

operating costs of the approved insurance providers and agents shall not exceed \$924,000,000 per year.”

(b) **REDUCED RATE OF RETURN.**—Section 508(k)(8) of the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C. 1508(k)(8)) (as amended by section 11011) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(G) **REDUCED RATE OF RETURN.**—Beginning with the 2014 reinsurance year, the Standard Reinsurance Agreement shall be adjusted to ensure a projected rate of return for the approved insurance producers not to exceed 12 percent, as determined by the Corporation.”

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. I yield to the chairman of the committee for other business.

Ms. STABENOW. I thank the Senator.

Madam President, we have a great start here with our first vote.

AMENDMENT NO. 945, AS MODIFIED

Ms. STABENOW. Before proceeding with Senator GILLIBRAND’s amendment, I ask unanimous consent that the Sessions amendment No. 945, with the changes at the desk, as modified, be agreed to.

The amendment, as modified, was agreed to, as follows:

(Purpose: To clarify eligibility criteria for agricultural irrigation assistance)

On page 263, between lines 20 and 21, insert the following:

“(iii) **IRRIGATION.**—In States where irrigation has not been used significantly for agricultural purposes, as determined by the Secretary, the Secretary shall not limit eligibility under section 1271B or this section on the basis of prior irrigation history.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

AMENDMENT NO. 931

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. I rise today to urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join my effort to fight off the proposed \$4 billion worth of cuts to SNAP, better known as food stamps.

I ask that my amendment, No. 931, be called up for a vote at a time determined by the manager of the bill.

When Congress proposes to cut the food stamp program, it is not a nameless, faceless person looking for a hand-out who suffers—it is hungry children, hardworking adults, seniors on fixed incomes, veterans, active-duty servicemembers fighting our wars, and the families who stand by them.

I heard from a single mom in Queens, working full time at a supermarket, doing all she could to make ends meet but still struggles in this very tough economy. Her son came home one day from school with a bag in his hand and told her he saved his lunch for their dinner, and that he asked his best friend if he could have his sandwich to bring home for his brother. Obviously that mother broke down in tears. She needs food stamp assistance.

I heard from a senior in Washington Heights in New York City. She receives a limited fixed income, not enough to live on. She relies on SNAP to pay for food and for some peace of mind. Without that help, putting food on the table will become impossible.

I have heard from veterans all across the country who are making their

voices heard to prevent these cuts, such as one very brave veteran from Colorado Springs. He served in Iraq, but was declared medically unfit to continue his service. He was released from the military and returned home. As he was looking for a job and waited for the VA to activate his benefits, he relied on SNAP to help his family make ends meet. Going from active duty to food stamps, he described, was a culture shock. It was never his plan to go on food stamps. Without that little bit of support, this veteran, his wife, and his children would have needlessly suffered. Today he is back on his feet working full time, but the program was there for him when he needed it, as it should be.

These are the people who rely on this critically needed assistance to put food on the table and who stand to lose if Congress follows through with these deep cuts to SNAP. Half of all food stamp recipients are children, 8 percent are seniors, and 1.4 million veteran households receive food stamps. There are some of you here who would have us believe that these children, seniors, and veterans are gaming the system just to take advantage of taxpayers. The fact is, it is less than 1 percent of every dollar that goes into this program that is wasted, less than 1 percent is evidence of fraud. Imagine if we had that level of efficiency anywhere else in government.

In fact, SNAP keeps our economy moving. This money goes straight to the grocery stores, the store clerks, the truckers who haul the food, and producers all across the country. Sixteen cents of every SNAP dollar actually goes right back to the farmer who grew the crop, according to the USDA. When we cut \$4 billion from SNAP, it means there is \$90 less a month going to half a million households. To folks in this Chamber, \$90 a month may not seem like a lot of money, but for a struggling family that is a week’s worth of groceries. Imagine telling your children they can’t eat the last week of every month. Imagine telling your child at night when he says to you: Mommy, I am still hungry, that there is nothing you can do about it.

As a mother, as a lawmaker, watching a child, a senior, and a brave veteran going hungry is something I will not stand for, and neither should anyone else in this body. Clearly we have to reduce the debt and the deficit, but hardworking parents, their children, seniors, troops, and veterans are just trying to keep the lights on, trying to make ends meet, trying to put food on the table. They did not spend this Nation into debt, and we should not be trying to balance the budget on their back. They deserve better from us. These are the wrong priorities for America.

Instead, the amendment I am proposing would reduce a real source of waste in this budget, and that is corporate welfare for large corporations that do not need it, including insur-

ance companies that are based in Bermuda, Australia, and Switzerland.

My amendment already has the support and advocacy of a third of this body. Thirty-three Senators have signed a letter saying do not cut food stamps, because it protects half a million struggling Americans who too often do not have a voice in Washington when they desperately need it. It makes modest cuts to an already overgenerous corporate welfare system. It is common sense. Standing by those who are suffering is the core. It is a core value of who we are as Americans.

If it is in your heart, and if you believe feeding hungry children is the right thing to do, then stand with us. Stand with America’s veterans. Stand with the AARP and America’s seniors. Stand with struggling families and children all across this Nation. Let’s keep food on the tables of people who need it. When we do, America will be stronger, and this body will be stronger.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:41 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. BALDWIN).

AGRICULTURE REFORM, FOOD, AND JOBS ACT OF 2013—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

COST OF GASOLINE

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I will hold off asking that the pending amendment be set aside until the manager is here. At this time I will address an enormously important national issue, an issue even more important to rural America; that is, the skyrocketing cost of gasoline at the pump, and oil in general, which is causing enormous hardship for the American consumer, small businesses, truckers, airlines, and fuel dealers.

The bottom line is in Vermont and all over this country people are paying an arm and a leg for a gallon of gas and for home heating oil, and it is a very serious economic problem for the individual consumer and for the entire economy at large. In fact, as we continue to struggle to get out of this terrible recession, high oil and gas prices are enormously detrimental to the entire economic recovery process.

These rapidly increasing prices are particularly harmful to rural America where working people often are forced to travel 50 to 100 miles to their jobs and back. If people are paying \$3.80 for a gallon of gas, that adds up, and it is money coming right out of their wallets.

Over the last 5 months the national average price for a gallon of gasoline

has gone up by more than 41 cents at the pump, even—and this is the important point to make—as U.S. oil inventories reach a three-decade high, and demand for gasoline is lower than it was 4 years ago when prices averaged less than \$2.30 a gallon. In other words, what we learned in elementary school about supply and demand and pricing—the foundation of capitalism, if you like—is when there is a lot of supply and limited demand, prices should go down. Right now, there is a lot of supply, less demand, and prices are going up, and I think we need to know why because this impacts our entire economy and millions and millions of consumers.

Our goal must be to do everything we can to make sure oil and gas prices are transparent and free from fraud, manipulation, abuse, and excessive speculation. Let the principles of supply and demand work. Let's eliminate fraud, manipulation, abuse, and excessive speculation, which is exactly what we are experiencing right now.

That is why I will be offering two important amendments that deal with these issues. Both of these amendments are within the jurisdiction of the Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee, which is obviously why I am offering them on this bill.

The first amendment, No. 963, requires the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, CFTC, and the Oil and Gas Price Fraud Working Group to conduct a 6-month investigation to determine whether any company or individual in the United States has manipulated the price of gasoline, crude oil, heating oil, diesel fuel, or jet fuel. Such an investigation is already taking place by regulators in Europe.

On May 14, 2013, just 1 week ago, the European Commission announced it was investigating allegations that several companies—including BP, Shell and Statoil—"may have colluded in reporting distorted prices to a Price Reporting Agency to manipulate the published prices for a number of oil and biofuel products."

I know RON WYDEN, chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, is also looking at this issue—perhaps in a slightly different way—and I applaud him for doing that. But this amendment basically says right now the European Commission believes there may be fraud among the major oil companies. If that is true in Europe, it may well be true in the United States. So I want the CFTC to investigate that as well.

Amendment No. 963 requires the CFTC to work with European regulators to determine if any company or individual in the United States provided inaccurate information to a price reporting agency for the purpose of manipulating the published prices of gasoline or oil; secondly, to refer any illegal activities to the proper authorities for prosecution; third, to report its findings within 6 months; and lastly, to publish recommendations on its Web

site on how to make sure the pricing of gasoline, crude oil, heating oil, diesel fuel, and jet fuel becomes more transparent, open, and free from manipulation, fraud, abuse, or excessive speculation.

The third largest oil company in Europe has estimated that as much as 80 percent of all crude oil product transactions are linked to prices published by Platts, a private price reporting agency, while just 20 percent are linked to trades on the New York Mercantile Exchange or ICE Futures in Europe. In order to calculate prices, Platts depends on oil companies and Wall Street speculators to voluntarily provide details on bids, offers, and transactions for various crude oil and petroleum commodities.

