I have the figures from our Commissioner of Agriculture. I am going to submit them for the record. But the preliminary figures that we have been scrambling to get in the last few weeks, from L.S.U., and from our research centers and extension service centers, say it is a minimum of a $700 million loss just in Louisiana.

I know Texas is still struggling. The people just got back to Galveston yesterday. We still cannot get into Cameron Parish, which is the parish closest to Texas, along our border, because it is that devastated and flooded. We only have 10,000 people who live there, but it is a great farming and ranching community. Yes, I admit our numbers are not completely in from Cameron. But it doesn't take a month to get numbers from Richland Parish. It doesn't take a month to get numbers from Madison Parish. I suggest somebody who works for the Department of Agriculture might want to spend a little time looking at central and north Louisiana so we can get our numbers in.

I thought not only would they do that, they would have declared a disaster and we would have a program to help. You know what I found out when I came back? We had created a program in the last farm bill—that is the good news. The bad news is the regulations have not yet started to be written.

Let me be clear. We passed a bill. There is a new program. They have started very briefly to write these regulations but, according to the testimony I received—I am going to submit the full testimony for the RECORD—the regulations are ''not imminent.''

I will wrap up. I ask unanimous consent for 2 more minutes.

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

Ms. LANDRIEU. The Under Secretary said—when I said, Could these regulations be written in 3 months? Could they be written in 6 months? Could they be written within the year?—Let me just say, Senator, ''they are not imminent.''

I said, What exactly does that mean? So our farmers have nowhere to ask for help?

Well, that is about it.

That answer is not acceptable to this Senator. If we are dealing with a credit crisis and can, in 5 days or 7 days, put together a $700 billion bailout for the financiers who bet on the price of cotton and soybean and wheat and sweet potatoes and sugarcane, we most certainly can spend a few days and a few billion dollars supporting the men and women who actually grow it.

That is why I am going to spend some time today, tonight, tomorrow and the next day, until I hear from the leadership—the Republican leadership, the Democratic leadership, or from the leadership at the White House—about what we can possibly do to get some help to farmers in the middle of the country who need our attention.

The program that will help them, the regulations have not been written. They can't even apply until next year. They have to go to the bank next week. When they go to the bank, if we don't do something here, the bank is going to say I can't lend you money because I can't get it from the elevator, the elevator can't get it from the importer or exporter, and it is a chain event that will result for the people whom we all represent—who have not borrowed one penny inappropriately, who were not engaged in subprime mortgages. All they do is work hard before the Sun comes up and as it goes down they are still working; who pay their bills and pay their mortgages. In their time of need this Congress is going to walk out without leaving a few pennies on the table for them? I don't think so.

I have brought this to the attention of the Appropriations Committee in a letter I wrote several weeks ago. I guess the letter was not written strongly enough to get the attention we needed, so I am going to continue to speak and make phone calls and hold meetings and organize as best I can a group of Senators and House Members who represent the southern part of this country and the breadbasket of America, the central interior part, to say while we are bailing out the financial coasts, we have our energy coast, which is a whole other speech that I could give, underwater, our rigs are toppled, now our crops are down in the field down in the south, in the gulf coast, and we cannot even get a quorum in a meeting to take care of this.

Let me say generally, the chairman of the Agriculture Committee, TOM HARKIN, has been very sensitive. I brought this matter to him and he conducted a joint hearing with me, so I thank publicly Senator HARKIN. I thank KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON for phone calls and meetings. I thank BLANCHE LINCOLN. I am sure there will be other Senators who can recognize the damage done, not just to Louisiana but to their States as well, and recognize that the program we have, the regulations have not been written and it is not going to help.

Let me also mention Senator KENT CONRAD who helped design that program. He has said to me, and will probably speak on this, that he recognizes the program that has been designed is not sufficient and we do need special help.

I am going to conclude by saying I will be back on the floor in the morning and many times throughout this weekend as we work through these major bills on defense, homeland security, the Wall Street bailout. But I am going to continue to press for some appropriate immediate relief, targeted and specific to the counties and to the parishes and farmers and farm communities that need the most help. Certainly these Americans who have done nothing wrong but work hard and just got caught in a confluence of terrible rains and bad storms can get the help they need.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SANDERS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2008

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Commerce Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 6063 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 6063) to authorize the programs of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and for other purposes.

