thrown out are taken from farms and other entities and distributed to the needy. In the Old Testament, in the book of Ruth, we learn that she gleaned in the fields so that her family could eat.

Each year in this country, 96 billion pounds of good, nutritious food is left

over or thrown away. Gleaning helps eliminate this waste. I have gleaned a number of times with an organization called the Society of St. Andrew, the latest being sweet potatoes in Harnett County, NC, in October.

While I have a number of concerns about the farm bill and its impact on North Carolina agriculture, I welcome this bill's hunger and nutrition focus. Especially at this beautiful season of giving and thanksgiving we should remember our 35 million fellow Americans who are struggling just to have enough to eat. The bill's provisions will help us keep up the fight in the battle against hunger. This is a campaign that cannot be won in months, or even a few years, but with a caring Government and a caring people working together, ending hunger in America is certainly a victory within reach.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate go to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

MORTGAGE FORGIVENESS DEBT RELIEF ACT OF 2007

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I now ask unanimous consent the Committee on Finance be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 3648, and the Senate 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. 3648) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exclude discharges of indebtedness on principal residences from gross income, and for other purposes.

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

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the amendment at the desk be agreed to, the bill as amended be read a third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and any statements relating to the measure be printed in the RECORD.

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

The amendment (No. 3856), in the nature of a substitute, was agreed to, as follows:

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

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill (H.R. 3648), as amended, was read the third time and passed.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, this is a very important measure we have adopted in the Senate. In fact, today is a very important day for families all across the United States who find themselves in this mortgage crisis that we have been hearing about, that we have been talking about, that we have been meeting about. Two important actions have taken place that will make a real difference in people's lives today. The first was, earlier today, modernization of the Federal Housing Authority, the FHA.

This had not been updated since the 1930s when people were in another time of tremendous crisis, losing their homes.

We have come together today and put forward modernization that will allow more people to be able to get refinancing, to be able to get help and support from the FHA, to be able to keep their homes. That is what we all want, the American dream of keeping our homes, of making sure our families have a roof over their head, that we can invest in equity in a home as part of creating that middle-class dream for ourselves, for our families, and it is how we strengthen the community when we have home ownership.

That is an important piece, and we just adopted the other piece that is very significant, particularly time-sensitive, and that is to make sure that no one who finds themselves in a mortgage foreclosure this year, in 2007, or finds themselves having to refinance their home below the value of their mortgage or through a short sale find themselves in a situation where, on top of losing their home or losing money, they have another tax bill.

Right now, up until the action we took a few moments ago, taxpayers, families across America, would find themselves, for example, in a situation of, if they had a \$100,000 mortgage and they refinanced at \$80,000 or the bank sold their home on a foreclosure at \$80,000, they would find themselves paying taxes on that difference between \$100,000 and \$80,000, that \$20,000 difference. If it was forgiven by the lender, they would pay taxes on that as if it were income. That makes no sense when families are challenged, facing the loss of their homes, struggling to make ends meet—we are coming up to Christmas now—when families are struggling to make sure they have what we all want, to be able to give our children a wonderful Christmas, to be able to have a home for them, a place for the Christmas tree.

There are too many families who now find themselves in a real crisis. I am very grateful to everyone who has been involved in getting us to this point. We have now said loudly and clearly that we understand and we are not going to allow families to have an additional