So that is one of the issues we want to take a hard look at to make sure we end those manipulations. The other issue I want to take a hard look at is the issue of speculation on the oil futures market. What we know right now is, according to the CFTC, approximately 80 percent of the oil futures market is controlled not by end users—not by fuel dealers, not by airline companies, not by people who actually use fuel—but by Wall Street speculators. So that is the issue my second amendment deals with.

This amendment addresses an issue that was not satisfactorily addressed in Dodd-Frank, where we attempted to deal with the issue of excessive speculation on the oil futures market. Amendment No. 964 requires the CFTC to use all of its authority, including its emergency powers, within 30 days to address this very important issue.

Once again the American people are at their wits end in trying to understand why oil prices go up despite the fact we have sufficient supply and lack of demand. I am not just speaking for myself but many economists also when I say I believe one of the major reasons for this significantly high price has to do with speculation—speculation on Wall Street.

This amendment requires the CFTC to use all its authority—again, including its emergency powers, which is not what we have done in the past—within 30 days to do the following: to implement position limits to eliminate, prevent, or diminish excessive oil speculation as required by the Dodd-Frank Act, and to immediately curb excessive oil speculation to ensure that oil and gas prices are based on the fundamentals of supply and demand.

As I mentioned earlier, price is supposed to be determined by the amount of supply and the amount of demand. Supply now is very high, demand is relatively low, and so we should be seeing a decline in oil prices rather than an increase. Further, the International Energy Agency recently projected the global supply of oil will surge by 8.4 million barrels a day over the next 5 years, significantly faster than demand, and nearly two-thirds of the increase in oil supply will be in North

America. So if you are looking at an abundance of supply and limited demand, we have every reason in the world to believe gas prices at the pump, oil prices in general, should go down. If they are not going down, we have to ask why. Many of us believe this has to do with excessive Wall Street speculation on the oil futures market.

While we cannot ignore the fact that big oil companies have been gouging consumers at the pump for years and have made over \$1 trillion in profit over the past decade, there is mounting evidence that high gasoline prices have less to do with supply and demand and more to do with Wall Street speculation jacking up oil and gas prices in the energy futures market. Ten years ago—and this is a very important point for people to understand—10 years ago speculators only controlled—"only" is probably the wrong word, but they controlled about 30 to 40 percent of the oil futures market. Today Wall Street speculators control at least 80 percent of the market. In a 10-year period, we have seen Wall Street speculation double on the energy futures market.

What does this mean in terms of oil prices? Everything in the world. The function of Wall Street speculation has nothing to do with using oil, everything to do with making a profit, driving prices higher. This is not just BERNIE SANDERS talking. There is now a growing consensus that excessive speculation on the oil futures market is driving up oil prices. ExxonMobil, Goldman Sachs, the IMF, the St. Louis Federal Reserve, the American Trucking Association, Delta Airlines, the Petroleum Marketers Association of America, the New England Fuel Institute and many other groups—the Consumer Federation of America—have all agreed that excessive oil speculation significantly increases oil and gas prices.

Interestingly enough, Goldman Sachs—not one of my favorite institutions but perhaps the largest speculator on Wall Street—came out with a report indicating that excessive oil speculation is costing Americans 56 cents a gallon at the pump. Goldman Sachs, speculator, they themselves estimating that excessive speculation is costing 56 cents a gallon at the pump for the average consumer, and that may be a conservative estimate.

A few years ago the CEO of ExxonMobil, again not one of my favorite companies, testified at a Senate hearing that excessive speculation contributed as much as 40 percent to the cost of a barrel of oil.

Saudi Arabia, the largest exporter of oil in the world, told the Bush administration back in 2008 during the last major spike in oil prices that speculation has contributed as much as 40 percent to a barrel of oil.

Gary Gensler, the chairman of the CFTC, has stated publicly that oil speculators now control between 80 to

87 percent of the energy futures market, a figure that has more than doubled over the past decade. In other words, the vast majority of oil on the futures market is not controlled by people who actually use the product but people whose only function in life being in the oil futures market is to make as much quick profit as they possibly can.

Let me give just a list of a few of the oil speculators and how much oil they were trading on June 30, 2008, when the price of oil was over \$140 a barrel and gas prices were over \$4 a gallon. Goldman Sachs bought and sold over 863 million barrels of oil, Morgan Stanley bought and sold over 632 million barrels of oil, Bank of America bought and sold over 112 million barrels of oil, Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, et cetera.

What we have to understand is that to a very significant degree, pricing of oil has nothing to do with supply and demand, nothing to do with end users who actually buy the product, and everything to do with Wall Street speculation. Sadly, the spike in oil and gasoline prices was totally avoidable. The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act required the Commodity Futures Trading Commission to impose strict limits on the amount of oil that Wall Street speculators could trade in the energy futures market by January 17, 2011, 2½ years ago.

Unfortunately, the CFTC has been unable to implement position limits due to opposition on Wall Street and a ruling of the DC district court which is now under appeal.

This amendment directs the CFTC to utilize all its authority, including its emergency powers, to curb excessive oil speculation within 30 days. We are not going to drag this on for another 5 years. The emergency directive in this amendment is virtually identical to bipartisan legislation that overwhelmingly passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 402 to 19, during a similar crisis in 2008.

Let me conclude by saying that millions of consumers are hurting as a result of excessive speculation. People are paying much more at the pump than they should for gasoline. This issue impacts our entire economy. It is time that we did something to that. I say to my colleagues: I call up amendments numbers 963 and 964, and ask for their immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Ms. STABENOW. Reserving the right to object, Madam President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, first, I thank the Senator from Vermont for raising all these issues that are so important for the American people. At this point in time, we do have an amendment that is pending, the amendment of Senator GILLIBRAND. We do not have unanimous consent in

order to set that aside so I would have to, at the moment, object to setting it aside, but I assure the Senator I wish to have an opportunity to talk to him about these issues.

Mr. SANDERS. I look forward to talking to the Senator from Michigan, but I do want her to know this is an enormously important amendment for the people of Vermont and the people of America. We want action. I think we have brought forth an amendment which, in fact, can end up substantially lowering the price of oil and gas at the pump and I will pursue this vigorously.

Ms. STABENOW. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. HOEVEN. Madam President, I rise to speak on the farm bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is recognized.

Mr. HOEVEN. I rise to speak on behalf of the Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act of 2013, a 5-year farm bill. This bill saves more than \$24 billion to help reduce our deficit and our debt, it streamlines farm programs to make them more efficient, and it ensures that our farmers and ranchers continue to have good risk management tools, particularly crop insurance.

It is vitally important to so many facets of our national interests. It is important to food, of course, but also to fuel, to fiber, to rural development, agriculture research, and many other areas. It touches the life of every single American in some of the most basic ways.

This year the farm bill is moving through the Senate because we have already debated and passed more than 90 percent of this bill in the last session. A lot of this bill we worked on very hard in the last session and passed it through this body with a big bipartisan vote.

Unfortunately, the House was not able to pass their version so we were not able to go to conference and finish the job. This year we need to do that.

This farm bill, again, 90 percent-plus we voted on in this body last session. We had a big bipartisan vote to pass it. We need to do that again. We need to get into conference with the House, and we need to get this done for farmers and ranchers and for the benefit of all Americans.

Last week we passed a bill out of the Senate Agriculture Committee, on which I serve, where I had the opportunity to help craft it—again, building on the product that we put together last year when we voted it out of committee with a big bipartisan vote. The House also passed its version of a farm bill out of their Agriculture Committee last week. They are looking to bring their bill to the House floor in June. We are hopeful they will pass it in June, but we need to be ready. We need to have ours done. I think we can show real leadership on this issue and be ready to get into conference with the House and get this important work done.

The Senate version we passed supports our farmers and ranchers in substantive and sensible ways. It gives them the necessary risk management tools and ensures that Americans, all Americans, continue to enjoy the highest quality, lowest cost food supply, not just in the world but in the history of the world.

Among the provisions of the commodity title is the no-cost Sugar Program. I wish to take just a few minutes to talk about the Sugar Program and its importance in the context of this farm bill. The Sugar Program warrants discussion because some Members—I believe certainly with the best of intentions—want to actually weaken this vitally important program. But weakening our current sugar policy would accomplish nothing. In fact, it would subject our producers, consumers, and industries to a distorted world market. Further, it would threaten more than 140,000 jobs in 22 States that depend on a vibrant, competitive sugar industry.

The world's sugar market is not a free market. Make no mistake, it is not a free market in any conventional sense of the term. I can tell you now, foreign governments heavily protect and subsidize their sugar producers. For example, Brazil spends between \$2 and \$3 billion per year to subsidize its producers. Mexico literally owns one-fifth of its industry and subsidizes the rest.

Our sugar farmers, along with the rest of America's farmers and ranchers, have told foreign competitors, time and again, we are ready to compete in a truly freely market, but we will not and must not unilaterally disarm, nor will dismantling the Sugar Program result in lower costs to consumers and American businesses. Once you factor in transportation costs, the world price of sugar is higher than the price in the United States.

Sugar prices are not only higher in Brazil and Mexico, they are higher worldwide. If we do away with sugar policy altogether and subject producers strictly to a distorted global market, what we will see is not lower prices but rather extreme volatility in the global sugar market.

