

BORSKI) in introducing the Disaster Mitigation Act of 1999.

This widely-supported bipartisan legislation passed the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure last year, after months of hearings and review by the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, which I am privileged to chair. Similar legislation moved through the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. The 106th Congress should give priority consideration to the Disaster Mitigation Act.

The introduced bill, essentially unchanged from the bill the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure reported last year, H.R. 3869, amends the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to authorize a program for predisaster mitigation, to streamline the administration of disaster relief, and to control the Federal cost of disaster assistance.

The two themes of the bill, greater emphasis on mitigation and greater program efficiency, will reduce the cost and suffering natural disasters place on communities and the Nation overall.

Improving our Nation's outdated flood plain maps is a prime example of an area where new technologies can save us millions of dollars. Computerized mapping makes eminent fiscal sense, and may ultimately save thousands of lives. Boy, that is a double-header worthy of strong, strong support.

I look forward to working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and State and local governments and other public and private sector entities and citizens to continue the effort to make disaster mitigation a national priority.

It makes far more sense to take action prior to a disaster to minimize the negative impact of that disaster. That makes so much more sense than to do what we have been doing year after year after year: A disaster comes, there is so much suffering, our hearts are pulled at, and we obviously respond. That is what government needs to do, but far better to minimize the impact before the disaster than to react to the disaster after it has occurred.

I am particularly pleased about the prospects of working with the chairwoman, the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. TILLIE FOWLER) and the ranking Democrat, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. JIM TRAFICANT) on the new Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Emergency Management, which has jurisdiction over the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Jurisdiction has been transferred from my subcommittee to the subcommittee of the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. FOWLER). I have already had extensive conversations with her. She is very much in support of this effort. I look forward to working with

her. I think it is going to be a productive partnership, and it is going to be bipartisan, Mr. Speaker.

My hope is that the legislation reported by the committee last year and reintroduced today by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BORSKI) and me will help the subcommittee as it reviews FEMA programs and considers legislation to improve the Nation's approach to disasters.

RESPONSES TO CONSTITUENTS' CONCERNS: THE READING OF THE MAILBAG

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GANSKE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I want to take a little time today to talk to the people back in my home district. My office receives many, many letters from constituents on numerous subjects, and I would like to read a few of them and answer them right here on the floor of the House. Let me begin. I call this the reading of the mailbag.

Mailbag letter number one. My first letter comes from Reinhold Maschhoff of Nashville, Illinois, who wrote to me about low hog prices.

"Dear sir, I am writing you about the low price on hogs. . . . First of all, I'm 80 years of age and doing some work. My wife is very active and does a lot of volunteer work at the hospital and nursing home.

"We used to live on a farm. However, my son farms and has a family. He farms only 300 acres. The rest has to come out of livestock. . . . This has made a good living for them. Now since August he has been losing money, \$25 to \$30 a pig.

"I think of all the work he does, and then to think he is losing money, as much as \$2,500 a load. This will lead to bankruptcy. What are you doing about it? Sincerely, Reinhold Maschhoff."

My response is that the recently rock bottom hog prices are a very real problem in Illinois. Literally hundreds of farmers have contacted me about this crisis, including Ruth Rensing of New Douglas, Illinois, and Daniel Matthews of Nokomis, Illinois.

Although no one has a quick and easy solution for these prices, I want to talk about what Congress and the Federal Government is doing right now. I recently held a series of meetings on the hog crisis with family farmers back in the 20th District of Illinois. Local farmers, agricultural leaders, and government officials met together in Springfield, Mt. Vernon, and Pittsfield, Illinois, to discuss their concerns in the hog industry, and to talk about any short- and long-term remedies that were available. I will briefly highlight a few here.

In order to help farmers suffering from low prices, the U.S. Department

of Agriculture announced several procedures to stem the hog crisis. The USDA will allow farmers to defer loan payments, and has made available payments to some struggling hog farmers. The agency has also brought \$70 million worth of pork for food aid programs.

While I realize this help is really a drop in the bucket compared to what many farmers have lost, I would encourage any farmers wishing to participate to contact either my district office or their local Farm Service Agency office.

Responding to the concerns of many small farmers in central and southern Illinois, I am in strong support of the Department of Justice's review of the agricultural industry, making sure that small- and medium-sized family farmers are not pushed out of the markets by larger companies.

