GOOD NEWS FOR RURAL NEW YORK

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, today I am happy to say there is good news in the omnibus appropriations bill for rural New Yorkers in two ways. The Satellite Home Viewer Act will finally allow rural residents in rural areas to receive local television programming, and the dairy language in the omnibus final package allows both option 1–A and the New England Dairy Compact to continue. Let me touch on both of these. It is clearly two dollops of good news for rural New Yorkers.

On the satellite bill, I have had constituent after constituent in areas such as Allegany County and Chenango County and Steuben County and Ulster County, throughout New York State in rural areas, tell me all of a sudden they were unable to receive over the air signals to their satellite programming. Imagine being cut off. Imagine for years depending on the weather reports before you took your kids to school or because you are a farmer and then not being able to get them. Imagine having your local news shows cut off. Imagine not being able to see things your family was accustomed to seeing, all because of a court action.

Today, that bill, that court action, is being overruled in the omnibus act. I am delighted to say half a million New York residents will now be able to get their local signal from their satellite which they were not able to do before—half a million people, all back the way they should be.

I hope we will continue the progress of the Satellite Home Viewer Act. The Federal provision was taken out. I understand the Senate Banking Committee plans to hold hearings next year to ensure that multiservice providers are encouraged to extend competition. I want to work with my colleagues to make sure my constituents in upstate rural New York, central New York, the west and southern tier, and in the north country have the same viewing options as those in downstate.

The other bit of good news, of course, is the dairy language in the final bill. First, I know some of my colleagues from Wisconsin and Minnesota have labored long and hard on behalf of their constituents in this regard. I salute their hard work, their tenacity, and their diligence. I heard the Senator from Minnesota say the average dairy farm in his State has 60 cows. It is no different in New York. We don’t have large farms, by and large. We shouldn’t be pitting one against the other. Without 1–A and without the dairy compact we would have had desperate times in rural New York for our dairy farmers. We are the third largest dairy State. Dairy is a vital industry in much of New York.

If option 1–B were allowed to be implemented, New York would experience the single largest loss of any State, $30.5 million a year. Compacts, of course, are necessary. The 1–A option passed both Houses. This is not something that happened in the dark of night and not being debated. Both Houses, after full debate, passed both compacts.

I say with all due respect to my colleagues from Minnesota and Wisconsin, it is they who seek to thwart the will of the majority of the House and the Senate when they try at the last minute to stop an omnibus bill from going through. We need this compact.

In New York and New England, the price of milk has not risen by more than 4 cents over the national average in every given year. I say to my downstate constituents, to keep an industry vital to all New Yorkers going, is it worth it to pay that 4 cents? Almost everyone says yes. With senior citizens and other types of good programs being exempt, this is a worthy piece of legislation. I think it is a good day for the dairy farmers of New York.

It is not all we wanted; I admit that. We want New York to be added to the Northeast Dairy Compact, and we will fight like the devil to make that happen in future years. Without 1–A and the existing dairy compact, which still benefits New York dairy farms in the north country and places such as Washington and Warren Counties and in central New York, those areas without the New England Dairy Compact, we would have suffered dramatically. Adding insult to injury, not having option 1–A would have been devastating.

In the last decade, New York State has lost one-third of its dairy farms, 13,000 to 8,600. The dairy compact and option 1–A will help my State and region retain this vital and cherished industry. I believe that can be done not at the expense of our counterparts in the Midwest.

In conclusion, it is a good day for rural New Yorkers in this omnibus bill. No. 1, the Satellite Home Viewer Act will allow half a million New York families to receive local signal once again; and, an extension of the dairy compact, as well as extension of option 1–A, will allow our dairy farmers who have been struggling over the last decade to have a better chance to survive, to grow, and to prosper in one of the industries most vital to all of New York State.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous agreement, the Senator from Maine is recognized.

SENATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Ms. COLLINS. For the information of all of our colleagues, I inform Senators that we are still working out some of the minute details that will then allow the Senate to move a number of important bills that have been cleared on both sides. While we are waiting for these last-minute glitches to be resolved, I want to take this opportunity to respond to some of the comments made by my colleagues on the other side of the aisle this evening. I am disappointed in some of the process, and I do not support all of the provisions of the omnibus appropriations bill which we will consider later this day, but I very much disagree with the assertions made by some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle that we have not accomplished anything during this Congress. We have, in fact, accomplished a great deal of which we can be proud. Rather than engaging in harsh partisan rhetoric, we should be coming together in these final hours of this session to celebrate what we have done for the American people.

First of all, I think we can take great pride in the accomplishment that we will be producing a balanced budget for the first time in the history of this country which does not raid the Social Security trust fund. This is a tremendous accomplishment and it establishes a new milestone in fiscal responsibility. It has been the Republican caucus that has held firm in their determination to prevent one penny of the Social Security trust fund from being diverted to support expensive new unrelated Government programs. We have succeeded. We have kept that commitment. We have fulfilled our obligation to the senior citizens of this country. For the first time in 30 years, the Congress has produced a balanced budget which will result in a surplus that does not rely on funds from the Social Security trust fund. The raid on the Social Security trust fund has been stopped cold.

I give a great deal of credit to Senator DOMENICI, to Senator STEVENS, to Senator ABRAHAM, and to all colleagues in the Republican caucus who have united in their determination to secure the Social Security trust fund for our seniors and for future generations. That is an accomplishment of which we can be proud.

Second, I am delighted the omnibus appropriations bill includes what has been my highest priority in the last few months and that is to restore some of the unintentional cuts made by the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 as well as by onerous regulations imposed by the Clinton administration that have impaired the ability of our rural hospitals, our home health care agencies, and our nursing homes to provide much needed quality health care to our Nation’s senior citizens.

The Presiding Officer has been an early supporter of legislation that I have introduced to provide financial relief to our distressed home health care agencies and our disabled citizens. Health care agencies allow our senior citizens and our disabled citizens to receive the health care where they want it, in the security and the privacy of their own