Not only are sugar prices lower in the United States and elsewhere, but the cost of sugar in most products is tiny. For example, in a Hershey's chocolate bar it is less than 2 percent of the cost. Further, it should be noted that sugar prices have fallen by more than 50 percent in the last 2 years, but candy prices at the store are not seeing the same level of reduction at all.

The truth is, if consumers are paying higher costs, it is because of labor and health care costs in the United States, not because of the cost of sugar.

For 10 years now, sugar policy has operated at zero cost to the American taxpayer because our farmers are efficient and competitive and because American sugar policy has always made sure they were playing on a level playing field. As a result, consumers in

this country enjoy more affordable sugar than elsewhere in the world and American consumers enjoy a safe and reliable homegrown source. The bottom line is that sugar policy is cost-effective and fair and it should be retained in the commodity title of the farm bill.

But I would like to turn, again, to the broader legislation. Good farm policy benefits every single American. As I said, we have the lowest cost, highest quality food supply in the world thanks to our farmers and ranchers and thanks to good farm policy. How do we put a value on our safe, abundant, nutritious, dependable food supply? It is invaluable. By any standard it is invaluable. Just consider the benefits that this farm bill provides.

The farm bill is a job creator and it helps our economy. Agriculture supports 16 million jobs in the United States and contributes billions of dollars to the national economy. Year in and year out we sell more food and fiber than we buy from abroad. Further, American agriculture produces a financial surplus. Through relentless innovation, best practices, and good stewardship of the land, American agriculture creates a positive balance of trade.

The farm bill saves money to help reduce the deficit and the debt. Think how important that is.

The 2013 farm bill, like the farm bill we passed last year, provides more than \$24 billion in savings—more than is required by sequestration—to help address the Nation's deficit and debt. Farmers and ranchers are stepping up and doing their part.

The farm bill also provides a strong market-based safety net for the producers. The safety net in the 2013 farm bill focuses on enhanced crop insurance; that is what they have asked for and that is the focus—not direct payments. Direct payments are limited. It enhances crop insurance with the inclusion of a new product called the supplemental coverage option, SCO. The SCO enables purchasers to purchase a supplemental policy beyond their individual farm-based policy, thereby creating an additional level of risk management.

The bill also includes the Agriculture Risk Coverage or ARC Program that provides assistance for shallow loss or multiple-year losses, which again helps our farmers to better manage risk. They are business people and they need to manage their risks.

Let's not forget the farm bill strengthens our national security. Our country doesn't have to depend on other countries for our food supply—countries that don't necessarily share our interests or values—and that makes us safer. The fact is we are secure in that most basic, vital necessity—our food supply.

The farm bill is about so many things that are important to the people of America. This is about all Americans. Again, I say good farm policy benefits

every single American. We have the highest quality, lowest cost food supply in the world thanks to our farmers, ranchers, and good farm policy.

This is about 16 million jobs in this country which are supported by agriculture. This is about a positive balance of trade which helps build our economy. This is about \$24 billion in savings where agriculture is stepping up and not only doing its share but more than its share to help with the deficit and debt. In the most fundamental ways, a good farm bill makes America stronger, safer, and more secure. We need to pass this farm bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. COCHRAN. Madam President, I am pleased to congratulate my friend from North Dakota for his statement and his discussion of the content of this farm bill. He was one of the active members of our committee who participated in the markup sessions, attended the hearings in preparation for writing a farm bill, and helped to shape the consensus that is reflected in the final work product. Senator HOEVEN is a very valuable member of our committee, and I commend and thank my colleague from North Dakota for his contributions to this process.

He very accurately describes that this is a consensus product. It is not a partisan bill; it is not meant to make anybody or any section or any commodity group look good or feel good because of favors done in this bill. This is truly to serve the interests of our good and great country and help improve our trading opportunities in agricultural commodities that are produced on our farms throughout the United States.

I think it is going to serve the interests of not only agriculture but the American citizen and, broadly speaking, much of this success is due to the contributions made by the Senator from North Dakota.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. HOEVEN. Madam President, I thank the distinguished Senator from Mississippi for his kind comments and also for his leadership on the Agriculture Committee as our ranking member. I wanted to express my appreciation.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MANCHIN). The Senator from North Dakota.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, it should come as no surprise that two Senators from the great State of North Dakota stand today and talk about the importance of American agriculture. Ninety percent of the land we have in North Dakota is engaged in production agriculture. As much as we have heard—and it is all true—about this great economic renaissance we are having in our State, agriculture is still No. 1.

Every year American farmers—North Dakota farmers—bet. They bet on good

weather, good prices, that the crop will grow, and they spend millions of dollars on that bet. They are the biggest gamblers in the history of the world, and they are asking for a farm bill that gives them a little bit of risk help and makes sure when they plant, they know that maybe they have a chance to get cost of production back out.

Why is that important? It is important because who is going to take that risk on behalf of the American people, on behalf of a global and worldwide supply of food? Who is going to take that risk if we don't help a little bit?

Today in America almost every State which has an agricultural base is doing a little bit better because agriculture has led the way. Agriculture has aided this economy. States with an agriculture base have a much lower rate of unemployment, and they have been leading the way on our trade deficit.

It cannot be overstated how significant this farm bill is not only to States such as North Dakota but to every State and every economy in this Union. There are 16 million jobs which hang in the balance. They are waiting for this body—the Congress—to give some assurance, to pass a farm bill.

I applaud both the ranking member and the committee chair for their excellent work. No bill which comes out of a committee with diverse opinions is absolutely perfect where everyone will agree on everything in the bill, but it is part of the great American compromise we have been talking about and striving for in this body. We are working to move the issues forward and do what Americans sent us here to do. We are here to deliberate, discuss, debate, and compromise, and that is what this bill is about.

Every piece of this bill is important. Every piece is a linchpin to make sure we pass a farm bill. We are going to hear a lot in the next couple of days about the Sugar Program. I will talk broadly about the other provisions of the bill tomorrow on this floor, but I want to spend today talking a little bit about the Sugar Program within the farm bill because it is absolutely significant and important.

I know Senator HOEVEN outlined some of the statistics we talk about when we talk about sugar. The U.S. sugar policy defends more than 142,000 jobs—not just in North Dakota, Minnesota, Florida, and Hawaii, but in 22 States. It defends those jobs from unfair foreign competition, and it results in nearly \$20 billion in annual economic activity in the United States.

Of course, many of these jobs are in North Dakota. We grow a lot of sugar beets in the Red River Valley, we process a lot of sugar beets in the Red River Valley, and those processing jobs are the value-added jobs that led the way to a value-added economy in our State. We are pretty protective of our sugar economy.

In many rural communities sugar is the linchpin of the local economy. Make no mistake that if we bend to the

reforms we will hear talked about or bend to the ideas some have today about the Sugar Program, we will lose our domestic sugar industry. Why? Because we cannot compete. Make no mistake about that.

I am not saying our producers cannot produce or compete with producers from other parts of the world if the playing field is level. In fact, not only can we compete, we can best them. However, the sugar playing field is not level. Other countries have subsidized their sugar programs for years. More than 120 countries actually produce sugar. Every one of them intervenes to defend their producers from global crisis where surplus sugar is dumped. No one could survive at historic world-level prices without these government interventions. If our farmers could go head to head with their foreign counterparts, they would robustly compete and, I believe, capture much of the market. Unfortunately, with Federal subsidization and protections in place, a fair fight is not available to our American sugar beet and sugar cane growers. Opponents of the Sugar Program would have us do one thing: Unilaterally disarm and surrender our market to foreign producers.

For over two decades, from 1989 to 2008—and I want everyone to remember the date of 2008—the average world cost of sugar production averaged about 51 percent more than the world price.

Let me say that again: The world average cost of sugar production averaged 51 percent more than the sugar price. How does that happen? How does anyone produce a product that costs more than they sell it for? They are subsidized, which means sugar producers have received support from governments that allow them to stay in business even when their production costs exceed the price.

In order for those sugar industries to survive, governments in foreign countries provide some buffer to the world market with a wide variety of import tariffs, nontariff import barriers, price and income supports, and direct and indirect subsidies.

We have heard that sugar prices are too high, and if we eliminate the Sugar Program—the risk program for our sugar growers—that sugar prices would drop. Food corporation opponents say the U.S. sugar price is too high. They further argue that high sugar prices threaten their competitiveness given foreign competition for processed foods.

The truth is that sugar prices have held relatively stable over the course of the last three decades. This cannot be said about most other agricultural commodities. Imagine if we were debating today about \$2-a-bushel corn.

U.S. raw sugar prices have dropped by more than half since the fall of 2011. Prices are now below the average price of the 1980s, below the average of the 1990s, and below the average of the decade of 2000.

Our sugar farmers have struggled for decades and many have not have sur-

vived. Since 1985, more than half of the sugar beet and sugar cane operations shut down. It is hard to survive in 2013 when the price they get for their product is the same price they would have received in 1980.