I have also written and signed several letters to key agricultural leaders in Washington, including the chairman of the Committee on Agriculture, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST), Agriculture Secretary Glickman, and House leadership, asking each to consider any help that is available for struggling farmers, like the Maschhoff family.

□ 1400

With the help of dozens of farmers who attended my district hog crisis meetings, we came to the conclusion that although we have no quick and easy answers for low prices, Congress can take action to prevent this from happening in the future. By renewing fast track trade authority, helping farmers find new markets, passing new trade bills and making sure farmers can easily get their products to market, Congress can help our struggling pork producers and hog farmers.

Thank you for the letter, Reinhold.

Letter number two, my next letter comes from Brent Barnes of Beecher City, Illinois. This letter's topic is a fair tax bill.

On January 11th, Mr. Barnes wrote: "Dear Representative SHIMKUS, as a constituent, I urge you to support the fair tax bill legislation that will allow every American the opportunity to save more for education, a home or a better retirement. The fair tax is a national sales tax system that is fair, simple and efficient. It will allow me to keep my whole paycheck, and I will never have to file a tax return again.

"I urge you to support this bill and to please respond in writing to my request for information about your position on the fair tax. Signed Brent Barnes."

Thanks for your letter, Brent. I like the sound of this legislation. I hope you know that when I ran for office and now as your Congressman, I believe strongly that we must reform our Tax Code. Unfortunately, I do not think the

President is as interested in the idea as we are here in Congress.

Nonetheless, I did a little digging on the fair tax on the Internet and found the Americans for Fair Taxation website. This website did a good job of describing this new tax structure, which I would like to take a moment to discuss.

First, all Federal income taxes, including the onerous death tax, are abolished and replaced by a single-rate Federal sales tax collected only once at the point of sale, a Federal sales tax.

The fair tax proposal provides a monthly rebate to all individuals so that no American will pay taxes on the purchase of necessities.

Most importantly, this proposal empowers individuals. Americans can only be taxed when they go to the store and purchase goods. This is fundamentally different than the current Tax Code which taxes Americans just for earning money.

This proposal will also eliminate the Internal Revenue Service. As so many Americans know, our confusing Tax Code has forced the IRS and its agents to issue confusing rulings which only undermines the public's trust in the Federal Tax Code.

The fair tax also makes tax evasion more difficult since retailers will now administer this tax just as they administer State sales taxes. American citizens will no longer need to file for their tax returns.

To Mr. Barnes, back in Fayette County, I would like to say that I have not reached a decision on whether to support a national sales tax or a flat tax at this point. Both systems have merit.

As you know, in the State of Illinois, we have both. We have a flat income tax and a sales tax. But I will continue to study this issue and promote reform on the Tax Code as I serve you in this Congress.

Realistically speaking, I believe fundamental tax reform is at least 2 years off. However, in the near term, the Congress is advancing a simple plan to reduce taxes by 10 percent across the board. After we save Social Security, with the surplus dollars, we can return the leftover funds to the taxpayers. After all, it is your money. Thank you for bringing this legislation to my attention, Brent. I will be sending a follow-up letter within the next few days.

Letter number 3, I recently received another letter from Mr. Robert Devore in Beecher City, Illinois. In his letter regarding the military, he writes: "Dear sir, I know you are a veteran, as I am. I served over 9 years on active duty in the United States Navy, including two trips to Vietnam. My interest concerns how the military is treating their members.

"I have a good friend in St. Elmo, Illinois, whose son enlisted in the Navy a year ago. He went to Great Lakes for 3

weeks' training prior to joining the fleet in a squadron aboard an aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf. While going through training at Great Lakes, he was required to pay for his meals.

"I have another friend whose son enlisted in the Air Force. His son was required to purchase his own bedding, sheets, et cetera, and pay for his meals. How can the military do this? Sincerely Robert L. Devore."

My response stems from concerns about how the military was treating not only active members but also those who are retired, and were expressed by Odie Farris of Mount Vernon, Connie Mann of Collinsville and Edna Roehl of Staunton.

With poor living conditions, bad pay, lack of access to medical care and disappearing benefits, we are short-changing the men and women of our armed forces. It is quite ironic that we ask them to put their lives on the line to defend our country, yet we need to provide a food stamp allowance for service members at the lowest pay grades.

Because of continued cuts to our defense budget, recruiting and retention are increasingly difficult, readiness harder to maintain and weapons modernization tougher to fund.

