

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES—Thursday, May 25, 2000

The House met at 10 a.m.

The Reverend Alpheus Townsend, Unity Temple of Peace, Bronx, New York, offered the following prayer:

“O God our help in ages past our hope for years to come our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home.”

Lord of Majesty, mercy and love we are grateful for this day and for the blessings it affords. We thank You for the bounty of this Nation and for its form of government. Thank You for inspiring its leaders over the years.

We ask Your blessing and guidance upon the membership of this assembly who are entrusted with the awesome task of helping to foster and preserve peace and justice in our world.

Father, bless and strengthen families, our youth, our schools and businesses with integrity and success, now and ever more for Your honor and glory, amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from Washington (Mr. NETHERCUTT) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. NETHERCUTT led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Mr. Lundregan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed a bill and a concurrent resolution of the following titles in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 484. An act to provide for the granting of refugee status in the United States to nationals of certain foreign countries in which American Vietnam War POW/MIAs or American Korean War POW/MIAs may be present, if those nationals assist in the return to the United States of those POW/MIAs alive.

S. Con. Res. 110. Concurrent resolution congratulating the Republic of Latvia on the tenth anniversary of the reestablishment of its independence from the rule of the former Soviet Union.

The message also announced that pursuant to section 301(b) of Public

Law 104-1, the Chair, on behalf of the Majority and Minority Leaders of the Senate and the Speaker and Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, announces the joint appointment of Barbara L. Camens of the District of Columbia and Roberta L. Holzwarth of Illinois to five-year terms on the Board of Directors of the Office of Compliance.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

The SPEAKER. At this time the Chair will recognize the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL). Other 1-minute speeches will be at the end of the day.

WELCOMING REVEREND ALPHEUS TOWNSEND TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

(Mr. ENGEL asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure today to introduce my good friend, my constituent, and my minister who gave the prayer this morning, Reverend Alpheus Townsend of the Unity Temple of Peace in my district in the Bronx, New York.

Pastor Townsend is a wonderful American success story. He resides in my District with his wife Millicent and son William, and is truly a champion, living the American dream, as so many immigrants who have come to our shores and helped to make our country the great Nation that it is.

Reverend Townsend was born in Jamaica and came to the United States in 1965 and worked at a number of jobs in New York, at Bankers Trust on Wall Street for 5 years as an operations specialist and at Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan. But he knew that the ministry was really his call.

He attended Unity Ministerial School in Missouri and was ordained in 1981. He founded the Unity Temple of Peace in the Bronx, New York, in my district, in 1982 and continues to pastor there.

Just recently, he was elected president of the Clergy Coalition of the 47th Precinct in the Northeast Bronx, which serves all five boroughs of New York City. It is a wonderful organization, assists many, many people, young, old, all types of people. He assisted in writing the bylaws and charter for the organization.

He has provided college scholarships to high school students, and I have been pleased to work with him in this

regard and to contribute to these scholarships because young people, as we know, of course, are our future. And Pastor Townsend has especially ministered to young people. He has worked with the council and the community and works with the police to enhance the quality of life in the community.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored and privileged to not only call Pastor Townsend, my constituent, but am honored and privileged to call him my friend. We have worked very, very closely together. He honors me and all of us with his presence today.

I thank the Speaker for allowing him to give the prayer this morning so that the entire House of Representatives and, indeed the entire country of the United States, can see what a wonderful pastor he is and how truly he is doing God's work and truly doing work for all of us.

Again, it is people like the Reverend Townsend who have come here to this country as an immigrant, who have participated and have really helped to make this country the great country that it is. I thank the reverend.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2559, AGRICULTURAL RISK PROTECTION ACT OF 2000

Mr. REYNOLDS. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 512 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 512

Resolved, That upon adoption of this resolution it shall be in order to consider the conference report to accompany the bill (H.R. 2559) to amend the Federal Crop Insurance Act to strengthen the safety net for agricultural producers by providing greater access to more affordable risk management tools and improved protection from production and income loss, to improve the efficiency and integrity of the Federal crop insurance program, and for other purposes. All points of order against the conference report and against its consideration are waived. The conference report shall be considered as read.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from New York (Mr. REYNOLDS) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to my friend, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MOAKLEY), pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, during consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

☐ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., ☐ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation before us today provides for consideration of the conference report to H.R. 2559, the Agriculture Risk Protection Act of 1999.

Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 512 is a standard conference report rule that waives all points of order against the conference report and against its consideration.

Additionally, the rule provides that the conference report shall be considered as read.

Passage of this rule will allow the House to consider the conference report to the Agriculture Risk Protection Act.

The Agriculture Risk Protection Act enjoys broad bipartisan support from colleagues representing farmers and ranchers from all regions of the country. It is the right legislative response to the current plight of our Nation's farmers and ranchers.

Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that farmers, growers, and ranchers are not experiencing the prosperity that many other Americans enjoy today. Confronted by adverse weather and low prices, they are facing a second year of extreme economic crisis.

In fact, apple growers alone lost a staggering \$760 million nationwide over the past 3 years, according to USDA statistics.

Representing Wayne County, New York, the largest apple producer in New York State and one of the largest in the Nation, this type of statistic is particularly troubling.

Growers in my district have been especially hard hit in recent years. Floods, storms, drought, and other severe weather have had a crippling effect on area specialty crop farmers.

Just last week, flooding destroyed onion crops that had been planted only days earlier in the Elba mucklands in Genesee County in my congressional district.

One local farmer estimated a 75 percent loss on 3,000 acres of onion crop, with an estimated value of \$15 million annually.

Despite these and other disasters, crop insurance programs have historically been tailored to farmers who grow so-called traditional crops, such as wheat, corn, and soybeans.

It is for that reason that I am especially pleased with the conference report which, for the first time, earmarks funds and encourages the development of products for underserved commodities, including specialty crops.

This Nation has had a long and proud agricultural history. Agriculture has been and remains a vital part of our Nation's economy and way of life. America's farmers feed not only our Nation but also the world.

We must give agriculture producers the tools to manage risk responsibly, and this legislation does just that.

This bill provides better insurance coverage at a lower cost for our Na-

tion's farmers. It provides affordable coverage at every level, with strong incentives to purchase higher levels of protection and new flexibility for producers to choose the level of coverage that best meets their needs.

This legislation promotes the development of new products for managing risk, empowering universities, co-ops, and individual farmers who work to develop successful policies.

It makes sure that every farmer and rancher has the tools necessary for risk preparation. Proactive steps such as these are needed at the Federal level.

Under current conditions, too many farmers are unable to afford crop insurance. When natural disasters strike, the Federal Government assists victims with taxpayer dollars.

By increasing Federal contributions to crop insurance, such insurance becomes more affordable and there is less need for taxpayer dollars for reactive solutions.

H.R. 2559 makes across-the-board reductions in farmer-paid premiums. The bill makes insurance that protects price as well as production more affordable to our farmers.

The bill also helps farmers who are hit hard by multiyear disasters to insure more of the yield of what they have proven that they can grow. These changes will help farmers from all regions growing all crops.

In short, Mr. Speaker, the Agriculture Risk Protection Act is a common sense, fiscally conservative bill. In passing the conference report, Congress goes a long way to properly prepare for natural disasters that impact agriculture production.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST), Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture, and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) for bringing this measure before the House today.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the rule and the underlying measure.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MOAKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my dear friend, the gentleman from New York (Mr. REYNOLDS), for yielding me the time.

Mr. Speaker, I am in support of this rule. This rule waives all points of order against consideration of the conference report, H.R. 2559, the Agriculture Risk Protection Act of 1999.

This rule is necessary to allow the House to consider this conference report and will provide critically needed funding for rural America.

In essence, Mr. Speaker, this conference agreement will allow producers who participate in Federal crop insurance programs to buy better coverage for less money.

However, the conference report spends the funds set aside in the budget

for crop insurance reform and for supplemental economic assistance. While these funds are badly needed in our ailing farm sector, the fact that for 3 years in a row the Congress has provided supplemental payments to agriculture points to the simple fact that our current farm policy is failing and needs a very thorough review.

Until there is such a review, Mr. Speaker, this conference agreement will help make crop insurance more useful to farmers who need protection from natural disasters and it will also provide a badly needed supplement to short-term farm income.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1015

Mr. REYNOLDS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. NETHERCUTT).

Mr. NETHERCUTT. I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of this rule and in support of the underlying conference report not only because of what the rule provides; I also want to make a comment about what the rule and the underlying measure do not provide. What they do not provide, what the underlying measure does not provide is the ability for this country and the agriculture economy that it serves to have an opportunity to have sanctions relief on food and medicine for five countries that we currently embargo unilaterally considered in the bill.