The amendment we are going to be debating here will drive the U.S. sugar price down even further, which will allow more subsidized sugar to flow into our market and put our sugar farmers out of business.

If we look at all of the commodities that are in the farm bill—look at every piece of that compromised bill—and start singling out one commodity for special treatment—let's forget for a minute we are talking about sugar. Let's talk about dairy. Would a sugar bill survive if we were to eliminate the dairy program? Would a farm bill survive if we were to eliminate the dairy program?

Our concern today is that this industry is critical to our food security but also, importantly, it is critical to the compromise of the farm bill itself. This is a farm bill that supports over 16 million jobs in an economy that struggles except on the farm. These programs have worked.

As someone who is from North Dakota, I have lived through bad farm bills. My producers have lived through bad farm bills. The last 5 to 6 years have been an enormous improvement, not only to market-driven techniques but it has been an enormous improvement in allowing our producers to make the market decisions they are going to make, but also get the help that is going to give them surety.

When a small North Dakota producer—and I am not exaggerating—spends \$1 million putting a crop in the ground, they do that for their family, they do that for their State, but they also do it for the country and for the world because they know the American farmer feeds the world and it is a pretty important job.

So I say, let the compromise stay. Let the bill stay intact. Let's move this bill forward, let's get it into conference with the House, and for once let's tell the American people we can get something done in Congress. Let's tell them we can respond to the needs of this country and move our country forward.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, we appreciate the comments of the distinguished Senator from North Dakota. Also, it is a pleasure to welcome her as a new member of our committee. She took an active part in the development of this bill, and we appreciate her contributions.

I see no other Senators seeking recognition at this time, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

AMENDMENT NO. 948

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment to call up amendment No. 948.

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

The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kansas [Mr. ROBERTS], for himself, Mr. THUNE, and Mr. JOHANNIS, proposes an amendment numbered 948.

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

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To improve and extend certain nutrition programs)

On page 355, between lines 7 and 8, insert the following:

SEC. 40 . RESTORING PROGRAM INTEGRITY TO CATEGORICAL ELIGIBILITY FOR THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The second sentence of section 5(a) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2014(a)) is amended by striking “receives benefits under a State program” and inserting “receives assistance (as defined in section 260.31 of title 45, Code of Federal Regulations, as in effect on January 1, 2013) under a State program”.

(b) RESOURCES.—Section 5(j) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2014(j)) is amended by striking “receives benefits under a State program” and inserting “receives assistance (as defined in section 260.31 of title 45, Code of Federal Regulations, as in effect on January 1, 2013) under a State program”.

Beginning on page 355, strike line 8 and all that follows through page 357, line 15, and insert the following:

SEC. 4002. ELIMINATING THE LOW-INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE LOOPHOLE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 5 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2014) is amended—

(1) in subsection (d)(11)(A), by striking “(other than” and all that follows through “et seq.)” and inserting “(other than payments or allowances made under part A of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.) or any payments under any other State program funded with qualified State expenditures (as defined in section 409(a)(7)(B)(i) of that Act (42 U.S.C. 609(a)(7)(B)(1)))”;

(2) in subsection (e)(6)(C), by striking clause (iv); and

(3) in subsection (k)—

(A) in paragraph (2)—

(i) by striking subparagraph (C);

(ii) by redesignating subparagraphs (D) through (G) as subparagraphs (C) through (F), respectively; and

(iii) by striking paragraph (4).

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Section 2605(f) of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Act of 1981 (42 U.S.C. 8624(f)) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1), by striking “(1)”; and

(2) by striking paragraph (2).

Beginning on page 379, strike line 15 and all that follows through page 380, line 15, and insert the following:

SEC. 4011. ELIMINATING STATE BONUSES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 16 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2025) is amended by striking subsection (d).

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Section 16 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2025) is amended—

(1) in subsection (c)—

(A) in the first sentence of paragraph (4), by striking “payment error rate” and all that follows through “subsection (d)” and inserting “liability amount or new investment amount under paragraph (1) or payment error rate”; and

(B) in the first sentence of paragraph (5), by striking “payment error rate” and all that follows through “subsection (d)” and inserting “liability amount or new investment amount under paragraph (1) or payment error rate”; and

(2) in subsection (i)(1), by striking “subsection (d)(1)” and inserting “subsection (c)(2)”.

SEC. 4012. ELIMINATING DUPLICATIVE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING.

(a) FUNDING OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS.—Section 16 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2025) is amended by striking subsection (h).

(b) ADMINISTRATIVE COST-SHARING.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 16(a) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2025(a)) is amended in the first sentence, in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by inserting “(other than a program carried out under section 6(d)(4))” after “supplemental nutrition assistance program”.

(2) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

(A) Section 17(b)(1)(B)(iv)(III)(hh) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2026(b)(1)(B)(iv)(III)(hh)) is amended by striking “(g), (h)(2), or (h)(3)” and inserting “or (g)”.

(B) Section 22(d)(1)(B)(ii) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2031(d)(1)(B)(ii)) is amended by striking “(g), (h)(2), and (h)(3)” and inserting “and (g)”.

(c) WORKFARE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 20 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2029) is amended by striking subsection (g).

(2) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 17(b)(1)(B)(iv)(III)(jj) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2026(b)(1)(B)(iv)(III)(jj)) is amended by striking “or (g)(1)”.

On page 385, strike lines 19 through 22 and insert the following:

SEC. 4016. ELIMINATING THE NUTRITION EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM.

Section 28 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2036a) is repealed.

On page 390, between lines 17 and 18, insert the following:

SEC. 4019. TERMINATING AN INCREASE IN BENEFITS.

Section 101(a) of division A of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-5; 123 Stat. 120; 124 Stat. 2394; 124 Stat. 3265) is amended by striking paragraph (2) and inserting the following:

“(2) TERMINATION.—The authority provided by this subsection shall terminate after September 1, 2013.”

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, this is Roberts amendment No. 948. This amendment would help rein in the largest expenditure within the Department of Agriculture budget—the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, more commonly known as food stamps.

The Senate Agriculture Committee included minimal savings under food stamps—around \$4 billion over the 10-

year budget window. I know people have different views, but I would say that it is certainly minimal. I think we could have done more in committee last week. I introduced an amendment at that time. I withdrew it to make sure we could get this to the floor. We must do much more in a responsible manner. Look at the House Agriculture Committee, which marked up a farm bill with over \$20 billion in savings from SNAP. That bill was marked up and passed with bipartisan support as of last week.

We can restore integrity to the program while providing benefits to those truly in need and save approximately an additional \$30 billion. Note that I say “while providing benefits to those truly in need.” I am not proposing a dramatic change in the policy of nutrition programs, such as block-granting programs to States. That would represent a dramatic change. Instead, this amendment enforces the principles of good government and restores SNAP and spending to much more responsible levels.

Also, SNAP was exempted from the across-the-board cuts known as sequestration. However, it is clear there are several areas within the program that could provide significant savings that were left untouched.

First, the amendment eliminates the LIHEAP loophole. Let me be clear. Eliminating the LIHEAP loophole does not affect SNAP eligibility for anyone using SNAP; it only decreases SNAP benefits for those who would not otherwise qualify for the higher SNAP benefit amounts.

But at least 17 States, with all due respect, are gaming the system by designing their Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program—LIHEAP—to exploit SNAP. Let me explain. The LIHEAP loophole works like this: Participating State agencies annually issue extremely low LIHEAP benefits to qualify otherwise ineligible households for standard utility allowances, which result in increased monthly SNAP benefits. For example, today a State agency can issue \$1—only \$1—annually in LIHEAP benefits to increase monthly SNAP benefits an average of \$90—that is \$1,080 per year—for households that do not otherwise pay out-of-pocket utility bills.

If you completely eliminate the LIHEAP loophole, as my legislation does, it will save taxpayers a total of \$12 billion—\$8 billion additional compared to the current version of the farm bill.

We also tie categorical eligibility to cash assistance, eliminating a loophole that States are exploiting by offering TANF-provided informational brochures and informational 1-800 numbers to maximize SNAP enrollment and the corresponding increase in Federal food benefits.

Categorical eligibility, simply known as Cat-El, was designed to help streamline the administration of SNAP by allowing households to be certified as eli-

gible for SNAP food benefits without evaluating household assets or gross income. 42 States are exploiting an unintended loophole of the TANF-provided informational brochures and informational 1-800 numbers to maximize SNAP enrollment and the corresponding increase in Federal food benefits and the cost. These States, with all due respect, are also gaming the system to bring otherwise ineligible SNAP participants into the program.

In an ongoing effort to streamline government programs, we should eliminate the duplicative SNAP Employment and Training Program and the SNAP Nutrition Education Grants Program. Combined, these two programs cost over \$8 billion and do not represent any direct food benefits—any direct food benefits.

This amendment also ends the Department of Agriculture practice of giving \$48 million in awards every year to State agencies for basically doing their job. Currently, bonuses are given to States for best program access—signing up as many people for SNAP as possible; most improved program access—how many more people signed up for SNAP compared to the previous year; and best application processing timelines—handling applications within required guidelines. The bonuses are not even required to be used for SNAP administration. A recipient State may choose to use the funding for any State priority.