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

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Nelson of Florida and Vitter substitute amendment, which is at the desk, be agreed to; the bill, as amended, be read the third time and passed, the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate, and any statements related to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

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

The amendment (No. 5648) was agreed to.

(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. 6063), as amended, was read the third time, and passed.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, we have just passed the NASA reauthorization bill. It is noteworthy that next week, October 1, is the 50th anniversary of the start of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and if my colleagues will recall, that was 1958. My colleagues may remember what was happening. The Soviet Union had surprised us by putting into orbit the first satellite, Sputnik, and America, in the midst of the Cold War among two superpowers, was absolutely shocked that we were behind in our technology; that we could not be premier. Then, lo and behold, 3 years later, they shocked us again by putting the first human in orbit, Yuri Gagarin, for one orbit when, in fact, we only had a rocket, the Redstone, that could get a human into suborbit. Then, we put Alan Shepard and subsequently Gus Grissom in suborbit, and then, in the meantime, the Soviet Union put Titov into several orbits. Of course, the

eyes of the world then focused in on Cape Canaveral, when a young marine, one of the original seven American astronauts, named John Glenn, climbed into that capsule knowing that the Atlas rocket had a 20-percent chance of failure. He rode it into the heavens for only three orbits. There was an indication on the instrument panel that his heat shield was loose, and as he started the deorbit burn, John Glenn knew that if that was an accurate reading, on reentry into the Earth's fiery atmosphere, heating up in excess of 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit, he would burn up. It is that memorable time when we heard his last words before he went into the blackout period on radio transmissions: John Glenn humming ''The Battle Hymn of the Republic.'' It is hard to tell that story without getting a lump in my throat.

Of course, what then happened, months before we flew John Glenn, we had a young President who said: We are going to the Moon and back within 9 years. This Nation came together. It focused the political will, it provided the resources, and it did what people did not think could be done.

A generation of young people so inspired by this Nation's space program started pouring into the universities, into math and science and technology and engineering. That generation that was educated in high technology has been the generation that has led us to be the leader in a global marketplace by producing the technology, the innovations, the intellectual capital that has allowed us to continue to be that leader.

So it is with that background that this Senator, who has the privilege of chairing the Space and Science Subcommittee within the Commerce Committee, wants to say: Happy birthday, NASA. We are sending to the House of Representatives tonight this NASA reauthorization bill, which will give the flexibility to the next President, and his designee as the next leader of NASA, the flexibility in a very troubled program that has not had the resources to do all the things that are demanded of it to try to continue to keep America preeminent in space; also to continue to have access to our own International Space Station that we built and paid for; and then to chart out a course for the future exploration of the heavens that will keep us fulfilling our destiny of our character as an American people, which is that by nature we are explorers and adventurers.

We never want to give that up. If we ever do, we will be a second-rate nation. But we would not because we have always had a frontier, a new frontier. In the development of this country, it used to be westward. Now it is upward and it is inward and that is the frontier we want to continue to explore.

So happy birthday, NASA. It is my hope that we will have the House of Representatives take this up on their suspension calendar tomorrow.

I wish to give great credit to the staff who are in the room for the majority and the minority. They all have worked at enormous overload—Chan Lieu and Jeff Bingham. Jeff, despite the fact of having suffered a heart attack earlier this year, and we didn't even let him out of his recuperative bed but that I was on the phone with him getting him to start corralling all these other Senators and House Members so we could get a consensus, so we could come together in an agreement.

The result tonight is the fact that this has been cleared in a 100-member Senate, when Senators are on edge and they are always looking for something to object to, and there is no objection here, as ruled by the Presiding Officer.

My congratulations to all the people, to the staff of the Commerce Committee, and to the staff of the Science and Technology Committee in the House of Representatives, chaired by Congressman BART GORDON of Tennessee. I am very grateful for everybody coming together and making this happen.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I am delighted to join my subcommittee chairman, Senator BILL NELSON, in bringing this legislation to the floor for consideration and passage. I share his belief that this legislation is an important statement of overwhelming congressional intent regarding the future of our Nation's civil space programs.