I have been actively engaged with our leadership and members of all committees of jurisdiction relative to the issue of lifting sanctions on food and medicine to try to accommodate some solution and reach some conclusion that would allow this marketing freedom to occur to our farmers. Unfortunately, my own leadership said no at the last minute. I am on the Committee on Appropriations and its Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies.

At the subcommittee level, we were able to insert language by an overwhelming vote that allowed sanctions on food and medicine to be lifted to assist our farmers and for humanitarian reasons as well. We went to the full committee a week or so ago and by a vote of 35-24 rejected a challenge to strip out this language that is going to help our farmers.

Now here we have come to the Committee on Rules and I understand later today there will be a rule on the agriculture appropriations bill. The language that was fairly and squarely passed through the appropriations process for literally the third year we have been working on this, but last night it was set up to be stripped out of the bill. So I am here to register my

objection and my active participation in defeating the agriculture appropriations rule, not this rule. I am going to vote for this one and I am going to vote for the conference report.

But in reality, the lifting of food and medicine sanctions should be in this conference report. It is a vehicle that could have passed, but it was thwarted by our leadership. I am going to object to the Rules Committee action and hope my colleagues will vote against the rule on agriculture appropriations which comes up later today.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST), the distinguished chairman of the Committee on Agriculture.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time and for his comments and the comments of the gentleman from Massachusetts.

I want to say that I strongly support this rule and urge its passage and the accompanying conference report. I appreciate the Committee on Rules meeting so late yesterday evening and into the night in order to give us this opportunity today. This is a measure that we have been working on for about a year and a half. It is something that in fact needs as soon as possible to get into law so that the regulations can be written, so that the provisions of this program can be implemented for the coming crop year.

It is vitally important that American producers understand the assistance package that is coming, and it is very critical that this happen at this particular time. I want to again extend my appreciation for all of those members on the Committee on Rules who made this possible.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT).

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time. This really is the second great day in a row for American farmers. Yesterday we passed PNTR, which will give us, our farmers better access to markets in China. Today we have a conference committee report that was signed by all 18 conferees. That does not happen very often here in Washington. And so in 2 consecutive days, we are seeing a tremendous display of bipartisanship on behalf of American farmers. Crop insurance reform is a very important issue. For too long it has been neglected by this Congress here in Washington, and so I am very happy to rise in support not only of the rule but of the bill. This is a great day for American agriculture. It follows on another great day yesterday. Hopefully, we can get those commodity prices up where they belong.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to House Resolution 512, I call up the conference report on the bill (H.R. 2559) to amend the Federal Crop Insurance Act to strengthen the safety net for agricultural producers by providing greater access to more affordable risk management tools and improved protection from production and income loss, to improve the efficiency and integrity of the Federal crop insurance program, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). Pursuant to House Resolution 512, the conference report is considered as having been read.

(For conference report and statement, see proceedings of the House of May 24, 2000, at page H3763).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST).

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I am extremely proud today to bring this conference report to the floor. With this single piece of legislation, we have the opportunity to strengthen farmers' ability to manage the risk the future may bring and to provide them the financial assistance that they badly need to cope with their immediate financial crisis.

H.R. 2559 began last year when the House provided the budget resources to overhaul and reinvigorate our ailing agricultural risk management system. The Committee on Agriculture then crafted, on a truly bipartisan basis, the most significant improvements in the crop insurance program in its history. The result last year was the House passage of legislation that makes risk management more affordable and more effective for more farmers. While the Senate was unable to pass a similar bill until this year, passage of this conference report today will ensure that producers will see the benefits of this major initiative beginning with the next year's crop.

In addition to sustaining the drive to secure future farm financial stability, this year's budget resolution also provides \$7.1 billion in emergency economic assistance to farmers facing their third straight year of historically low prices. Recovering Asian markets and trade openings like yesterday's passage of permanent normal trade relations with China are optimistic signs for future prices.

But this year, farmers face a bleak situation. Providing temporary economic assistance now will bring a measure of economic stability to farm families as they struggle to regain

markets and secure improved prices. Altogether, the elements contained in this conference report signal Congress' commitment to help America's farmers get through their current price crisis and to provide a more stable foundation of risk management for their future.

This has been a massive undertaking that would not have been possible without a broad bipartisan effort. I want to thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), the ranking Democrat on the committee who set aside partisan considerations to work for a year and a half to bring us to today's vote. His effort typifies the spirit of all 51 members of the House Committee on Agriculture to work tirelessly on behalf of American farmers. Our committee also owes a debt of gratitude to the whole House, who in two successive budget cycles recognized the need to focus special attention on one sector of our booming economy that is struggling. The work of the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. CHAMBLISS) and his colleagues on the Committee on the Budget made available the resources needed to bring this bill to the floor today.

Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to be a part of such a broad, sustained, and bipartisan effort to provide economic assistance and lay a stronger foundation for the future of American farm families. I urge all of my colleagues to support the conference report to H.R. 2559.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the conference report and to congratulate my colleagues on the Committee on Agriculture. I particularly want to thank the chairman for his work that he has put into this bill and for the inclusion of the minority and of all the members of the committee in the development of its provisions. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST), the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EWING), the subcommittee chairman, and the gentleman from California (Mr. CONDIT), the ranking Democrat on the subcommittee, are all to be commended for their efforts. While I support the conference report and encourage its adoption, I do have reservations about the manner in which the budgeted funds are being spent.

Mr. Speaker, the conference report's crop insurance provisions succeed in spending the funds that were allocated in fiscal year 2000 and 2001 budgets for risk management and income assistance. The bill's supplemental provisions succeed in spending the \$7.1 billion reserve fund for agriculture as set forth in the fiscal year 2001 budget.

As someone who represents a rural agricultural area, I know how badly these additional resources are needed. Throughout the process of developing

the crop insurance provisions of this bill, I have supported the idea that our crop insurance program needs to be strengthened and improved. While it was the will of our committee and of the House and Senate conferees that these funds should be dedicated to improvements in our current crop insurance program, the budget resolution made funds available for the broader purposes of income assistance and for risk management. In so doing, it provided a level of flexibility that would permit nearly any kind of agricultural assistance. I feel that this flexibility should have been used to meet a broader set of needs.

Likewise, Mr. Speaker, the reserve fund for agriculture in this year's budget could have been used for any manner of assistance for farm producers. Again, the conference report before us today ignores that flexibility. By spending the \$5.5 billion available for this year entirely on additional AMTA payments, the bill fails to recognize other unmet needs. For example, payments to producers under last year's natural disaster assistance program were pro-rated because sufficient funds were not appropriated to make them whole. I would have dedicated some of the \$5.5 billion to raising these payments, which would have provided assistance to producers of all commodities who suffered from disaster.

Without a doubt, the supplemental AMTA payments will provide assistance to agricultural producers who are suffering from economic disasters because of our failure to live up to our promises to provide them with opportunities from the marketplace. The criteria for receiving assistance are merely the possession of an AMTA contract, however; and this allows producers to receive a payment without demonstrating real need. I strongly believe that more fully funding the disaster payments would have been a better method for directing these funds to agriculture producers most in need. But my view was a minority view.

Mr. Speaker, I also believe that these allotted funds could be better utilized to establish an adequate safety net for producers. This year marks the third year in a row that Congress has been called upon to take extraordinary action to make up for the deficiencies of our current farm program. It is getting expensive. The fact that for 3 years in a row we are compensating producers for low prices seems to me to be a stark admission that our basic farm program is not working, just as multiple years of yield disaster aid shows that crop insurance is not working. Increases in the budget are a clear signal by our colleagues that these problems, income reductions as well as yield reductions, need to be addressed, and the crop insurance provisions of this conference report today do move in that direction.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I must express my reservations in regard to the timing of this economic disaster assistance. As of right now, all we know for certain is that commodity prices are low. We have no hard numbers in regard to the extent to which we will need disaster assistance this year. Current outlook suggests that drought in the Midwest and the South will severely affect production. There is a possibility that supply and price relations could result in a situation where we have strengthened prices later this year.

I understand that these funds must be spent in a timely manner in order to meet budget requirements. However, I would have been more comfortable taking our time in order to fully assess the complete picture later this year. I am concerned that we may not be allocating the provision of economic loss versus crop loss in a manner that is most responsible to the actual conditions facing producers this year.

Our Nation deserves a long-term reliable farm policy. Taxpayers and agricultural producers alike should be able to know up front what kind of assistance they can expect and what the rules will be for distributing it. In terms of yield insurance, this bill makes some progress. Higher subsidy rates, for example, will lead to higher levels of participation in crop insurance, better indemnity performance for the producers who participate and hopefully less need for Congress to respond to weather disasters with emergency spending.

Absent from the bill, Mr. Speaker, is the other half of the picture. In this and the previous 2 years, our programs have left producers overexposed to price and weather disasters. The bill makes progress towards addressing yield disaster, but what about future price disasters? How much more will our government spend on ad hoc supplemental AMTA payments before we realize that a more rational, predictable policy needs to be in force?

Mr. Speaker, having pressed my reservations, I once again want to commend the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST) and all the members of the Committee on Agriculture and the conference committee for their work on this bill. Going into this progress, we agreed that short-term changes in crop insurance in this cycle would pave the way for a broad look at the entire program in the years ahead. I look forward to working with my colleagues in developing a crop insurance program that works better and a farm revenue program that meets producer and taxpayer needs.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge that my colleagues vote to adopt the conference report before the House today.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

□ 1030

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, one of the pleasures we have had in the past year and a half personally from this Member's standpoint has been the opportunity to work with and to have very open and frank discussions with not only my colleague on the committee, but my friend and my neighbor, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), my neighbor not only the committee, but neighbor in Texas as well.

But there are a couple of points that I want to make, Mr. Speaker, in regards to the comments of the gentleman from Texas. I agree with the gentleman in the fact that we have problems in agriculture and problems that the program has its deficiencies. It was that recognition after the second year of the amount of money that was required in order to keep agriculture afloat in this country that our committee embarked on a series of hearings across this country to listen to farmers, to get their input on what is good and what is bad about current farm policy.

We have just concluded in the past 2 weeks 10 of those hearings, and I will say my friend and partner, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), accompanied me on all 10 of those. We were the only two members on the committee able to attend them all. But it was for the express purpose of going out and listening to farmers.

We heard a number of suggestions, but a couple of the things we did hear, that I think resonated throughout, was the fact that it has been the assistance that Congress has provided over the last couple of years that helped tremendously, keeping farmers in business. Another was the need for a dramatic reform in crop insurance. I think today's activity and legislation addresses both of those in a very significant way.

I think we need to have a better way to make this delivery, but I will say that given the fact that this is paid in this fiscal year, given the fact that it has to be deliverable in a timely fashion, there have been a lot of discussions with people from the outside and others about a need to make a change in the delivery process. I am very open to looking at that change. There has been a lot of discussion about it. It has not come forward. We will continue to look at it in any possible way we can do the job better.

But I do not want those listening to this conversation to believe that this is not something that is strongly supported by commodity groups all across this country. There has been virtually unanimous request for making the payments from commodity groups in the fashion that is provided for in this legislation. It does ensure that farmers do know exactly what it is they are going

to get, they know exactly when they are going to get it, and that helps them tremendously in their financial obligations and considerations and concerns that they have to deal with today.

I think that, given the fact that we are dealing in an area that has tremendous concerns and problems, agriculture, that this is a very healthy and a very positive response to those concerns.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BARRETT), the vice chairman of the committee.

Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, after 8 weeks of negotiations and countless hours of discussions between the House and the Senate Agriculture Committees, I am more than pleased to rise today in support of the conference report on the Agriculture Risk Protection Act. The conference report on H.R. 2559 is really an excellent piece of legislation that accomplishes what we set out to accomplish, that is, making crop insurance more affordable and easier to use for all of our producers.

Under the leadership of the gentleman from Texas (Chairman COMBEST), and, yes, the ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), the House Committee on Agriculture listened to producers' suggestions, complaints and stories of fraud. We then developed and passed the bill, with the help of the Committee on the Budget, to address those concerns and greatly improve the program.

I am pleased that the conference report will increase premium subsidies for producers, address actual production history discrepancies, fund research and development for new insurance policies and products, and make certain that the program is not fraudulently used or abused. Producers have asked for many of these changes for many years, and I believe we have something that they will want to use and that is in fact helpful to them.

Also the conference report includes a much-needed economic assistance package for agriculture. As has been mentioned, while the economy as a whole has been booming, American producers have faced low prices for nearly 3 long years. With this conference report, we are responding with concrete policies and necessary financial assistance. Congress' willingness to provide assistance again this year demonstrates our commitment to farmers, ranchers and to rural America.

Even though many of my colleagues may not have farms or ranches in their districts, agriculture is vital to every American and every congressional district. So thank the farmer, when you can. They feed us all.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this conference report. Com-

bined with the economic assistance package, it will provide the help producers need to meet the challenges of today's poor agriculture economy.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY).

Mr. BERRY. Mr. Speaker, I want to, first of all, thank the distinguished chairman of the Committee on Agriculture, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST), and the distinguished ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), for the great work they have done and the leadership they have provided for all of American agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Agriculture Risk Protection Act and in support of the emergency assistance contained in this bill. Food and fiber production in this country is a national security interest, second only to national defense. Every citizen of this country benefits from the safest, most affordable and most abundant food supply in the history of the world.

Americans spend less of their income on food than almost any other country in the world. This is a direct result of the productivity of American agriculture. When agriculture is suffering through difficult times, such as the times of low commodity prices that we face now, it is essential that Congress and the President act to preserve agriculture productivity. Farmers need emergency assistance right now to stay in business.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this bill, so that American agriculture is able to continue to fuel the economic development of this country by providing a reliable, reasonably priced food supply.

This bill also makes the Federal Crop Insurance Program a better risk management tool for America's farmers. Farmers will pay less for crop insurance at every level of coverage as a result of this bill. By offering increased premium subsidies, this bill encourages farmers to purchase crop insurance and protect themselves against low yields and weather disasters.

This bill also goes a long way towards reducing fraud and abuse in the crop insurance system. For years this has been a problem that has plagued the system by those who attempt to fraudulently gain payment through crop insurance. This bill provides stiffer penalties to attempt to root out this abuse. I have always believed that crop insurance was not a viable tool because it was ridden by this fraud and abuse, but this bill greatly helps this problem.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote yes on this bill.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, American farmers and ranchers are at risk. Let me briefly try to explain

what I see as the problem and how this legislation partially provides a solution to part of that problem. We are at record low commodity prices, some lower than they have been for 30 years. The world is overproducing some of these commodities and prices are way down.

Part of the problem for the survival of our agricultural industry in this country is going to be how much other countries subsidize their farmers. Right now we are in a situation where Europe, for example, subsidizes their farmers five times as much as we subsidize our farmers, and much of that encouraged production goes into what otherwise might be our markets. So the American consumer, America, this Congress, is faced with some decisions of are we going to do what is necessary to keep a viable, strong agricultural industry in America.

This legislation encourages farmers to take out more insurance, insurance that covers not only yields, helps to ensure against low-yield disasters, but also helps to ensure against the prices they might receive for that particular commodity. We do that by increasing subsidies for some of these farmers so that in the beginning, as we start experimenting in this new crop revenue insurance endeavor, we are better able to encourage more farmers to move into that arena.

This kind of legislation, I think, is very important as part of our effort to start remodeling, refashioning where we go in future agricultural policy.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman and the ranking member for their leadership.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. UDALL), a sponsor of the biomass legislation in the House, H.R. 2819, and who also contributed to the biomass provisions that are contained in this conference report. I want to thank the gentleman for his hard work on this issue.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, let me just begin by thanking the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) for their work on this important measure. I want to remember my friend Lou Entz from Colorado, who suggested in the spirit of this legislation that if you eat, you are involved in agriculture, and those of us that live in suburban districts need to remember that.

But let me talk about title IV, the Biomass Research and Development Act. Last year the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOEHLERT) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. MINGE) joined me in introducing the House version of this legislation. We were joined shortly thereafter by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EWING), who introduced his own version of the legislation.

The two bills had much in common. Both recognized the increased contribution that biobased industrial products can make to our economy, if and only if appropriate research was put into place. Both realized the increased need for cooperation among the Departments of Energy and Agriculture and the private sector in conducting the research and ensuring it leads to new product and new jobs. Both recognized the importance of the conversion of cellulosic biomass, which consists of any plant or plant product.

Cellulosic conversion is particularly important to the State of Colorado because of the potential threat of wildfires. We have seen the effect of wildfires over the recent weeks in New Mexico, and there is much more we could do to make these materials available through commercial markets.

In Colorado, the Colorado Forest Service, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service Laboratory, and the National Renewable Energy Lab began to study the possibility of developing ethanol or other bioproducts economically from this wood fiber.

I am especially pleased to see that the version of the legislation before us incorporates important concepts from the Udall-Boehlert-Minge bill. Peer-reviewed research, sensitivity to the effects of increased bioproduction on the environment, and an emphasis on the economics of bioenergy and biobased industrial projects are all featured prominently in the legislation.

The definition of biomass is limited to organic matter that is available on a renewing or recurring basis, and therefore would not include old growth forests or other environmentally sensitive ecosystems.

Mr. Speaker, I urge passage of this important bill.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS), a member of the committee who has been very involved in this entire process.

Mr. LUCAS of Oklahoma. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the chairman and ranking member for all their work and all their efforts on this legislation. It includes three initiatives that will greatly benefit Oklahoma producers. We reform the crop insurance system, we double the AMTA payments, and we include LDP graze-out language. This legislation is a big win for Oklahoma producers.

I would especially like to thank the gentleman from Texas (Chairman COMBEST) for his help in including the LDP graze-out language, which I introduced last August. This legislation is the single most important issue for Oklahoma producers.

Currently, producers are eligible for a loan deficiency payment if their wheat crop is hayed, put into silage, or

cut for grain. However, if a producer chooses to graze out his wheat crop, he does not qualify for the LDP payment and is left at an extreme disadvantage. Oklahoma producers have been calling for Congress to correct this inequity for some time. H.R. 2559 includes language that will allow producers to collect a payment equivalent to LDP if they opt to graze out instead of putting their wheat into hay or through the combine.

I encourage all my colleagues to support this very important legislation. This legislation provides more flexibility and options for our producers.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON).

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, I also want to congratulate and compliment the chairman and the ranking member for their cooperation in working on this legislation, but also I want to congratulate all the conferees who were involved in this, because this has been an issue that our farmers nationwide have suffered through, in not having a way of managing risk. We are gathering some information right now from North Carolina to compliment what I am saying because I know in North Carolina the current structure did not allow for this risk management that we have now to speak to the needs.

□ 1045

We went through endless floods in North Carolina, so our farmers indeed not only suffered the risks of droughts they had years before, but they also had to manage losing their crops, and many of them lost their crops and found no way of having any compensation.

This bill is not perfect, but it is certainly moving in the right direction; it includes a broad base of opportunity for a larger number of people; it takes out some of the inequities that are in the current law; and it also is a welcome opportunity for the farm service people who are administering this program, because they find they are able now to respond more appropriately to the farmers.

Again, I want to congratulate all of the people who were involved in making sure that this came to the floor in a timely manner, and I hope that it will become law very soon so that our farmers can indeed benefit from this.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. CANADY).

Mr. CANADY of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today in support of the conference report on this important legislation. I particularly want to focus attention on a provision in this conference committee report in title 4, which encompasses legislation I previously introduced known as the Plant Protection Act.

This legislation is designed to address a very real problem facing Amer-

ican agriculture. The United States loses thousands of acres and billions of dollars in farm production each year due to invasive species. Exacerbating this serious problem are the outdated and fragmented quarantine statutes that govern interdiction of prohibited plants and plant pests. Our agricultural sector needs a modern, effective statutory authority that will protect our crops from these destructive invasive species.

It was for this reason that I introduced the Plant Protection Act. This legislation, crafted in consultation with the USDA, will help to prevent the introduction and dissemination of invasive plants and pests by giving the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service greatly enhanced investigatory and enforcement tools. The Plant Protection Act will streamline and consolidate existing statutes into one comprehensive law and eliminate outdated and ambiguous provisions. It will also boost deterrents against trafficking of prohibited species by increasing monetary penalties for smuggling, and it will provide USDA with a comprehensive set of investigatory tools and ensure transparency for our trading partners.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this provision of the conference committee report is an important step forward in protecting American agriculture, and I thank the chairman for his support for this.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I have no additional speakers on the floor at this time, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. CHAMBLISS), the vice chairman of the Committee on the Budget.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

In 1996, we crafted a new farm bill wherein we told the American farmer that the Federal Government is going to change the way that we participate in farming operations. At the same time we did that, we said we are going to do some other things. We are going to provide the farmer with tax relief. We are going to provide the farmer with regulatory relief. We are going to provide the farmer with crop insurance reform, and we are going to provide the farmer with better trade agreements so that farmers can, in fact, sell their products for a decent return on the open market.

Well, unfortunately, it has taken us a while to get there, but yesterday, with the vote that we had on the China trade agreement, we are now opening markets in China to the American farmer and it will be a tremendous benefit for farmers all across America.

Today, we are taking another giant step in the right direction. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) is

right in a couple of areas when he says we are not doing everything from a legislative standpoint to make farming easier and make farming more prosperous, because we cannot do that, but these are steps in the right direction.

What we are doing today with crop insurance reform is really significant, and every American farmer knows and understands that. This has been a team effort. It has been a team effort between leadership and the Committee on Budget as well as the Committee on Agriculture, and our two captains, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) have done a great job of leading the team down the field. I commend them for the work they have done on this with respect to crop insurance reform.

The other part of this bill in providing up-front money to our farmers for this year is extremely important also, because we know that 2000 is going to be a tough year for farmers all across America. I do not know how much money it is going to take to make sure that they can survive this year, but this is going to be another meaningful step in the right direction, because it is going to be money in the hands of the producer. That is critically important. It is critically important now, as we are facing droughts, as we are facing lowest commodity prices that we have ever seen.

So again, this bill provides a double hit for the American farmer with respect to crop insurance reform, as well as with respect to money in the hands of producers to help improve the year 2000. I commend the chairman and the ranking member for their great leadership.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. CONDIT), the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Risk Management, Research and Specialty Crops, that did yeoman's work on the crop insurance portions of this.

Mr. CONDIT. Mr. Speaker, I would like, if I may, to engage the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST), the chairman of the committee, in a colloquy if he would agree to do that.

Before I do that, I would first like to thank the chairman for the hard work he has put in in bringing this conference report to the floor. He kept us focused and kept us at the table, and I appreciate that. I also would like to congratulate and commend the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) for his hard work and the time that he put in keeping us focused and at the table, as well as staff on both sides of the aisle. They are to be commended for their time and effort in this area.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the chairman is aware of the illegal activities undertaken by the Department of Agriculture employees at Hunts Point Terminal. These illegal activities have re-

sulted in grave economic losses for produce growers throughout the country. I look forward to working with the chairman to determine the exact scope of the illegal activities so that we may adequately reimburse produce growers for their losses.

It is my hope that the committee can fully examine this matter as soon as possible, and I would encourage the chairman and wait for his response to indicate that he would be willing to take a look at this.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. CONDIT. I yield to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman's comments. Not only is the chair aware but extremely concerned about what did go on in the grading program. While I regret that we were unable to include funding in this particular package for the economic damage that these growers incurred, I agree that both the House and the Senate committees should immediately consider ways that we can help these growers recover their economic loss. It is a travesty that this loss occurred as a result of illegal action by Federal employees. I assure the gentleman I will work with him in every way I possibly can.

Mr. CONDIT. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). The gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST) has 15½ minutes remaining, and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) has 16 minutes remaining.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE), a very important and active member of the committee.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) for their leadership in bringing this to the floor.

Let me make a couple of observations, if I might, about this legislation. First of all, crop insurance should be the risk management tool that is used by our producers. Unfortunately, it has not been because it has not worked. Producers have expressed a lot of frustration about the crop insurance program and have asked for changes. In response to that, last year I introduced, along with the gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. POMEROY), legislation to do just that.

Many of the changes that are incorporated in the product that we will vote on today are consistent with those proposals, one of which deals with the premium schedule in providing more incentives for producers to buy up the

higher level of coverage, and this legislation addresses that important point.

The second point that was a real concern to producers in South Dakota and other places in the Midwest was the computation of the actual production history. This legislation also makes important changes in that area that will make it more usable for producers.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would say that this is important legislation. The reforms that are included in here will be very helpful to our producers. It will give them what they need in terms of having a risk management tool in place that will allow them to ride out the storms that are often the case in agriculture across this country.

The other thing I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that the disaster legislation includes a provision which is very important to me and which I have been fighting for. And I appreciate the conferees and the chairman for including a piece in this disaster legislation on value-added agriculture, because I do believe that our producers need to be reaching up the marketing chain capturing more of that value by processing our raw commodities at the point of production. We need to encourage that in this country.

So this legislation, I think for the first time, lays down a marker and provides incentives for our producers to become more involved in value-added operations; and, furthermore, I think will help strengthen our rural economies by helping to create additional jobs and opportunity in rural America.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would simply say that this is a good piece of legislation. I appreciate the leadership by our chairman and ranking member, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. PETERSON).