Finally, the amendment terminates the ongoing stimulus, enacted by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which provided extra funding to increase monthly SNAP food benefits. I really understand the importance of domestic food assistance programs for many hard-working Americans, including many Kansans. As chairman of the House Agriculture Committee some years ago, we worked very hard to save the Food Stamp Program and prevent any kinds of efforts to simply do away with it or send it back to States because of the very things I have talked about.

My goal is simple: to restore integrity to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in a commonsense and comprehensive manner. Enacting this package of reforms will allow the Federal Government to continue to help those who truly need SNAP food benefits and assistance. I encourage my colleagues to support this amendment and these reforms for the benefit of all Americans.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I inquire of the chairwoman if I might be able to speak for about 5 or 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Thank you, Mr. President.

Certainly we want to hear from the distinguished Senator from Montana. I

know the Senator from South Dakota has been waiting for some time as well, and we had asked him to wait until Senator ROBERTS had offered his amendment. I am not sure of the time the Senator from South Dakota is requesting right now, but certainly we want to hear from both of the Senators.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, does the Senator from Michigan want to lock in a time agreement on the votes?

Ms. STABENOW. It appears at this moment we are going to have to have a little bit more time before we do that, but I thank the Senator.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

TRAGEDY IN OKLAHOMA

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I first want to start with just a word about the tragedy in Oklahoma. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families impacted by yesterday's devastating storms, as well as the first responders and volunteers who rushed to the scene. I hope all Americans will continue to keep them in their thoughts and prayers and be looking for ways in which they can pitch in and help in this very tragic situation.

LONG-TERM BUDGET CHALLENGES

Mr. President, I come to the floor today to talk about the long-term budget challenges facing the country and the impact those challenges are going to have on jobs, economic growth, and future generations if we do not control spending.

Last week the Congressional Budget Office released its updated budget projections, and in conjunction with that they released an analysis of the President's 2014 budget.

Once again, the CBO report underscores the long-term budget challenges facing this country. If you listen to many of the politicians here in Washington, DC, and commentators on the Democratic side reacting to the Congressional Budget Office report, you would have heard claims that the deficit and debt crisis facing this country is solved and that no further deficit reduction is needed. In fact, President Obama took to the airwaves recently in his radio address and boasted about the deficits "shrinking at the fastest rate in decades."

These claims about last week's Congressional Budget Office report strike me as odd, particularly because the details of the report tell a different story. According to the CBO, the deficit for 2013 is projected to be \$642 billion or 4 percent of the Nation's gross domestic product.

While the deficit may be down from its record trillion dollar-plus levels, the national debt, which is already at \$16.7 trillion, continues to grow at an alarming rate—\$642 billion this year alone. While it is encouraging that the

deficit this year will be smaller than it was originally projected, part of those savings are due to unexpected repayments from Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and the revenue increases from January's fiscal cliff agreement.

The fact of the matter is a deficit 4 percent the size of the economy is nearly double the historic average. Over the next 10 years covered in the CBO's baseline projections, the national debt will grow by nearly \$9 trillion to over \$25 trillion.

To put that number in perspective, the country is projected to rack up over \$2 billion in debt every single day over the next decade, at which point our national debt will exceed \$25 trillion. This assumes the sequester remains in place. Publicly held debt will remain above 70 percent of GDP, which is much higher than the historic average of 39 percent. CBO projects that publicly held debt will continue on an upward path beyond the next decade.

This growth is driven by spending, not revenue. The CBO report confirms that revenues are projected to grow by 45.9 percent in the 8 years after the year 2015, while overall spending will grow at 55 percent during that time period, despite the fact that inflation will be 19.5 percent and economic growth 24.9 percent during that time period. Those are CBO estimates about economic growth, inflation, spending, and debt over the course of the next decade.

In other words, revenues are going up but spending is projected to grow at nearly three times the rate of inflation, meaning we have a spending problem, not a revenue problem. In fact, revenues will reach 19.1 percent of GDP by the year 2023, which is well above the historic average of 17.9 percent since the end of World War II. Spending, on the other hand, will continue to grow even with the sequester, driven largely by increases in mandatory spending. Mandatory spending on programs such as Medicare is projected to grow by 79 percent from today's level over the next 10 years. Federal health care programs, including ObamaCare, are driving the surge in mandatory spending. Federal health care spending is projected to double over the next decade as the health insurance exchange subsidies kick in beginning next year. Medicare and other programs continue to grow without needed reforms to save and strengthen them.

Spending on mandatory programs and interest on the debt will consume nearly three-quarters of all Federal spending over the next 10 years, leaving little room to pay for all discretionary programs including, I might add, national defense.

To slow the rapid rise in debt this country is experiencing, we have to control the largest driver of that debt, which is spending and, in particular, mandatory entitlement spending. The alternative is a crippling national debt that is bad for the economy, bad for jobs, bad for our national security, and bad for our children and grandchildren.

According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, "Such high and rising debt later in the coming decade would have serious negative consequences." The report goes on to say: "Moreover, because Federal borrowing reduces national saving, over time the capital stock would be smaller and total wages would be lower . . ."

The CBO also warns that such high levels of debt increase the risk of a fiscal crisis. The threat the rising national debt poses to our economy is real. It will impact the American people, and it will impact our economy in very real ways. It will slow economic growth, meaning fewer jobs. It will drive up interest rates, making it more expensive to borrow money to pay for a college education or to buy a home.

It is inevitable that the national debt is going to have to be addressed at some point. The question is whether we address it directly or continue kicking the can down the road, which will only make our problems much more difficult to solve.

The Congressional Budget Office also projected in their update last week that interest spending—the amount we spend to finance our debt—is going to increase dramatically over the next several years. In fact, interest costs on prior deficit spending are going to grow from \$223 billion today to \$823 billion in 2023, an increase of 369 percent. Net interest costs will surpass the base defense budget in 2019, 6 years from now. Think about that. We are going to spend more in interest on the debt 6 years from now than we spend on national security, on our national defense. That is how fast the interest is going to eat up every other area of the budget.

I would hope we will be able to take this CBO report and not greet it with great fanfare and be slapping high fives because for 1 year the deficit was reduced by a couple of hundred billion over what it was supposed to be, but, rather, recognize that with \$642 billion this year and a Federal debt that is going to be at \$25 trillion at the end of this decade and interest payments that will exceed the amount we spend on national security, we have a serious debt crisis in this country that needs to be addressed.

It is my wish that Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle and our Democratic colleagues will work with us and that the President will step forward and acknowledge we have a debt crisis. It is not a debt crisis somewhere out there in the future, it is a debt crisis today that needs to be dealt with. The CBO update, rather than alleviating that concern, puts the fine point that we need to act, and we need to act now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, Thomas Jefferson once said: "Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing."

I know many Montana farmers and ranchers who understand that exactly. They know what Jefferson meant. They work the soils and tend their herds month after month, often through natural disasters such as the drought we had in 2012. It is hard work, but they do it because it is work worth doing. The dirt under their nails and the sweat on their brow puts food on our tables every day. The farm bill supports that effort, the bill before us this afternoon. It is work worth doing.

Make no mistake, the farm bill is a jobs bill. It supports 16 million American jobs every year. In my State of Montana, one in every five jobs is tied to agriculture. Those jobs are counting on us to get this bill done.

As we work to tackle the debt, it is important to remember the farm bill cuts spending by \$23 billion. The farm bill is part of the solution, not part of the problem. Under the leadership of Chairwoman STABENOW and Ranking Member COCHRAN, we have crafted a true reform farm bill. We worked with farmers and ranchers across the country to create a farm policy that works for producers and taxpayers both. It provides support that is needed when they actually experience a loss.

As Will Rogers notably said: "The farmer has to be an optimist or he wouldn't still be a farmer."

Farming is capital intensive. Farmers work with paper-thin profit margins. Even the best farmer is left at the mercy of weather and chance.

The drought last year is an example of the risk farmers face. USDA predicts that 80 percent of agricultural land experienced drought in 2012, making it one of the most expensive droughts in a generation. In Montana that means 48 of 56 counties with parched crops and empty fields. The revenue program in this bill, combined with the crop insurance products we have fine-tuned over the decades, will help farmers survive disasters such as this and prepare to put food on America's tables when weather or market conditions improve.

Anyone who has been to Montana knows we have the best-tasting beef in the world too—or at least we think so. For the last year our ranchers have weathered this drought with no support. With hay and water in short supply, they have been forced to thin their herds. Thinning herds means lost jobs in Montana, because 50 percent of our economy is tied to agriculture, and about 35 percent of our total agriculture proceeds come from cattle and calf sales.

Livestock disaster assistance keeps our ranchers in business until the rain starts falling again. That is why I created these programs in 2008, and that is why I fought so hard to make them permanent in this bill—to finally provide our ranchers with certainty they can take to the bank. In the last farm bill they were not permanent and caused almost another disaster. I thank the chairman and ranking member for working with me to extend that livestock disaster with limited funds.