We must properly fund our entire military, from our recent enlistees to those who fought in foreign wars. We should be funding our military more, and I will continue to fight to ensure our military is able to meet our defense needs.

Letter number 4, my final letter this afternoon, is from Rich DuPatz, Sr., from Brighton, Illinois. He writes, "As your constituent, I am writing to urge you to support H.R. 4197, the Citizen's Privacy Protection Act of 1998. This bill would repeal section 656 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, which would be a significant step toward establishing a national ID card.

"Section 656 would prohibit Federal agencies from accepting State issued drivers' licenses as valid identification unless the license conforms to a Federal standard, and the State puts the driver's Social Security number on the license or verifies it with the Social Security Administration. As a result, each State would issue ID cards.

"Requiring drivers to turn over their Social Security number is like asking them to provide a virtual pass key to a mountain of private and often sensitive information. A Social Security number is often used by businesses as an identifier. Therefore, it can be used to access a person's medical history, shopping preferences, use of prescription drugs, household income and other financial information just to name a few.

"Help put the Federal Government out of the national ID business. I strongly encourage you to help protect my privacy by supporting H.R. 4197,

and I look forward to hearing your thoughts on this legislation. Signed Mr. Rich DuPatz, Sr."

Well, first of all, Richard, I want to thank you for writing me and expressing your concerns with this issue. When I look at people who maintain their Social Security cards that were originally issued, there is an interesting statement at the bottom. This statement identifies that the Social Security number should only be used for the Social Security system and not used for any other identification purpose. How far we have come since the issuing of those first Social Security cards.

I also want to give you a little background behind the issue that you address. As you stated in your letter, Congress passed a tough illegal immigration bill in 1996 to address a serious problem with illegal immigration and voter fraud. I am sure that you would agree that having illegal aliens voting in our elections is not acceptable, as it would reduce the value of your vote.

To address the issue of illegal immigration and voter fraud, Congress authorized the Department of Transportation to establish national requirements for drivers licenses, making them, in effect, national ID cards. Acting on this authorization, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, commonly known as NHTSA, proposed a new rule, which would provide the basis for a national ID card. The rule would direct that all Federal agencies may accept, as proof of identity, only a driver's license or identification document that conforms strictly to certain specific and uniform Federal requirements.

Rich, I would have to agree with you on your concerns with NHTSA's proposed rule for it goes far beyond Congressional intent, raising serious privacy and civil liberty questions.

To address your concerns, on October 1998, the House of Representatives voted 333 to 95 in support of the omnibus appropriations conference report for fiscal year 1999. The following day, President Clinton signed it into law. Contained within this appropriation bill was a provision which prohibits NHTSA from issuing a final rule on national identification cards as required under section 656 of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act.

In short, Congress blocked implementation of this rule. For now, our civil liberties are protected but rest assured, I will continue to watch for over zealous bureaucrats or misinterpretations of Congressional intent in the future.

I would like to close my remarks for this afternoon, but before I go I want to thank my constituents who wrote my office. I hope that my responses answered their questions fully and to each of my constituents who I mentioned today, you will be receiving a

follow-up copy of my remarks in the mail shortly.

Mr. Speaker, I include for the RECORD the following letters.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, December 17, 1998.

DAN GLICKMAN,
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
(USDA), Washington, DC.

DEAR SECRETARY GLICKMAN: As I am sure you are aware, the prices for hogs moving from farms to the market are at their lowest levels in over 30 years.

I have spoken recently with many farmers in my district in central and southwestern Illinois, and they have shared with me their deep concerns about hog prices that have dropped to as low as 5 cents per pound, from 30 cents per pound less than 1 year ago. Many farmers in my district are losing money on every hog they sell, surrendering thousands of dollars every week, some on the verge of losing their farms altogether.

It is also my understanding that labor circumstances in Canada, and a short supply of space in packing plants across the country have helped to fuel this agriculture crisis.

While in the past many grain and commodity farmers relied on government control of the marketplace, hog farmers have traditionally been free of government intervention. However, I feel the government can not stand idly by, while farmers in my district lose their farms, especially due to circumstances beyond their control.

Today my office was in contact with Mr. Enrique Figueroa of the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service regarding what steps the Department is taking toward helping our farmers out of a very grave crisis. During our meeting, he indicated to me that the \$50 million purchase of hogs for food assistance will be accelerated, pork will be included in the upcoming allocation of credit guarantees to support exports to South Korea, a Pork Crisis Task Force will be created, and the FSA and USDA will be involved in restructuring loans and loan practices in order to help pork producers deal with recent losses.