This statement, in the form of legislation we expect to have the near-unanimous support of the Congress, comes at a crucial time for NASA and its important programs. Not only do we, as authorizing committee members, believe it is our responsibility to regularly and consistently offer legislation to authorize appropriations levels, but also to provide a policy framework and guidance for the effective and efficient use of those appropriations. The passage of this bill will represent the first time in over 20 years that NASA authorization bills will have been adopted back-to-back by the Congress.

This week we celebrated NASA's 50th anniversary of the legislation that brought NASA into existence on October 1, 1958, and began this Nation's concerted effort to explore the heavens above us, and the universe beyond.

NASA also finds itself at a unique moment in its history, where it is undertaking a major shift in its contribution to the human exploration and utilization of space. In just two more years, we will see the completion of the International Space Station, which NASA has been developing, in cooperation with its 16 international partners, to serve as a unique laboratory in space—one that will finally be equipped with its full complement of research facilities, and inhabited by a full crew of six astronauts and researchers.

Three years ago, the Congress enacted legislation which, among many other things, designated the U.S. portion of the space station—and the roughly fifty percent of our partner-built laboratories that we are allocated in exchange for launching and operating the station and its modules—as a National Laboratory. Already we are seeing the interest in using those unique orbiting facilities increase, as Memoranda of Understanding have been signed between NASA and the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to pave the way for their use of those facilities for research that will benefit life on Earth. Other agreements have been signed and more are under development. The research future of the space station is beginning to shine brighter than it has in recent years.

NASA is preparing itself to turn its own focus outward from the Earth, once it has completed paving the way for others to carry forward the utilization of the space station and low-earth orbit. This legislation, like its predecessor in 2005, underscores the congressional commitment to see that new mission move forward—and even more quickly than currently planned, in terms of developing the postshuttle vehicles that will enable that new Vision for Exploration.

I am especially pleased that this legislation includes the clear recognition of a unique and important facility in my own State—the Michoud Assembly Facility—the important role it will play in the development and production of the space shuttle replacement vehicles, as it has done for over a quarter of a century in the space shuttle program. It includes language that will help to clarify the details of that role, for Michoud and for the other NASA facilities and Centers that most directly support human space launch development and operations, such as the nearby Stennis Research Center, the Marshall Space flight Center, Johnson Space Center, and, of course the Kennedy Space Center.

All of these facilities—and their extremely talented and capable employees—are facing what could be a difficult transition, as one system winds down and another grows up to take its place. This legislation demonstrates that the Congress is aware of the fear and uncertainty that can accompany such a transition, and includes initial steps we have taken to mitigate these concerns and address the impacts of such redirection of work and skills. We must act quickly and effectively to minimize the disruption of jobs—and people's lives and livelihood. Some of those impacts are already being felt, in Michoud and other facilities, as certain of the activities to support the space shuttle program are already winding down. The legislation includes language to help us know, well in advance, when more of those kinds of changes will occur, so that we can monitor them and ensure the tools and resources are in place to deal with them.

We have also been able to address the situation that has arisen recently as

the result of concerns about availability of Soyuz vehicles to ensure we can have crew access to the space station—and a crew escape capability should it ever become necessary for the crew to quickly return to Earth. While specific steps are being taken in other legislation to address this issue, which is outside the jurisdiction of the Commerce Committee, our bill will ensure we will retain the option, at least, to continue space shuttle flights for some period of time, should that prove to be necessary to ensure effective use of the space station. The bill ensures that such an option is preserved, at least until the end of April, next year, so that the new administration and the Congress will have time to consider the need or desirability of taking that step. And the bill includes a provision that will ensure the Congress will have the results of a study already under way within NASA, which would identify and quantify a range of options for continued shuttle operations over a range of time periods.

An important message this legislation is intended to send is that NASA should have the resources it needs to carry out the unique and valuable programs that it is asked to conduct for the American people. Those programs include a wide range of activity beyond human spaceflight. Space Science, such as carried out by the Hubble Space Telescope and the other Great Observatories, and the incredible success of Martian rovers and interplanetary probes, are not only exciting and thrilling to watch, but, like their human spaceflight counterparts, help inspire entire generations to pursue science, technology, engineering and mathematics in school—and help guarantee the Nation's strong leadership role in the global community of nations. NASA's Earth science programs provide answers about our own spaceship Earth that are essential to help us understand and use the resources our earthy home wisely and understand the true nature of our impact on the environment, and ways we can help mitigate those impacts responsibly.