We did not stop there. We did not stop with reforming the farm bill. We saved \$6 billion from in the conservation title without compromising the policy. We did this by consolidating 23 existing programs, bringing a tight network of efficient and streamlined conservation programs.

I made sure we protected the working lands programs, which contribute to substantial conservation improvements but still allow for productive use of the land.

In the forestry title, we permanently authorized stewardship contracting. This is so important to the western one-third of our State. This will help the timber industry sustainably harvest more trees. Anyone in western Montana will tell you that means jobs.

We also included support to combat the bark beetle epidemic that has killed over 6 million acres of Montana forests. Senator BENNET and I worked together to make sure those dead trees can be harvested more quickly before the wood wastes or burns. With fire season already well underway in Montana, this investment is more important than ever.

I was also extremely proud of our work to help veterans find jobs in farming. Forty-five percent of our servicemembers come from rural areas. This is a national statistic, so farming is a natural fit for veterans looking to return home to a rural way of life.

In the nutrition title, I am proud to say we kept the fundamentals of the food stamp program intact so low-income families have their safety net in place as the economy continues to improve. We even found a way to trump up spending for TEFAP, which provides emergency food for needy families.

In Montana, agriculture is a way of life. It is our biggest industry. Our 29,300 farms produce billions of dollars worth of quality wheat, barley, peas, and lentils—to say nothing of our livestock. Our ranchers have 2.5 million head of cattle, which means there are more cows in Montana than people.

The farm bill is not just for producers. It also provides funding for rural businesses, from Miles City, to Glendive, to Libby. The farm bill offers opportunities for Montanans of all walks of life.

The same is true all across America. Our farm policy contributes to security in American agriculture, and that is why we spend less on food than any other country in the world. We spend less than any other developed country in the world. Americans spend less than 7 percent of their disposable income to feed their families. That compares with almost 25 percent in 1930.

Our producers put food on tables around the world. In 2012, agricultural exports reached \$136 billion, with a surplus of \$32 billion—literally growing wealth from our fertile soils.

Like any small business owner, farmers and ranchers all across Montana tell me the No. 1 thing they want is certainty. Operating under short-term

extensions leaves millions of Americans' agricultural jobs stuck in limbo. Farmers and ranchers need certainty they can take to the bank. That is why they need this 5-year farm bill. If we can get this bill passed, we are on the road to moving away from these short-term extensions—which do no one any good—and moving to longer term legislation which does everybody a lot more good. I hope we can get this bill passed, it is so important.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. I am going to proceed on my leader time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

BURMESE SANCTIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. For the past two decades, I have been coming to the Senate floor to condemn acts of the Burmese regime against its own people. For the past decade, for these same reasons, I have sponsored legislation to impose sanctions on the Burmese Government.

Beginning in 2003, import sanctions have been renewed annually through the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act. This act was later enhanced in 2008 through the Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE Act, a measure I also cosponsored.

Today, however, I come to the floor with a different message. After having given the matter a great deal of thought and review, I do not believe Congress should reauthorize these import sanctions.

Let me repeat that. I do not believe the Burma sanctions should be renewed for another year. There are several reasons why.

First, the objective of the sanctions effort is to change the behavior of the Burmese Government. To a significant extent that has actually taken place. As a result of the new Burmese Government's actions in the past 2½ years, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, has been freed from house arrest, has been permitted to travel abroad, and has been elected to office as a member of Parliament.

A free and fair by-election was held in Burma last year. Scores of political prisoners have been released. A freer form of government has begun to take root. I strongly believe the import sanctions we previously enacted were instrumental in promoting these reforms. They helped deny the previous military junta the legitimacy it had craved.

These positive changes, many of which I saw for myself during my visit to Burma in January 2012, should be acknowledged, and we do acknowledge them. As Suu Kyi herself said last fall during her visit to the United States, "the sanctions need to be removed."

Second, I believe renewing sanctions would be a slap in the face to Burmese reformers and would embolden those within Burma who want to slow or reverse the reform movement. We should

be strengthening the hand of these reformists to show the “fence sitters” that reform will be met with positive action by the United States. The administration has extended an olive branch to the new Burmese Government, and I believe it is time for Congress to do the same. Burmese citizens should not be made to feel that Congress will maintain sanctions no matter what they do.

Third, after renewal of the import ban last year, the administration waived most of the sanctions in response to the recent reforms. So as a practical matter—as a practical matter—even if the ban were renewed, its effect would be largely nullified through an administration waiver—a waiver, by the way, I support.

Let me emphasize a few points. By choosing not to renew the import ban, no one should fall under the misimpression that Congress would be giving up its leverage with respect to Burma. The current restrictions on importation of Burmese jade and rubies are likely to remain in place even without the renewal of sanctions. This is because the administration enjoys authority under other statutes to continue to limit the importation of Burmese gems. So, again, as a practical matter, the restrictions on Burma would be little different without the sanctions than they are right now under the sanctions we renewed last year, considering the fact the sanctions were waived last year anyway.

Moreover, there are other sanctions, apart from the law I was just talking about, which would remain permanent. They include the authority to freeze assets and the authority to deny visas to bad Burmese actors. Even if the import ban is not reauthorized, these provisions remain on the books.

In addition, a variety of other sanctions that expressly name Burma remain in effect and still require outright repeal or modification. They include provisions within the fiscal year 1997 foreign operations appropriations bill, the Customs and Trade Act of 1990, and the Foreign Assistance Act.

If the Burmese Government continues to support political and economic reform, then at a later date Congress can consider whether these permanent restrictions warrant removal or modification.

Beyond the realm of trade, there are other statutes of general application that sanction Burma due to concerns over human trafficking, counter-narcotics, and religious freedom, to name just a few such issues. Burma must take positive action in order to no longer qualify for sanctions under those measures as well. So, again, legislative leverage would remain even without the renewal of this law.

There also remains the annual appropriations process as Congress considers how much and what types of aid Burma should receive in the first place. For instance, there is some indication that Burma wants to improve its military-

to-military relationship with us. Frankly, I think that is a good idea, and such programs and contacts provide additional tools for congressional oversight and action.

The European Union and Australia have also removed most of their sanctions against Burma. Congress, in choosing not to renew trade sanctions, would ensure that American companies remain on equal footing with their western competitors and bring greater certainty to those U.S. firms which are considering investment in Burma.

Finally, if Burma backslides, Congress can always reconsider the sanctions.

As a Congress, we need to be realistic about the fundamental challenges facing Burma on its road to reform. The country faces major challenges on many fronts stemming from a half century of bad governance and economic mismanagement. In this post-junta period the Burmese people need our help, and bilateral trade can do just that. It can help improve Burmese lives and show the people of Burma that a move toward greater political openness under a new government brings with it tangible benefits in their daily lives.

A Burmese Government that is more representative of its people and reforming economically will be positioned to contribute to ASEAN regional stability and grow increasingly independent within the region.

While I am pleased with the progress we have already seen, I would note I am not—repeat, not—fully satisfied with the progress Burma has made so far. Much more needs to be done. The 2015 elections will be a vital indicator of how strong the reform movement is within Burma.

In my view there are several other important benchmarks we will need to see achieved going forward. For example, all parties within Burma must work to reduce the clashes between the military and ethnic minority groups and begin political dialogue toward peaceful reconciliation. All parties within Burma need to work to diminish sectarian strife between Buddhists and Muslims. Any arms trade between North Korea and Burma needs to stop—now.

The Burmese constitution also needs amending in several areas. For example, provisions specifically designed to exclude Suu Kyi from running for President need to be changed. Complete and unconditional release of political prisoners needs to be undertaken. The military should increasingly be brought under civilian control. Finally, other reforms in progress involving enhanced rule of law, protection of private property, and government accountability need to take place.

I make this appeal to my colleagues in light of the visit of Burmese President Thein Sein to Washington this week. This is an important visit reflecting many of the dramatic changes that have taken place in Burma. It fol-

lows on the heels of Daw Aung Suu Kyi’s landmark visit last fall and President Obama’s visit to Burma last year.

Many of us who have followed Burma for years—in my case, two decades—never thought we would see this reform come to this troubled country. This is an important moment. I believe it is time for Congress to take responsible action to continue to promote progress by encouraging those who are risking much—very much—within Burma while still leaving in place other sanctions in order to encourage further reform. A decision not to renew the sanctions is an important step in that direction. To do otherwise could send the wrong signal to the wrong people.

So as a Congress, let’s continue to vigorously support democracy and peaceful reconciliation in Burma, but let’s do so by taking a positive step forward with regard to our sanctions policy.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I see my friend from Louisiana wishing to speak, but I have a unanimous consent request first.

I ask unanimous consent that at 4:05—5 minutes after 4—the Senate proceed to a vote in relation to the Roberts amendment, No. 948; that there be no second-degree amendments in order to the amendment prior to the vote; that the time until 4:05 be divided with 10 minutes for Senator VITTER and the remaining time to be equally divided on the amendment.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I rise to present two amendments I have filed on this farm bill, and I will be pushing hard for votes on them right now. I hope these get a full and extensive debate and a vote. They are relevant and related to the farm bill in significant ways.