Mr. PETERSON of Minnesota. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

I rise today in support of this, and I appreciate the work of everybody that was involved. I want to especially thank the chairman and ranking member for all of their leadership in bringing this important piece of legislation to my district to the floor.

This crop insurance reform has been something we have been working toward for a long time, and it is going to make some significant improvements. It is not as good as our people would like, but it is going to move us a long way in the right direction. We are going to be able to get at some of the problems that my producers have had where we have had losses 6 years out of the last 7; and the current system just, frankly, is too expensive and they cannot get enough coverage.

I particularly appreciate the conference committee yesterday including a provision that I have been concerned about that affects a lot of producers

around the country where if one has a change in one's identification number, just because maybe one of two brothers were farming together and one of them happened to get out of the business and the one remaining changed that identification number, the remaining farmer is precluded from receiving disaster payments. In the conference report yesterday we adopted an amendment that I proposed that will allow those people access to the disaster program that they were denied.

Another provision that is in the bill that is going to be helpful to us allows the people that have had problems with scab disease up in our part of the world are going to be able to improve the APH so that they can get more coverage and be able to better and more adequately insure the risk to their crops. We are very appreciative that that language is in the bill as well.

This bill, as I said, does not go as far as I would like, but it is going to significantly improve the situation. I hope that we can continue to work on crop insurance to try to get a workable revenue coverage so that we can get farmers to be able to cover all of their crops.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on the assistance part of this. Yesterday in the conference committee, we tried to change a little bit of the assistance package. We are very appreciative that the assistance is in here. But if we were to use the 2000 payment levels, we would have had an additional \$366 million that we tried to use to buy up last year's disasters where people were limited to 69 percent of the disaster that they actually had occur and bring that level up to 85 percent which is what we did in 1998.

Unfortunately, that was not accepted, and I think this would have been a much better bill. Had we made that change, we would have put more of this money out to people that really needed it that have had multiple-year disasters and are having a very tough time such as up in my part of the world, in the Northeast and Southeast and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, on the whole, this is a very good piece of legislation and I want to commend the chairman and ranking member and everybody else for their work; and I encourage the adoption of this conference report.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CAMP), a former member of the Committee on Agriculture and a gentleman who still has an extreme interest and is a tremendous amount of assistance on agricultural matters.

Mr. CAMP. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of this conference report. This legislation will provide needed protection for our farmers who have struggled with low commodity prices and weather-related disasters. I want to thank the chairman for his continued work to help our family farmers.

There is another part of this legislation that is very important to the farmers in my district and throughout the State of Michigan. This legislation will provide \$6 million in emergency funds to combat bovine tuberculosis.

□ 1100

Bovine tuberculosis has historically been a very rare disease in wild deer. However, extensive testing in Michigan found the disease had spread throughout the deer population, and these deer have passed on the disease to our cattle herds.

There is no vaccine for bovine TB, and cattle infected with TB are destroyed. In addition to the fear of losing their herds, Michigan farmers are now facing the news that USDA has taken steps to remove Michigan's bovine TB-free status. The loss of that status is expected to cost farmers \$156 million over the next few years, and that is a conservative estimate.

The State of Michigan, USDA, and Michigan State University have worked hard to address this escalating problem. These emergency funds being appropriated today will assist in providing the tools necessary to continue fighting this disease and provide relief to Michigan farmers.

Again, I want to thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST). I would like to thank the entire Michigan delegation for their work on this issue, and I would especially like to recognize the efforts of the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK) from the first district of Michigan. The first outbreaks of this disease began in the first and fourth districts, the districts he and I represent; and since that time his commitment to this issue has been unwavering and a great help.

Again, I urge my colleagues to support final passage.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE).

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to voice my support for this conference report and express my gratitude to those who have included in this the \$7.1 billion economic relief package for farmers. I do not need to tell anyone here how sorely this assistance is needed. For decades, North Carolina has been one of the most prosperous and productive agricultural States in our country, but then came the Asian economic crisis that sent commodity prices crashing down, followed by Hurricane Dennis, then Hurricane Floyd. Then came the floods which paralyzed eastern North Carolina. Then came Hurricane Irene. Then came steep cuts in tobacco programs.

Now what do we have to look forward to during this summer? The forecasters say that it will be another severe

drought and another active hurricane season. Our farmers have been through a lot, and this emergency funding could not come any too soon.

Farming is more than a way of making a living. It is a way of life. It is our responsibility to take these actions that will protect the heritage and character of rural America and preserve our farming communities.

I want to thank the bill managers, the chairman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), the ranking member, for their leadership in helping to craft and guide this assistance package. The Committee on Agriculture has a long history of bipartisan cooperation, and I am proud to be a part of that honorable tradition.

I believe the underlying crop insurance bill will reduce fraud and abuse and expand the insurance coverage and make premiums more affordable to our farmers. However, it will not solve all the problems facing the agricultural community.

Crop insurance reform and emergency funding is only a bridge leading us to the real issue, and that is fundamental reform of the 1996 Freedom to Farm Act which expires in 2002.

As Congress continues the debate on Federal farm policy, I remain hopeful that Congress can produce legislation that will strengthen our Nation's safety net for our farmers so emergency aid packages will no longer be necessary except in the most dire of circumstances. I look forward to that debate.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), a very active and significant member of this committee.

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST) for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) for their leadership. The longer I serve on the Committee on Agriculture, the greater respect I have for the leadership that is provided.

I particularly appreciate the hearings that have been held across the country and the willingness to listen to everyday producers, farmers, and ranchers across our Nation, including the hearing we held at the Kansas State Fair in September of 1999.

The provisions included in the crop insurance reform aspect of this conference report alone would be something that we could come to the House floor very proud of today, and they do move us in the right direction. Crop insurance has needed reform for a long time, and this committee on the House side has worked long and hard to make that happen.

In addition to that, and I hope it does not get overshadowed, in addition to that this conference report will provide

disaster assistance for farmers desperately in need of that assistance.

With the failure for us to reach agreements in WTO and reducing subsidies by the European communities and others, with the failure of our ability to reduce taxes and reduce rules and regulations that affect farmers in their everyday lives and their pocket-books, and with continued low commodity prices, on top of increasing costs for fuel and the Federal Reserve continually raising the interest rate, there is no question but what we would lose another generation of farmers without the assistance provided in this package.

I am particularly delighted that it comes to us early in this session. I thank the Committee on the Budget, and I thank the Committee on Agriculture and the leadership of the House for making certain that our farmers and their bankers know early in this year whether or not there is going to be assistance that is provided to them.

So this is a good day. Crop insurances, disaster assistance and the many provisions contained in this legislation will make a difference in the everyday lives of farmers and ranchers across the country; and we will keep, in place, this generation of farmers now and for the future.

I look forward to working with this committee because our farmers want something more than disaster assistance. That is not what they really want. They want a price for their commodity.

We have a long way to go to help insure that that opportunity is there. This is a step in the right direction, and we have our work cut out for us. I look forward to working with the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST) today, tomorrow, and every year. I thank the gentleman for this conference report.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP).

Mr. BISHOP. Mr. Speaker, I would say to the chairman, the ranking member, the conference committee, I cannot express enough gratitude to them for finally completing the work in bringing this very, very important piece of legislation to the floor for the consideration of the full House.

We need a risk protection tool to repair the safety net that our farmers have had torn away from them. We have been working on this bill for some time, and I am just delighted that finally we are able to get to the point where we can go home and tell our farmers that we have accomplished our work.

This will repair that safety net. It will reward good farming experience, much as we reward good drivers for driving safely. It is more affordable. There will be more coverage, and it will pay for the cost of production losses when there is a disaster.

The most important thing that I like, and what our farmers in Georgia like, is the APH, the adjusted production history, which is a part of this bill; and we are very, very, very pleased with that.

We are pleased with the short-term relief that is being given in the emergency payments for the oil seed producers, the cotton seed producers, and for the disaster assistance for our peanut farmers.

I think we have done a very good job here, and I want to commend, again, the chairman, the ranking member, and the conference committee for a job well done; and I am so glad that we are finally able to get it accomplished.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. CALVERT), another very active member of our committee.

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of this conference report, the Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000. This legislation goes a long way to assisting our farmers. I want to thank both the chairman and the ranking member, the gentlemen from the great State of Texas, for moving this conference report forward. I am especially pleased that \$25 million was included to compensate growers for losses resulting from Pierce's Disease, plum pox, and citrus canker. My district has been hit hard by Pierce's Disease, which is transmitted by the glassy-winged sharpshooter. The disease attacks grapevines and is spreading at a rapid rate through Southern California, the gateway of one of the premier wine regions in California, as well as threatening the wine regions in the northern part of the State.

It is estimated that 25 percent of the 3,000 acres of vineyards in Temecula have been destroyed to Pierce's Disease. Pests are not new to California and to this country. It is estimated in California alone we will lose about \$3 billion in losses just because of pests. Pests are introduced in California, new pests, every 60 days. This assistance will help our growers to fight these pests and to struggle through a tough period.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. POMEROY).

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by commending the gentleman from Texas (Chairman COMBEST) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), the ranking member, for this legislation and the inclusive process they initiated that brought this legislation about.

This is my fourth term as a Member of this Congress. In my view, the crop insurance piece of this package before us reflects the very finest dimensions of bipartisan corporation on difficult

problems that I have ever experienced as a Member of this body. It really took extraordinary leadership from the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST) and I appreciate it very much.

Bottom line, this legislation brings farmers higher levels of coverage of premiums they can afford. Farmers risk an awful lot of capital every year, and they need to protect that risk with crop insurance that gets the job done. This higher coverage at affordable premiums will take a big part of that.

Additionally, when farmers lose several years in a row because of weather cycles beyond their circumstance, they require the ability to continue to have adequate coverage. We fix the APH flaw in the existing program with this legislation, and it will mean much better protection going forward for farmers in that regard.

Finally, as has been alluded to by previous speakers, the disaster response contained in this legislation responding to the continued low-price environment our farmers face is also extremely important. Imagine, when it costs more to grow the crop than one can get paid for at the elevator after harvest time. Nobody can stay in business very long under those circumstances.

We need to build over the long haul countercyclical price protection in the farm program so that we do not have to go through this exercise of appropriating every year disaster assistance; but in the meantime this help is desperately needed, very meaningful.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EWING), the chairman of the subcommittee where this process all started back a year and a half ago.

Mr. EWING. Mr. Speaker, my thanks to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST) and to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) for all the work and effort they have put in in coming up with a bill which really has a lot in it for American agriculture.

This is truly a remarkable week for agriculture. With the passage of permanent normal trade relations with China yesterday, today the passage of this bill, which has more in it than just crop insurance reform, and then possibly on to the appropriations process for agriculture, this truly is a remarkable week.

I want to comment just briefly on the bill and its underlying basic part, that dealing with crop insurance, because this is what we promised our farmers when we passed Freedom to Farm, one of the important things.

We would give them a safety net, and I believe that the provisions of the crop insurance bill, as amended in this bill, provide truly a magnificent improvement to that safety net.

We are going to allow our farmers to insure at higher levels. We are going to guarantee they can insure what they

grow or what they should be able to grow on their land, and we are going to do it at a cost that is significantly reduced.

Also in this bill, though, is a very important thing and other speakers have talked about how we are going to let our farmers know that they are going to have some help in these bad times, again in 2000. The lost market payments that are in this bill are very important to agriculture across the country and certainly in Illinois.

Finally, in this bill is a provision that was part of the bill that I introduced. We called it the biomass bill. Senator LUGAR introduced it in the other body and it has been incorporated into this bill, and it is going to provide research to find uses for what we grow in America, alternate products. This bill contains a lot of good parts and I certainly encourage everyone to vote for it.

The Conference Report to the Agricultural Risk Protection Act is of immense importance for America's agricultural producers. The \$8.2 billion provided in the bill for crop insurance over the next 5 years will lead to increased program participation and help to decrease the need for ad hoc disaster bills.

This legislation will increase by 30 percent the amount of government assistance in purchasing crop insurance. Many producers have wanted to purchase higher levels of coverage, but because of the high costs of premiums they have been unable to afford the high costs of premiums. The bill will allow producers to buy levels of crop insurance that actually protect them from the unpredictable forces of mother nature.

The conference agreement also ensures that farmers' actual production history will be adjusted so that APH won't drop by more than 60 percent of the transitional yield in any particular year.

Further improvements will allow livestock producers to develop pilot insurance programs for the first time. This will be extremely important to those producers since livestock revenue accounts for nearly half of this nation's producer revenue.

One of the issues we heard over and over during Subcommittee and full Committee hearings throughout the country was that producers wanted cost of production policies. This bill provides the ability for the development of cost of production policies.

Additionally, the Conference Report makes revenue insurance such as CRC, which is important to producers in Illinois and many other areas of the country more affordable, thereby giving them the ability to protect their projected revenue flow.

Everyone involved in the federal crop insurance has stressed the importance of preventing fraud and abuse. The Agricultural Risk Protection Act deals with concerns voiced over program integrity.

The Risk Management Agency and the Farm Service Agency will be required to work together to ensure that records for crop insurance and other programs are accurate.

The Secretary of Agriculture is required to submit an annual report that identifies specific

instances of fraud, waste, and abuse and outlines the steps taken to correct these problems.

The Secretary will have the power to use a broad range of sanctions against producers, agents, loss adjusters, and insurance providers who are committing fraud or abuse.

The conference agreement reflects the intention of the Committee to make the program more efficient and accountable in both its administration and development of new policies.

Rather than having the government develop all new insurance policies, this legislation gives producers and their representative organizations the ability to work with companies, agents, and universities to develop crop insurance policies that they believe are more attractive and workable. These groups will be reimbursed for their costs if the end product is approved by the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation's board and then offered to producers by an approved crop insurance provider.

Many specialty crops have indicated their desire to have policies that are better suited to their particular needs and this provision will help to accommodate their wishes.

For those underserved crops with limited resources, the FCIC may contract with private groups to help develop new policies.

These provisions are designed to provide that producers will be able to have policies that help them address their business risks.

The Conference Report to the Agricultural Risk Protection Act also contains a number of provisions that reach beyond crop insurance. I will briefly outline these provisions that are of considerable importance to my producers in Illinois.

Contained in the agreement is \$7.1 billion in economic assistance to the agricultural sector. Nearly \$5.5 billion dollars in Agricultural Market Transition Act (AMTA) payments will help our family farmers remain financially solvent as they weather through current low commodity prices in our agricultural economy. Many of my farming constituents have told me that without these market loss payments they have received in the past two years, their family farms would have been extremely difficult to hold onto.

This legislation also provides for a \$500 million oilseed payment which will benefit farmers in my district as they continue to deal with soybean prices that are hovering at a nearly thirty year low.

The bill invests funds into the research of technology for reducing, modifying, recycling, and utilizing waste streams from livestock production and eliminating associated air, water, and soil quality problems. This research is vital as our suburbs expand into our rural areas, and the concerns of odor and sanitation issues take on a new importance.

The Conference Report contains legislative language comparable to a bill I introduced last year, H.R. 2827, the National Sustainable Fuels and Chemicals Act of 1999. Much of the language is similar and all of the goals are identical. The Biomass Research and Development Act of 2000 is a bicameral, bipartisan effort to authorize research into the transformation of biomass into biobased industrial products.

Biomass is any organic matter that is available on a renewable or recurring basis, includ-

ing agricultural crops and trees, wood and wood wastes and residues (including material removed from so-called old growth forests), plants, grasses, residues, fibers, animal wastes, municipal wastes, and other waste materials. By investing in research of biomass, we may be creating an additional market for farmers' products in the long term. Research created by this legislation will help to add in the expedited development of alternative fuels that are environmentally friendly.

The conference agreement both authorizes and appropriates funds to complete the construction of a corn-based ethanol pilot plant in Edwardsville, Illinois, at Southern Illinois University. This pilot plant will be beneficial to the ethanol industry and corn producers.

I urge my colleagues to support the Agricultural Risk Protection Act to help producers help themselves to better risk management strategies. The Conference Report to the Agricultural Risk Protection Act is of vital importance to all of agriculture.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Maine (Mr. BALDACCI).

Mr. BALDACCI. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the ranking member and the staff for all of their hard work, and also the chairman of the subcommittee and the full committee for being able to work together in regards to these reforms. They have been a long time coming. The Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000 has a lot to commend it, but more can and should be done in the future.

We are seeing the failure of our current farm policy. The legislation that we have before us does not go far enough in providing risk management reforms to strengthen that safety net, but I would like to thank all those involved in working together to try to help raise the farmers' income, primarily with specialty crops.

The bill contains improvements to the noninsured disaster assistance program. It provides solid investment in research and development for new policies while benefiting specialty crops in underserved States. Those are reforms that my farmers can appreciate.

