farmers are the ones who are going to pay the price.

Not once in this bill did I read any language that would provide any type of protection to our tobacco farmers—not even once. This is why I have introduced, during the four amendments, the one that gives you their numbers: 1236, 1237, 1238, and 1239.

If the FDA is going to regulate tobacco and require sweeping changes within the industry, I want to ensure that all those farmers have a voice at the negotiating table. My amendments do this. Not only do they allow for fair grower representation, but they help ensure that those who will be most affected by this legislation will not be forced to pay the biggest price.

Let me be clear that I oppose the FDA regulation of tobacco. I have said that as long as tobacco is a legal commodity, it should be regulated through the USDA, the United States Department of Agriculture, not the FDA. If we are going to discuss giving the FDA this authority through this or similar legislation, I want to make sure that we consider the impact on agriculture.

In Kentucky, the family farm is the foundation for whom we are as a State. For one, the family farm in Kentucky has centered around one crop—tobacco. Tobacco barns and small plots of tobacco dot the Kentucky landscape. We are proud of our heritage and proud that tobacco plays a role in our history. Even after the buy-out, tobacco still plays a prominent role in my State’s agricultural landscape. We have tried to broaden our agricultural base. We have had some success with several types of vegetables, cattle, and even raising catfish. But at the end of the day, nothing brings as much of a revenue to the small farmer in Kentucky as tobacco. It is big business for small farmers.

With the current economic conditions, more and more farmers in my State are turning to growing tobacco to supplement their income or, in a lot of cases, tobacco is their sole source of income. The money they get from tobacco pays their mortgages, puts their kids through school, and actually allows them to stay on the farm.

Outside of the western part of my State, Kentucky does not have tens of thousands of acres of flat land. We have a lot of rolling hills and a climate where tobacco thrives. It can be raised very cheaply on small plots of land that simply cannot accommodate other crops. Whether we like it or not, tobacco remains an economic staple for rural Kentucky. It is profitable and farmers rely on it. That might not be popular today, but it is an economic reality that we have to face.

Whatever the opponents of tobacco say, there is no denying that this bill will add unnecessary mandates and expenses on the farmers in the attempt to punish the big tobacco companies. Sure, this bill will hurt big tobacco companies. They might have to start exporting more of their products. But they will survive. But Kentucky’s tobacco farmers do not have these options available to them. They are the ones who are going to be hurt by this type of legislation.

Some of my colleagues might support this legislation because they wish to outlaw tobacco. The last time I looked, tobacco was still a legal product in this country. If my colleagues want to make tobacco honest and upfront about it. Let’s consider legislation to make it illegal. We can fight that here, out on the floor of the Senate. But let’s not keep trying to slip it through the back door; through over-regulation and taxes in the name of preventing underage smoking.

Children should not have cigarettes. They should not. This is why we have age limits and advertising limits. We should do all that we can to keep cigarettes out of the hands of our kids. But the bill before us is not the answer. We can do better and should do better. All this bill does is move the regulation of a legal product from several agencies to another, one that has no jurisdiction to regulate it.

The only people this bill is going to hurt in the end are not the big tobacco companies, but the small and honest farmers who depend on tobacco to pay their bills. This is why I have offered four farmer-friendly amendments to the bill. I want to explain for a few minutes the four.

One, Bunning amendment No. 1236, clarifies that nothing in this bill would prevent our farmers from growing and cultivating tobacco as they have been able to do for the past hundred-plus years.

My second amendment, No. 1237, establishes a grower grant program that would help ease the financial burden of this bill on our farmers.

Amendment No. 1238 gives growers a seat at the negotiating table. The underlying bill established the Tobacco Scientific Advisory Committee made up of 12 members. Seven of those members are from the medical field to ensure that public health needs are taken into account. There is one of the public, and three representatives from the tobacco industry, there are two manufacturers, and one grower. All members of the committee are voting except for the last three—the tobacco representatives. My amendment is simple. It gives the representatives the right to vote and adds two more grower positions. That way, all three forms of tobacco—burley, flue cured and dark leaf—are represented at the negotiating table.

The third, Bunning amendment, No. 1239, asks the FDA if they are going to impose any new restrictions or requirements on farmers, then they should consider and conduct a feasibility study so that we know the effect on the farm level.

When my amendments come up, I encourage my colleagues to support them.