Research in advanced concepts in aeronautics carried out by NASA plays a key role in ensuring the safe and efficient operations of our aviation industry, and in identifying the new technologies and systems that will drive the future developments of aeronautics systems and vehicles that we cannot even imagine today.

In short, the legislation provides a balanced level of funding and emphasis on all of NASA's key missions. To do all of these things, we have increased the authorized funding levels for NASA more than $2 billion above the amount requested for fiscal year 2009. We do not do so with the expectation that such an increased level of funding will be able to be appropriated. We understand the fiscal challenges we all face and I am among those who has and will always stand for reducing the size of government and ensuring that the government moves more in the direction of doing only those things that cannot be done by the private sector.

I believe that what NASA does, when it works at the leading edge of science and exploration, is doing things that no other entity, public or private, can do. We must be sure to always be alert, however, for opportunities for NASA to help private and commercial entities use the new technologies and techniques developed in research to place themselves in a position to move into areas once seen as the purview of NASA—such as the commercial orbital space transportation system, intended to enable private entities to provide launch and cargo—and one day crew—delivery to and from the International Space Station. This legislation includes provisions to help ensure the expanded development of a commercial space industry that can effectively—and economically—operate in both low-earth orbit and eventually participate in the exploration of the Moon—and beyond.

I believe we need to view the funds authorized to accomplish NASA's objectives more as investments than simply expenditures. We have had 50 years of experience which demonstrates that money invested in NASA programs yields technology gains and scientific excellence that has provided massive returns on that investment. One doesn't have to look very far to see the benefits to mankind from those programs. To list them all—even the obvious ones—would take volumes.

In years past, there have been efforts by private economic experts to quantify the value returned to the economy of this Nation from the product of NASA research and exploration. Those estimates have ranged from $7 to $9 returned to the economy for every dollar spent by NASA. Such estimates are hard to prove beyond a shadow of doubt and are based on assumptions that mayor may not be valid. But even if they are wildly exaggerated, and the return on investment is only something like $1 back to the economy for every dollar spent. How many government programs could one say that about?

I have described some of what I believe to be the very important and positive aspects of the legislation and the agency programs and initiatives it supports. We also have important and difficult issues that will need to be addressed which we have not been able to fully deal with in this bill. Many people are deeply concerned about the fact that, between the retirement of the space shuttle, planned for 2010, and the availability of the Ares 1 Rocket and the Orion Crew Exploration vehicle, there could be a 3- to 6-year gap, during which this nation would not have the capability to independently launch humans into space. That this period of time—however long it proves to be—would begin, under the present plan, precisely at the time we have finally completed the space station and it is available for research and scientific uses, makes that gap even less acceptable. It makes little sense for us not to be able to get U.S. scientists and astronauts there to conduct the long-awaited research that can only be done in that unique microgravity environment.

As I mentioned we have attempted to address part of that problem in language and authorized funding that would accelerate the development of shuttle replacement vehicles. That addresses the ''back end'' of the gap. But I would like to have seen more flexibility in the bill to enable the assessment of other options, besides extension of the shuttle program, or even in combination with that, to develop alternative capabilities in the short-term. We were unable to preserve the flexibility we had started with in our reported bill during the preconferencing and negotiations with the House leading to the agreement on the language we are presenting today. But I hope we will be able to more thoughtfully and fully address that issue as we begin next year to develop the next NASA Reauthorization Act.

I believe this legislation represents a strong and important message of support for ensuring the United States maintains its leadership position in space exploration. I remind my colleagues that the substitute amendment we are offering has been fully agreed to in advance by the House Science Committee, and the amended House bill can be swiftly accepted by the House when we return it to them, and sent to the President before this Congress adjourns for the year. I urge my colleagues to support passage of our substitute amendment to the House bill.

GREAT LAKES LEGACY REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2008

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 6460, which was received from the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 6460) to amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to provide for the remediation of sediment contamination in areas of concern, and for other purposes.

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

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a Levin amendment, which is at the desk, be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed, the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate, and that any statements relating to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

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

The amendment (No. 5649) was agreed to, as follows:

(Purpose: To limit the duration of reauthorization)

Strike section 3(f) and all that follows and insert the following: