

medical care, and many of them just cannot. The VA has recommitted itself to the White River Junction program, but this sort of thing is happening all across the country.

Last year, we finally raised the veteran's budget for medical care by \$1.7 billion. I was particularly relieved that Vermont veterans finally received some assistance, in the form of a \$7 million Rural Health Care Initiative. That funding will develop a number of innovative programs to bring high quality care closer to home. I would remind everyone that a majority of the Senate defeated an amendment offered by my friend PAUL WELLSTONE that would have raised VA medical care funding an additional \$1.3 billion in Fiscal Year 2000. I was proud to vote for the increase, but disappointed that more of our colleagues did not go along with this much-needed amendment.

We have a long way to go in ensuring that our veterans receive the health care that they so richly deserve. After many years of fixed funding and increased costs, we need continued funding increases, and new programs to provide higher quality care.

We must also keep our promises to those who have completed a military career. I have strongly supported efforts to improve TRICARE, the military health care system upon which military retirees rely for their health care. The system is generally sound, but problems have arisen in developing the provider networks and ensuring quick reimbursements for payments. Last November, I supported a TRICARE forum in Burlington, Vermont, to allow retirees and other participants to express their concerns directly to health care providers. Of course, we must also ensure that Medicare-eligible retirees continue to receive high quality health care.

What are we doing instead? In 1996, we changed the immigration laws to expedite deportation proceedings by cutting back on procedural safeguards and judicial review. The zealotry of Congress and the White House to be tough on aliens has successfully snared permanent residents who have spilled their blood for this country. As the INS prepares to deport American veterans for even the most minuscule criminal offenses, we have not even been kind enough to thank them for their service with a hearing to listen to their circumstances. Last year I introduced the Fairness to Immigrant Veterans Act, S. 871, to remedy this situation, but it has been bottled up in committee.

If we truly wish to do something patriotic, what we should be talking about is honoring our veterans. We should honor our veterans by answering Lincoln's call "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan." We should honor our veterans with substance rather than symbols.

If we fail to meet the concrete needs of American veterans and try to push them aside with symbolic gestures, we will have failed in our duty not only to our veterans, but to our country, as well. I wonder where we would be if the effort and funds expended each year lobbying for the constitutional amendment had been directed toward the needs of our veterans and their families and to making sure that we honor them by fulfilling our commitments to them.

I see one of the many veterans of World War II serving still in the Senate, and I will yield to my friend and neighbor, the distinguished senior Senator from New York.

Mr. MOYNIHAN. Mr. President, I had not intended to speak in this debate. This is the fourth time this amendment has come to the floor since I have been present. But the speeches, statements, the addresses by the Senator from Nebraska and the Senator from Virginia compel me simply to bear witness to them. There are 10 Members in the Senate today, 10 remaining persons, who were in uniform in World War II.

I was in the Navy—not heroically; and I was called up again briefly in Korea. I was part of that generation in which service to the Nation was so deeply honored, and lived with horror to see the disrespect shown those who answered the country's service in Vietnam, as they were asked to do. They were commanded to do so and they had taken an oath to obey.

What a thrilling thing it is to see, two such exemplars, men of heroism, achievement and spotless honor, come to this floor and speak as they have done. We take one oath which binds us today. Those who have been in the military have taken earlier oaths. Our oath is to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic—not "foreign or," not just "foreign." This was added over the course of the 19th century.

Surely, there would be no one, however unintentionally—and I say this as a member of the American Legion—who would propose that to debase the First Amendment to the Constitution meets the criteria of upholding and defending it.

Those two men have defended their nation in battle—one in the Navy, one in the Marines. I speak as one who was involved. I was in 20 years, altogether, before being discharged. I have to grant, I was not aware that I was discharged, but it turned up later in the file somewhere.

Our oath is solemn, and it is binding, and they—Senators ROBB and KERREY—stand there as witness to what it requires of us. If we cannot do this on this floor, what can we expect Americans to do on battlefields, in the skies, under the seas, and on the land in the years ahead?