I would respectfully urge you to expedite those actions you have proposed with all due diligence, and to take any other necessary steps to help these struggling farmers in Illinois and across the country.

Hog farmers in Illinois are among the most safe, efficient and reliable producers in the world, and we must allow them the opportunity to survive in what has recently become a very volatile marketplace.

In the coming days and weeks, I will continue to be in close contact with pork producers in my district and with the Department, to ensure that family farmers in my district have every opportunity for a bright and secure future.

Thank you for your prompt action and consideration. Please feel free to contact me, as time is short for many farmers in my district.

Sincerely,

JOHN SHIMKUS,
Member of Congress.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, January 8, 1999.

Hon. LARRY COMBEST,
Chairman, House Agriculture Committee,
Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN COMBEST: As I am sure you are aware, the prices for hogs moving from farms to the market are at their lowest levels in over 30 years.

I have spoken recently with many farmers in my district in central and southwestern Illinois, and they have shared with me their deep concerns about hog prices that have dropped to as low as 5 cents per pound, from 35-40 cents per pound less than 1 year ago. Many farmers in my district are losing money on every hog they sell, surrendering thousands of dollars every week, some on the verge of losing their farms.

It is also my understanding that labor circumstances in Canada, and a short supply of space in packing plants across the country have helped to fuel this agriculture crisis.

While in the past many grain and commodity farmers relied on government control of the marketplace, hog farmers have traditionally been free of government intervention. However, I feel the government can not stand idly by, while farmers in my district lose their farms, especially due to circumstances beyond their control.

I urge you to take action to help our family farmers see their way through this crisis. Hog farmers in Illinois are among the most safe, efficient and reliable producers in the world, and we must allow them the opportunity to survive in what has recently become a very volatile marketplace.

Thank you for your prompt action and consideration. Please feel free to contact me, as time is short for many farmers in my district.

Sincerely,

JOHN SHIMKUS,
Member of Congress.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
Washington, DC, January 15, 1999.
Hon. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

Hon. RICHARD GEPHARDT,
Minority Leader, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MESSRS. HASTERT AND GEPHARDT: We are writing to alert you to the severe problems facing family farmers in the pork industry. Pork prices have plunged to their lowest level since the Great Depression, dropping nearly 80% compared with last year, leaving pork producers struggling to hang on to their farms.

On January 8, 1999, a number of Members met with Under Secretary Mike Dunn and several other high-ranking USDA officials to exchange ideas about what can be done to bring relief to our nation's hog farmers. Those present at the meeting agreed that this issue is of utmost importance and needs to be addressed quickly by both the Administration and the Congress.

We are working together to develop a plan that can be brought to the entire House for passage and implementation. We are willing to discuss any idea that can assist our pork producers, from changing current USDA regulations to providing supplemental appropriations.

It is essential that the Leadership of Congress work in a bipartisan manner to allow Congress to take the necessary steps to address this important issue in an expeditious manner. We believe Congress needs to act as soon as possible, but certainly prior to the beginning of the spring planting season at the end of March.

Thank you in advance for your serious consideration of our request. We look forward to working with you to improve the economic conditions facing America's pork producers.

Sincerely,

Jim Nussle; David Minge; Leonard L. Boswell; Bill Barrett; Ray LaHood;

Jerry Weller; John Shimkus; Jerry F. Costello; Jim Leach; Earl Pomeroy; Ron Kind; Thomas Ewing; Marion Berry; Tom Latham; Gil Gutknecht; Lane Evans; Doug Bereuter; David Phelps; Bob Etheridge; David McIntosh; Debbie Stabenow; John Thune.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WELDON of Florida). Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 2 o'clock and 12 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

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AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. DREIER) at 3 o'clock and 3 minutes p.m.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 350, MANDATES INFORMATION ACT OF 1999

Mr. LINDER, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 106-6) on the resolution (H. Res. 36) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 350) to improve congressional deliberation on proposed Federal private sector mandates, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. SKEEN (at the request of Mr. ARMEY) for today and the balance of the week on account of a death in the family.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Mrs. JONES of Ohio) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. BLUMENAUER, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. NORTON, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. PALLONE, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. DUNCAN) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)