The first amendment is with regard to the free government cell phone program, and of course that uses as criteria for eligibility the food stamp program and other benefit programs, so it is directly related to that aspect of the farm bill.

Mr. President, as you know, this program has been exploding almost without limit, and I have some fundamental concerns about it. My fundamental concerns are pretty simple and pretty basic. They come down to two things: First of all, I think the whole program is an entitlement mentality gone wild; that we have started the notion that folks are entitled to the government, the taxpayer, providing them almost everything under the sun; and, secondly, and not unrelated, there has been widespread fraud and abuse in this program, and I am convinced it is at the core of this program and can’t be scrubbed out.

What is the program we are talking about? Well, it is the free government cell phone program. It was started in 2008, and in just those few years since then it has grown from \$143 million that year, which itself is a significant amount of money, to nearly \$2 billion now—an elevenfold increase. This program is paid for by you and by me. It is paid for through our land line and cell phone bills. We all get a charge on our bills. So if you actually pay your phone bill, land line, and/or cell phone, you get a charge and you pay that charge and that is what funds this program. So ratepayers, taxpayers, citizens, millions upon millions around the country pay for this program.

The FCC itself—and the FCC is in charge of the program—estimates that about 270,000 beneficiaries have more than one of these free government cell phones. That is interesting, that is important because that is completely against the law and against the rules—completely prohibited. The FCC also says the top five companies that benefit from the program could not confirm the eligibility of 41 percent of the folks they signed up. This is from a report in 2011. The FCC did some spot-checking and found that 41 percent of the folks these companies signed up couldn't be confirmed as eligible.

This has led one of my colleagues, CLAIRE McCASKILL, Democrat of Missouri, to say the program is rife for fraud, with a "history of extreme waste and abuse." That is what my objections are all about—rampant waste and abuse and a general entitlement mentality that I think has gone too far.

The amendment I offer on this bill, which is at the desk, would simply and completely end the program with regard to free government cell phones. Someone might argue: Oh, these programs are being fixed. We are making great strides.

Well, I was interested in seeing how far we have come, so this very weekend I was talking to a friend of mine back in Louisiana, Clarence, and he was interested in that too. So Monday—yes—today—he decided to go to one of these outlets that advertises free government cell phones and just see what his experience was.

So he walked in and simply told the truth; that he was interested in getting a free government cell phone. He was asked: Are you now on any government benefit program, such as food stamps?

He answered truthfully: No. He said: I have a job. I don't make a lot of money. That was the truth.

He was asked to produce two things: a driver's license and a pay stub. He showed the people at the counter both of those things. They looked at them. Interestingly, they certainly didn't make any copies. They certainly didn't create any documentation because that could potentially get them in trouble.

They looked at his documents and gave him a form he had to sign once, and then they immediately gave him a free government cell phone. The phone

was on, it worked immediately, it had minutes on it that he could immediately use. He walked out of that storefront in less than 10 minutes with a free government cell phone.

He then looked up the precise eligibility criteria of the program, which he did not know before. Guess what. Surprise, surprise. He did not qualify. He should never have gotten one. So he is returning it today. It will also be interesting to see how long that phone is kept on even after he returns it because the provider gets \$9.25 from the ratepayer and the taxpayer and the FCC every month for that account.

This is his, Clarence's, free government cell phone. This is his receipt. The charge is zero, absolutely free, and completely contrary to all of the rules of the program, which is why he is returning it today.

We have serious spending and fiscal challenges in this country, but we have an even greater challenge, which is we have lost the faith and confidence of the American people. We have lost it because of this. We have lost it because there are tents popping out on every street corner. They are handing out these free government cell phones like candy. And why is that happening? Because the people handing out the phones have a vested interest in doing that, have a vested interest in not worrying about whether eligibility criteria are met because every time they hand out a phone they get \$9.25 per phone per month as long as they can sustain that gravy train.

They are the biggest welfare abusers of this—rich owners of companies who milk the system to get richer, whom I would call government welfare kings.

This abuse needs to stop. We need to recapture the confidence of the American people. My amendment would help do that.

I will also be presenting and pushing for a vote on an amendment to limit and bar certain people from receiving any food stamp benefits. Those are folks who have been convicted of violent and serious crimes such as violent rapists, pedophiles, and murderers. There is a misconception that ban is already in the law. In fact, it is not. In fact, the only ban that exists is for drug felons and in the law is an opt-out for States so the State can opt out of even that ban.

My second amendment is simple and straightforward. It would establish a complete ban in the program for anyone who has committed a violent rape, a crime of pedophilia or a murder. There would be no opt-out for States.

I hope we can form a bipartisan consensus around this basic idea and put that basic fundamental limitation in the law. I urge my colleagues to look at both of these amendments and support both of these amendments.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 1 minute remaining. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, will the distinguished Presiding Officer

please inform the Senator on how much time we have divided equally.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 40 seconds.

Mr. ROBERTS. I ask unanimous consent that 2 minutes be granted.

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

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, this is an amendment I have worked on considerably, along with Senator THUNE, Senator JOHANNIS, others on the Agriculture Committee, and others as well. We can restore integrity to the SNAP program while providing benefits to those truly in need. Let me emphasize that—while providing benefits to those truly in need. We are not touching those while we will save an additional \$31 billion; \$31 billion as compared to what? Compared to \$800 billion over 10 years. If we cannot at least make those kinds of savings, \$31 billion to \$800 billion, we have problems. I am not proposing a dramatic change in the policy of nutrition programs, such as block granting programs to States would represent; instead, this amendment would enforce the principles of good government and return SNAP spending to more responsible levels.

SNAP was exempted from across-the-board cuts known as sequestration. However, it is clear there are areas within the program that could provide significant savings that were left untouched. Enacting these reforms would allow the Federal Government to continue to help those who truly need Federal benefits and assistance but also enact needed reforms. Otherwise, food stamps and SNAP will continue to be a target. I don't want that. I think we can restore integrity to the program. I encourage my colleagues to support this amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I rise in strong opposition to this amendment. This goes way beyond what we have done in the committee, which is to focus on waste, fraud, and abuse and make sure there is integrity in the program, to make sure supplemental nutrition assistance goes to families who have been working hard all their lives, paying taxes, who fall on hard times and need some temporary help. This, in fact, would have a nine times higher cut than what we reported out of the committee on a bipartisan vote. It would undercut what we are trying to do in employment and training, which is so critical.

We all want people to have the opportunity to get back to work. We are seeing now, in the area of nutrition, the costs are now going down the way they should be, which is people are getting back to work and no longer needing the help. That is the way we should reduce it, in addition to tackling waste, fraud, and abuse, as we do in this bill.

I strongly urge my colleagues to vote no on this amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the Roberts amendment.

Ms. STABENOW. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be. There is a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. COBURN) and the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE) would have voted "yea."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 40, nays 58, as follows;

[Rollcall Vote No. 130 Leg.]

YEAS—40

Alexander	Flake	Paul
Ayotte	Graham	Portman
Barrasso	Grassley	Risch
Blunt	Hatch	Roberts
Boozman	Heller	Rubio
Burr	Hoeben	Scott
Chambliss	Isakson	Sessions
Coats	Johanns	Shelby
Corker	Johnson (WI)	Thune
Cornyn	Kirk	Toomey
Crapo	Lee	Vitter
Cruz	McCain	Wicker
Enzi	McConnell	
Fischer	Moran	

NAYS—58

Baldwin	Hagan	Murray
Baucus	Harkin	Nelson
Begich	Heinrich	Pryor
Bennet	Heitkamp	Reed
Blumenthal	Hirono	Reid
Boxer	Johnson (SD)	Rockefeller
Brown	Kaine	Sanders
Cantwell	King	Schatz
Cardin	Klobuchar	Schumer
Carper	Landrieu	Shaheen
Casey	Lautenberg	Stabenow
Cochran	Leahy	Tester
Collins	Levin	Udall (CO)
Coons	Manchin	Udall (NM)
Cowan	McCaskill	Warner
Donnelly	Menendez	Warren
Durbin	Merkley	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Mikulski	Wyden
Franken	Murkowski	
Gillibrand	Murphy	

NOT VOTING—2

Coburn Inhofe

The amendment (No. 948) was rejected.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I move to reconsider the vote and to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

AMENDMENT NO. 931

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be 5 minutes equally divided prior to a vote in relation to the Gillibrand amendment No. 931; that there be no second-degree amendments in order to the amendment prior to the vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I rise in support of this amendment be-

cause when Congress proposes to cut the Food Stamp Program, it is not nameless, faceless people looking for a handout who suffer. It is children. It is veterans. It is Active-Duty servicemembers. It is hard-working adults. We have to stand by them in the way they have stood by us. The reality of this amendment is that half of the recipients of food stamps are children, 8 percent are seniors, and 1.4 million veteran households receive food stamps.