Please, I say to all Senators, heed them and walk away from this trivializing of our most sacred trust. Defeat this amendment.

I thank the Chair.

Mr. DASCHLE. Will the majority leader allow me to make one brief comment before he propounds his unanimous-consent request?

Mr. LOTT. Yes.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I came to the floor to thank the distinguished senior Senator from New York, but also my two colleagues, Senators ROBB and KERREY, for their extraordinary statements on the Senate floor. I hope the American people have had the opportunity to hear, and I hope the opportunity to read what they have said is made to schoolkids and others who have given a great deal of thought to our Constitution and the reason our Founding Fathers wrote as they did.

Their eloquence and their power and their extraordinary persuasiveness ought to be tonic for us all late in the day on an afternoon which has seen a good debate. I am hopeful people have had the opportunity to hear this contribution, above and beyond all of those made so far in this debate.

I yield the floor.

VETERANS BENEFITS

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I wish to make one other point, which is not a constitutional argument, but it does have a lot to do with veterans. I say that we have spent some time on this, and we should; it is not an unimportant matter. But I also hope we will spend time on the floor of the Senate talking about a range of other very important issues that affect veterans. I am amazed that every time I meet with veterans in Minnesota, or in other parts of the country, I hear about the ways in which veterans fall between the cracks. We have a budget this year that is better than a flatline budget, but Senator KENNEDY is out here—a health care Senator—and he knows that better than anybody in the Senate.

The fact is, we have an aging veteran population like we have an aging population in general, and that is all for the good because people are living longer. We don't have any real way right now of helping those veterans the way we should. We passed the millennium bill, but the question is, Will the appropriations be there? We ought to be talking about the health care needs of veterans as well. We ought to be talking about how we are going to make sure those veterans can stay at home and live at home with dignity, with home-based health care.

I was at a medical center in Minneapolis, which is a real flagship hospital. It is not uncommon, when you go visit with veterans, you will see spouses who are there with their husbands, or maybe out in the waiting

room or the lobby relaxing. You can talk to them for 3 minutes and realize they are scared to death about their husband going home. Maybe they had a knee or a hip operation, or maybe they have cancer. The spouses are mainly women. They don't know how they are going to take care of their husbands.

There isn't even any support for respite care. When are we going to talk about that issue? When are we going to talk about the number of veterans who are homeless? When are we going to talk about the number of them who are Vietnam vets, because they are struggling with posttraumatic syndrome and because they are struggling with substance abuse and they don't get the treatment? When are we going to be talking about this overall budget for veterans' health care, which is not a national-line budget?

There is an increase from the President this year—I am glad for that—but it doesn't really take into account all of the gaps and all of the investment we need to make. When are we going to do that?

I did not come to the floor to not speak to this amendment. I have spoken with as much as I can muster as to why I oppose it. But I also want to say—I want this to be part of my formal remarks because I don't think it is off the Record—colleagues, that I hope we will talk about the whole set of other issues that are very important, not only to veterans but to the American people.

I can assure you that I have worked with veterans to put together their independent budget. That is a whole coalition of veterans organizations. It is really shocking how many veterans fall between the cracks. We have a lot of work to do. We are talking about people's lives. It is no way to say thanks to veterans when we don't come through with the health care we promised them.

I want to make it clear that I hope we will soon focus on these issues as well. I hope the veterans community will—I know the veterans community will—focus on these issues as well. I spend an awful lot of time with veterans. I have a lot of meetings with veterans and with county veteran service officers. These issues come up over and over again.

THE FREEDOM TO FARM ACT

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, as much as I hate to recognize this, this is the fourth anniversary of the passage by the House and the Senate of the "freedom to fail" bill.

On this date in 1996, both houses of Congress approved a new farm bill, described then as "the most sweeping change in agriculture since the Depression. It would get rid of government subsidies to farmers over the next seven years."

The bill has made sweeping changes in agriculture—it has produced one of the worst economic crises that rural American has ever experienced. Thanks to the Freedom to Farm, or as I call it the Freedom to Fail Act, tens of thousands of farm families are in jeopardy of losing their livelihoods and life savings.

The Freedom to Farm bill is not saving tax payers money, in fact we have spent \$19 billion more in the first 4 years of the 1996 farm bill than was supposed to be spent through the 7 year life of the law.

However, what has resulted is the precipitous loss of family farmers because this legislation has not provided small and moderate sized farmers with a safety net. Instead payment loopholes have been inserted in legislation that has allowed the largest agribusiness corporations to receive the lions share of government support. This is unacceptable.

In my State of Minnesota, family farm income has decreased 43 percent since 1996 and more than 25 percent of the remaining farms may not cover expenses for 2000. Every month more and more family farmers are being forced to give up their life's work, their homes, and their communities.

The primary problem is price. The average price paid to producers for their crops has plummeted. Farmers suffer from a negative cash flow. In Minnesota it costs \$2.50 to grow a bushel of corn. Today the price of a bushel of corn in Minnesota sells at around \$1.75 at the local elevator.

The forecast for prices is gloom. USDA projections for commodity prices are expected to remain low.

USDA estimates that farm income will decline 17 percent this year if Congress does not act.

Wheat prices have dropped \$3 in the past 2 years. In May, 1996, wheat was selling \$5.75 per bushel. Today, wheat is at \$2.78 per bushel. This is well below the cost of production. Farmers need at least \$4 a bushel to break even.

Soybean prices will probably average under \$5 a bushel. Livestock and dairy prices are also being impacted. Hog farmers still face market prices below their costs of production for the third straight year.

Family farmers have struggled to survive as the devastating results of the 1996 Farm bill, exacerbated by the lack of a reliable farm safety net.

In addition, merger after merger in the agriculture sector leaves producers wondering if they will be able to survive amidst the new giants of agribusiness.

As a direct result, rural bankers, implement dealers, and other small businesses that rely on farm families as their customers have been squeezed as the cash flows have dropped. Rural families with shrunken incomes have less money to pay for quality health

care coverage and adequate child care for their children. There is an affordable housing crunch as urgent as in our urban areas. And finally, in our rural communities there is a lack of good jobs at decent wages.

The crisis is real. You can see it in the numbers. You can see it in the eyes of the scores of farmers who are forced to sell off the substance of their history and their livelihood.

Many compare the current farm crisis to the 1980's. We all know there was a massive shake out of family farmers at that time. It changed the face of rural America. Many communities were devastated and have not recovered. I assume many use the comparison to remind us that the distressed farm economy in the '80's somehow survived, and so farmers will survive this one too. But the crisis we now face is much graver than in the 80's, and I fear that family farmers and rural America will not survive.

The tough farm economy may resemble the agricultural crisis of the 1980's, but there is a notable difference, and that difference is namely the passage of the Freedom to Farm Act. The Act ignored the fact that family farming is a business both uniquely important and uniquely affected by nonmarket forces.

The Freedom to Farm has become Freedom to Fail.

The 1996 Freedom to Farm bill was suppose to wean rural America from subsidies by introducing a market-driven agriculture. The bill gave farmers flexibility to plant what they wanted, and it was to make farmers able to adapt to a slump in a particular commodity by switching to a more profitable crop. But the switch in crops doesn't make a difference if they are all drastically low.

We are now witnessing many farmers planting soybeans. Why is that so many farmers are planting soybeans? It isn't because the market demands soybeans. It is because the Freedom to Fail bill capped the loan rate on soybeans higher than other commodities, and so farmers are planting soybeans to get a better rate than from corn or wheat. This is not market driven agriculture.

The Freedom to Farm bill is not saving tax payers money, as I've said we have spent \$19 billion in the first 4 years of the bill than was supposed to be spent through the 6-year life of the law. However, what has resulted is the precipitous loss of family farmers because this legislation has not provided small and moderate sized farmers with an adequate safety net.

Instead payment loopholes have been inserted in legislation that has allowed the largest agribusiness corporations to receive the majority of government support. This is unacceptable.

In order to ensure that family farmers remain a part of this country's