Some of my colleagues believe this is some loophole we are closing, but the fact is these programs were designed for efficiency as part of welfare reform. When we put this LIHEAP program in place—the "heat and eat" program—it was to say families living in cold weather States that have high heating bills need extra money to put food on the table. This particular provision is for people in rental apartments who do not have a heating bill but are also having their heat included in their rent. These Governors in "heat and eat" States have said we want to make sure our recipients of food stamps are eligible for this benefit because they need it. Children, seniors, veterans, Active-Duty servicemembers deserve to have food on their table.

I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I thank the Presiding Officer.

No, no, no, no; we are not cutting anybody's benefits that the distinguished Senator from New York is talking about. This amendment would effectively shield over 80 percent of the farm bill from any deficit reduction and prevent the bill from addressing a serious breach in the nutrition program. The distinguished chairperson of the Agriculture Committee, the Senator from Michigan, already has included the provision in the bill. To say the chairperson is against food stamps for needy people is ridiculous.

It is important to note this amendment does more than create in a State what is called the LIHEAP loophole which we don't want; this amendment also cuts crop insurance. That is the No. 1 priority of American farmers today. It is one of the great success stories. It was developed as a way to help farmers manage their own risks, have skin in the game, and head off the need for costly, inefficient, ad hoc disaster programs. These types of cuts can be difficult to absorb. When we are in the third year of drought is not the time to change them.

I also wish to add the Senator from New York has been a champion of expanding crop insurance coverage for specialty crops, organic crops in her home State. I just think that perhaps she is misinformed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Is there time remaining?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 1 minute 9 seconds remaining.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I reluctantly rise in opposition. I am a full supporter of this program to make sure families who find themselves in a situation beyond their control because of the economy, because of what has been happening to so many around the country, get the temporary help they need. What we have done in the farm bill is focus on those areas where there has been fraud or abuse or, in this case, misuse of actually a very good program to be able to provide assistance in terms of heat and food. But there are a few States—mine is one of them—that have gone beyond and are misusing a well-intended program.

I believe in fighting for the integrity of these programs so we can continue to fight for increased help for people who truly need it, and I believe what we have done in the bill meets the test of integrity and is defensible and addresses legitimate concerns raised about the misuse and fraud of programs.

So I ask my colleagues to oppose the amendment, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second.

There is a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) is necessarily absent.

I further announce that, if present and voting, the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) would vote "yea."

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. COBURN), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE), and the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE) would have voted "nay."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 26, nays 70, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 131 Leg.]

YEAS—26

Baldwin	Hirono	Reed
Begich	King	Reid
Blumenthal	Lautenberg	Sanders
Boxer	Leahy	Schatz
Brown	Levin	Schumer
Cantwell	Menendez	Udall (NM)
Casey	Merkley	Warren
Cowan	Murphy	Wyden
Gillibrand	Murray	

NAYS—70

Alexander	Carper	Cruz
Ayotte	Chambliss	Donnelly
Barrasso	Coats	Durbin
Baucus	Cochran	Enzi
Bennet	Collins	Feinstein
Blunt	Coons	Fischer
Boozman	Corker	Flake
Burr	Cornyn	Franken
Cardin	Crapo	Graham

Grassley	Landrieu	Rubio
Hagan	Lee	Scott
Harkin	Manchin	Sessions
Hatch	McCain	Shaheen
Heinrich	McCaskill	Shelby
Heitkamp	McConnell	Stabenow
Heller	Mikulski	Tester
Hoeven	Moran	Thune
Isakson	Nelson	Toomey
Johanns	Paul	Udall (CO)
Johnson (SD)	Portman	Vitter
Johnson (WI)	Pryor	Warner
Kaine	Risch	Wicker
Kirk	Roberts	
Klobuchar	Rockefeller	

NOT VOTING—4

Coburn	Murkowski
Inhofe	Whitehouse

The amendment (No. 931) was rejected.

Mr. REID. I move to reconsider the vote and move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the time until 5:30 p.m. be for a period of morning business, with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each during that time, and that at 5:30 p.m. Senator STABENOW be recognized.

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

The Senator from Washington.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—
H. CON. RES. 25

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, it has now been 59 days since the Senate and the House passed our budget resolutions. The American people are now expecting us to get together and do everything possible to bridge the partisan divide and come to a bipartisan deal. On this side the Senate Democrats are ready to get to work. Unfortunately, despite their focus over the past 2 years on the need to return to regular order, Republicans have been refusing to allow us to move to a bipartisan budget conference.

Many Republicans, including the ranking member on the Budget Committee, Senator SESSIONS, had been very clear up until recently that after the Senate engages in an open and fair budget markup process—and these are his words—“the work of conferencing must begin.”

Minority Leader MCCONNELL said in January that if the Senate budget is different from the House budget, then “send it off to conference. That’s how things used to work around here. We used to call it legislating.” I could not agree more with Minority Leader MCCONNELL’s words from back in January. Over the past few weeks we have tried to move to conference eight times, and each time Senate Republicans have stood and said no.

They have managed to stall for weeks now, but their excuses for not

wanting to move to conference are changing. At first Republicans told us that we needed “a framework” before they would allow us to move to conference, although they never explained what that meant. And, frankly, a budget is a framework. Then the story changed, and they told us they would only let us move to conference if we made certain guarantees about the outcome. Then last week the story changed again, and Senate Republicans claimed that despite the fact that we engaged in a fair and open budget process in the Senate less than 2 months ago, they think we need a do-over, with another 50 hours of debate on top of the 50 hours we have already done and another round of unlimited amendments on top of the unlimited amendments that were moved already.

This is absurd. First of all, to claim that regular order involves a second full Senate budget debate is simply not true. The Senate has never been forced to go through a full debate and open amendment process twice just to get to conference—not one case. Completely unprecedented. In fact, every single time since 1994 that the Senate moved to conference, it was done by unanimous consent, with bipartisan support, which is the way it ought to be done.

Second of all, the Senate engaged in a full and open debate in which any Member could offer any budget amendment they wanted to. We did that a few months ago. I know all of my colleagues remember this. I certainly remember this.

I would be happy to quote some of what was said about the process if any reminders are needed because as that debate came to a close in the wee hours of the morning, Minority Leader MCCONNELL said the Senate had just engaged in “an open and complete and full debate.” He continued and said, “I know everyone is exhausted, and people may not feel it at the moment, but this is one of the Senate’s finest days in recent years, and I commend everyone who has participated in this extraordinary debate.”

My ranking member, Senator SESSIONS, said the Budget Committee markup was “an open process” where “everybody had the ability to offer amendments.”

Senator SESSIONS said on the floor, as debate was wrapping up, he was thankful that the Republicans had “free ability to speak and debate” and for “helping us move a lot of amendments fairly and equitably tonight.”

There is no question the Senate engaged in a fair and open and lengthy debate about the budget before we passed it. There is absolutely no good reason to ask that we do this all over unless the intention is to simply stall the process and push us closer to a crisis.

Instead of scrambling to find new excuses for their budget conference flipflops, I hope Senate Republicans realize their opposition to bipartisan negotiations is not sustainable and will

not allow us to get to the table and move on this matter.

I know there are Members who do not agree with the budget that was passed. They will have another opportunity to fight for changes in a bipartisan conference, which is how we do this. That is the responsible and appropriate path forward, and I hope the Senate Republican leaders decide to move back to the position they maintained just a few months ago. I know a number of our colleagues on the Republican side have said to me privately and in public that they believe we should move to conference. I hope we can do that. The challenges before our country in terms of our debt and deficit and the investments that need to be made and the certainty that Americans are looking to us for cannot be completed until we go to conference and work out our differences and come back and move this forward.

I hope this time when I ask for unanimous consent to go to conference Senate Republicans will join with us so the American people can see an open conference move to a debate and solve this very challenging problem we have in front of us.

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 33, H. Con. Res. 25; that the amendment which is at the desk, the text of S. Con. Res. 8, the budget resolution passed by the Senate, be inserted in lieu thereof; that H. Con. Res. 25, as amended, be agreed to; the motion to reconsider be made and laid upon the table; that the Senate insist on its amendment, request a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses; and that the chair be authorized to appoint conferees on the part of the Senate, all with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. WARREN). Is there objection?

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Reserving the right to object, it has now been 59 days that the opposition has been trying to orchestrate a backroom deal to raise the debt ceiling. Raising the debt ceiling is an incredibly important debate and shouldn’t be done in the back room by a few people. It shouldn’t be done through parliamentary trickery or chicanery. It should be done out in the full and open and under the ordinary rules of the Senate.

We are now borrowing \$40,000 every second, \$4 billion a day. We must borrow from China to run the ordinary functions of our government. In fact, it is worse. We borrow from China to send money to China. We borrow money from China to send money to Pakistan. We build bridges in Pakistan with money borrowed from China. It can’t go on. No American family can continue to spend money endlessly that they don’t have.

All we are asking is for a commonsense resolution that says we can’t keep borrowing.

What I ask is unanimous consent that the Senator modify her request so