I am disappointed that we did not change the formula for the AMTA payments, and I would have rather seen a portion of that money being spent on the disaster programs that have occurred and particularly with apples and with potatoes.

Our farmers should not have to live with payments amounting to just 65 percent of their disaster losses.

Helping farmers add value to their crops is one sure way to stabilize the economies of rural America.

□ 1115

I would like to thank the conferees. I have submitted legislation and amendments dealing with value added, and the component of \$15 million will go a long way in helping producers to be able to add values, both to their harvest and markets, and to help them to

find those markets all with forest products, with potatoes, with blueberries, and cranberries.

The enactment of this section will go a long way to making sure that farmer cooperatives are going to be able to have value added and be able to have access to those markets. I think they are vitally important.

I want to thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST), chairman, and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), ranking member, and the staff itself for working together on this; and I seek to work with them also as we advance into agriculture appropriations.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES), a very valued member of our committee.

Mr. HAYES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Chairman COMBEST) for his tireless and enthusiastic effort for our farmers from Lubbock, Texas and the gentleman from Ericksdahl, Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), the ranking member.

Mr. Speaker, today I rise in enthusiastic support of the first comprehensive crop insurance reform since 1994 as well as much needed economic assistance to our farmers, and it could not have come at a better time.

Our Nation's farmers and ranchers are suffering from over 3 years of record-low commodity prices, drought, and many other natural disasters leading to financial stress. In North Carolina, USDA estimates an 18 percent drop in farm income this year for 1999 levels. In addition, our producers will continue to be greatly affected by increasing interest rates that make farm loans more and more expensive. I am happy to see that we have addressed these problems with disaster assistance also included in this bill.

The \$7.1 billion slated to be paid to producers will help to offset the financial difficulties they are going through. The reforms made to crop insurance will also aid our farmers.

More than 2 years ago, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EWING) joined me in Laurinburg in the North Carolina eighth district to work on this issue of crop insurance, and here we are today. It is a great day for farm community. The chairman and ranking member and all the staff worked so hard for years to produce this very, very effective bill.

The bill increases premium subsidies in such a way to provide producers the incentive to buy higher levels of coverage and improve participation in the program.

In addition, the bill provides incentives through the development of new and innovative insurance products so that we continue to provide our producers with the best tools possible. Fraud, waste, and abuse also addressed in the bill go a long way towards restoring integrity to the program.

Mr. Speaker, again, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST), chairman, and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), ranking member, and all involved for a wonderful bill. I encourage my colleagues' support.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK).

Mr. STUPAK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank the conferees for bringing forth this bill and the \$6 million included in this bill for Michigan to fight bovine tuberculosis.

These funds are an important first step in combating an outbreak of bovine tuberculosis in Michigan. Bovine TB is spreading in Michigan's Lower Peninsula and threatening our beef and dairy cattle.

USDA has announced that Michigan will lose its bovine TB-free status effective June 1. This decision will have dire economic consequences.

It will require the testing of all 1.25 million Michigan beef and dairy cattle. It will place greater restrictions on their travel into other States. It is estimated that Michigan's economy will suffer losses of \$156 million over the next 10 years.

Michigan's situation is complicated because the virus has been found in deer herds, which are more mobile and pose a greater risk to beef and dairy cattle. A quarantine zone exists in Michigan; however, positive deer have been found outside of the zone.

In addition, the disease has appeared in badgers, bobcats, coyotes, raccoons, and red foxes. When the disease is rampant, immediate action is necessary.

Compounding Michigan's crisis are the restrictions placed on Michigan's beef and dairy cattle from entering other States for sale or slaughter. In the last 4 years, more than 18,000 Michigan cattle have been exported to other States. Now over 43 States have restrictions on accepting Michigan cattle. Michigan farmers have lost their markets and cannot recoup them until TB is eradicated. Help is needed now, not tomorrow, not next month, and definitely not next year.

So it is essential that we stop bovine tuberculosis before it spreads to neighboring States. Prior to being downgraded, Michigan had been bovine free since 1979. We cannot, however, afford to wait another 21 years to regain a TB-free status, and these funds will help in that effort.

I thank all of the conferees for their work.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, when we started off on this endeavor, the idea was to listen to what farmers said was a problem in the current crop insurance program and to do everything we could to try to make for certain that we could correct as

much of that as possible within the constraints that we had. As always is the case, when there is a pot of money, it becomes very tempting to try to divvy that up in a variety of ways.

The conference that was concluded yesterday was concluded in 2 hours and 45 minutes. Nine members of the Senate, nine members of the House and all 18 Members of that conference committee signed that report.

I think it does two things. Number one, I think it shows the significance of what this bill is doing. But I also think that it shows the significance of the amount of bipartisan effort that went into this bill; and as much as anything, it shows how well the staff of the House committee, both minority and majority, worked very closely together on this throughout the entire process and their work with the Senate staff and members of the Senate, and having us to a point that something of this magnitude could be concluded in such a short period of time.

Without the work that has gone on literally for weeks, many, many late hours by the staff, both the House and the Senate, majority and minority, this would have not been possible. There is no way that I can thank them enough for those long hours that they put in in creating this product that I think is going to have a significant bearing on the future of American agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JOHN).

Mr. JOHN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas for yielding me 1½ minutes.

Being on the Subcommittee of Risk Management, Research, and Specialty Crops that began the deliberations on this bill, I am proud to stand up here before the House today and support the conference committee report.

I want to thank the gentleman from Texas (Chairman COMBEST), and the subcommittee, and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), the ranking member of the full committee, for their tireless work in putting this piece of legislation together. This is a very important piece of legislation because I think it heals the promises that were made in the 1996 farm bill.

My understanding, I was not here at the time, but my understanding of when we passed the Freedom to Farms bills, the Congress' obligation was twofold: First to provide a safety net and, second, to open new markets.

I think yesterday we took a major step in opening new markets for our rice producers and the other farmers across America; and maybe even today we will have another opportunity to continue opening markets in the area of Cuba and other areas in other countries.

But the second part was creating a safety net, a safety net that is so important to our rice producers and also our farmers across the country.

So I stand here to support the conference committee report because it makes it accessible and it makes it affordable. But, specifically, I want to thank the gentlemen from Texas, Mr. COMBEST and Mr. STENHOLM, both of which worked with me to provide a provision to help south Louisiana's rice farmers.

This year, we had a drought of a magnitude that we have not seen in many, many years in southwest Louisiana. Under present law, rice farmers were not covered under the drought provisions. I just wanted to thank them for being able to put the rice provision in there for our rice farmers because it is so important to them.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the conference committee report.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, how much time is remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). The gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST) has 2½ minutes remaining. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) has 3 minutes remaining.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, just let me say in closing, again, I commend the gentleman from Illinois (Chairman EWING) and the ranking members on this side for the tremendous hard work that has gone into this package. There is no question that our producers all across the Nation will be very appreciative of this financial assistance once again this year.

I thank the actions, as the gentleman from Texas (Chairman COMBEST) has mentioned a moment ago, tremendous work of the staffs on both sides of the aisle who have been able to work together in resolving many difficult issues in which we do not always agree 100 percent. But this committee, under the leadership of the gentleman from Texas (Chairman COMBEST), I think, does as good and perhaps I would say best job of any committee in the House of working out differences between both sides when we, perhaps, have differences, not partisan differences, but honest differences in the manner in which various pieces of the legislation should be written.

This was a difficult task with the conditions and all, but it has been done in a way in which I feel that can be recommended to our colleagues on both sides of the aisle for their support. Again, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Chairman COMBEST) for his work and cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of the time.

Again, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), my friend and

my neighbor there, for all the good work and the efforts that have gone into this, and, again, to the staff on the minority side for the efforts and for their work.

If I might just take a moment, Mr. Speaker, to, not only talk about the significance of this bill, but the significance of what happened in the House yesterday. One of the glaring concerns that agriculture has faced over the last 3 years has been a concern about the ability or inability to expand markets.

While I recognize and appreciate the deep-held feelings of those people who were opposed to the granting of permanent normal trade relations with China, I think it was one of the most significant votes that we could take in this House on, not only what is good for America, but what is good for our farmers when we have 1.3 billion people, the largest market in the world, that is now opening up to American production.

All of the groups that have come forward and have talked about the amount of increase and income for their producers and the amount of increase in the price of hogs or cattle, the number of exports that will become available to us, it was really, in my opinion, a no choice, that we have now made ourselves available to a market that everyone else in the world would have taken advantage of.

The gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) in every one of the field hearings that we held across the country, not only asked the panel, but he asked the members in the audience, and this has been several thousand over 10 hearings, their position on providing PNTR. In all of those hearings, total combined, well over 90 percent of the people indicated that they supported that activity.

I think that shows the kind of recognition and support that American agriculture has, but I think it also shows the understanding that people have, number one, about what a great trade agreement that was, and number two, about its impact on agriculture.

It was, I think, a very thoughtful question that my colleague asked and carried through that, through the entire hearing process, and I think, continued to focus on it in its significance. It also, I think, gave us a recognition of the amount of support that was out there that otherwise would not have been done.

So I think, as was stated earlier, the last 2 days have been extremely positive days for American agriculture. I was glad to be a part of it and glad to be a part of it on a team that works so bipartisan.

Mr. GOODLING. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the conference report on H.R. 2559, the Agriculture Risk Protection Act. This legislation will provide important assistance to our nation's agricultural community and it will help our nation's children as well.

I was reared on a farm and know the hardships faced by our nation's farmers. I was also an educator and know the importance of ensuring that children eat nutritious meals. It is simple. Hungry children don't pay attention to their schoolwork, they pay attention to their growling stomachs.

Currently farmers in my Congressional district are experiencing problems with plum pox. I want to thank the conferees for including indemnification authorization for fruit growers affected by the plum pox virus in Adams County, Pennsylvania, as directed by Secretary Glickman in his March 2, 2000 declaration of Extraordinary Emergency.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation also includes several provisions affecting our federal child nutrition programs. I would like to highlight several of the key provisions.

The first provision is based on H.R. 3614, the Emergency Commodity Distribution Act of 2000. This legislation was introduced to restore recent cuts to the School Lunch Program. Since the 103rd Congress, 12 percent of the cost of school lunches was to be in the form of agricultural products purchased for schools.

Last session, this law was modified to allow the 12 percent commodity requirement to be met through a combination of entitlement and bonus commodities. The savings achieved as a result of this revision was used to help fund the "Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999." As a consequence, schools will receive fewer commodities because bonus commodities will be counted as part of the 12 percent commodity requirement rather than in addition to the commodities schools would receive under this requirement. At the same time, purchases of agriculture commodities will also be reduced.

The conference agreement restores \$110 million for the purchase of commodities for school meal programs. Both the children and the agriculture community benefit from these purchases and I thank the conferees for agreeing to partially restore this important commodity funding.

The conference report also includes key provisions of H.R. 4520, the Child and Adult Care Food Program Integrity Act of 2000, legislation to combat fraud and abuse in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The Child and Adult Care Food Program provides nutritious meals and snacks to children in day care facilities and family day care homes. It operates in 37,000 day care centers and 175,000 day care homes.

Unfortunately, in recent years both the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the General Accounting Office (GAO) have issued reports of widespread fraud and abuse and deficient management practices in the program. As a result, the full value of nutrition benefits the program delivers has been denied to many of the 2.7 million participating children nationwide.

Provisions included in the conference report, based on H.R. 4520, would address fraud and abuse in CACFP and improve program management. For example, the legislation will require the Agriculture Department to develop a plan for ongoing periodic training of state and sponsor staff in the prevention of fraud and abuse; require a minimum number of unannounced site visits for inspections; and permit

the Secretary of Agriculture to withhold administrative funds to states that have not met their oversight responsibilities. It will also require child care provisions to notify parents if they are participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, so they can take action if they suspect fraud and abuse. These are but a few of the key provisions directed at eliminating fraud and abuse in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Enactment of this legislation will ensure that CACFP funds will be used to feed children and not end up in the hands of unscrupulous program sponsors and care providers.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2559, the Agriculture Risk Protection Act. It provides important assistance to our country's farmers and ensures the provision of vital nutrition assistance to our nation's children.

Mr. CONDIT. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to begin by thanking the Agriculture Committee members and staff for their hard work on the Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000. This bill goes far in providing much needed assistance to farmers nationally, and for the first time effectively addresses the unique conditions of California specialty crops.

A main concern of specialty crop producers is the lack of insurance programs that meet their risk management needs. This bill prioritizes \$25 million for research and development of new and improved insurance products for these growers. Additionally, new mandates on RMA to contract out and reimburse private sector research and development of crop insurance programs will expedite product development and reform. The streamlining of RMA's review and development procedures encourages new product availability in response to proposals and requests from producers and approved insurance providers. A specialty crop coordinator will be appointed to expand existing policies and coverage for specialty crops.

To increase specialty crop participation in crop insurance programs, cooperatives and non-profit trade associations are permitted to offer Catastrophic and additional levels of insurance to their members where state law allows licensing fees. Members of these cooperatives who are located in adjacent states also benefit from this provision. California farmers will benefit tremendously from this provision, since cooperatives will now be allowed to encourage farmer participation in crop insurance programs and assist in the payment of fees.

Participation is also increased by the elimination of an area-wide loss before disaster payments can be made to producers of currently non-insurable crops. In states with less than 50 percent of national participation average, the USDA Secretary is also instructed to take steps to study and develop other ways to increase participation.

I am very pleased with the reforms made in this year's crop insurance legislation and thank you on behalf of all California farmers for responding to their needs.

Mrs. CAPPS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of Agriculture Risk Protection Act Conference Report. This bill provides important support for our Nation's farmers and ensures that Americans will have a steady, affordable food supply.

I want to address an issue that is of particular importance to my district—the spread of Pierce's Disease. I am pleased that this bill includes much-needed funding to combat Pierce's disease and the Glassy-winged Sharpshooter which spread it. This disease is having a devastating effect on California vintners, and needs to be brought under control before it does even greater damage.

Although outbreaks in my district have been limited, recent sightings of the Glassy-winged Sharpshooter are very worrisome. Just the other day eggs of the Glassy-winged Sharpshooter were found on plants at two northern San Luis Obispo County nurseries.

While we have been experimenting with different ways to combat Pierce's Disease, currently there is no known cure. Central Coast wine grape growers are banding together and contributing funds to fight this disease. We in the federal government need to support these efforts.

I joined members of the Wine Caucus in urging the Agriculture Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee to increase funding for combating Pierce's Disease. I am pleased that the Subcommittee saw the importance of this issue and provided appropriate funding in the Agriculture Risk Protection Act Conference Report.

This bill provides the necessary support for our vintners with \$7.14 million in funding for control and containment activities in California and \$25 million to compensate growers for losses due to three different diseases including Pierce's Disease.

We cannot rest until a cure for this disease is found and the Glassy-winged Sharpshooter is eradicated. I'm glad that this bill takes a major step in that direction.

Mr. KIND. Mr. Speaker, I am extremely disappointed in H.R. 2559, the conference report on the Agriculture Risk Protection Act. While originally intended as a simple crop insurance measure, H.R. 2559 instead is a sad commentary of the state of our nation's current dysfunctional farm policy.

The crop insurance reform bill that this body is set to vote upon codifies some of the basic principles that many of us have been advocating—affordability, and buy-up coverage. I am happy that the measure authorizes an increase in the number of counties that can participate in the dairy options pilot program (DOPP), authorizes the creation of livestock insurance program, and improved coverage of specialty crops—including cranberries, apples, and vegetable crops grown in Wisconsin.

Unfortunately, the conference committee has unnecessarily included \$7.1 billion in emergency farm payments in the bill. This legislation is not the proper vehicle for such outlays. Instead, the House should deal with these matters separately, in a more thorough and thoughtful manner.

The emergency farm assistance fails the American farmer and rural communities in a number of ways. Specifically, it fails to target the assistance to those producers and commodities that need it most. By distributing these funds through the inequitable Agriculture Marketing Transition Act (AMTA) formula, this legislation places a priority on wheat and feed grains grown on large operations in the Great Plains and fails to address the needs of family-sized operations.

According to a recent computer investigation by the Environmental Working Group, "taxpayers have provided \$22.9 billion in emergency subsidies (payments above normal farm bill receipts) during the first three years of the 'Freedom to Farm' law, but 10 percent of the recipients (144,000 participants) collected 61 percent of the money." Even President Clinton's Agriculture Secretary opposes this delivery mechanism, claiming that AMTA payments treat "the farm economy as monolith, failing to consider the varying degree of market weakness across commodities." Sadly, this bill fails to correct this economic injustice.

In addition, the AMTA payments do not increase farm conservation programs. In a period when a growing segment of the American population is calling for improvements in clean water and air, as well as more sustainable agriculture practices in general, it is irresponsible not to allocate adequate funds to programs that address the growing concentrated animal agriculture industry and its related phosphorous and nutrient management problems as well as hazards associated with crop fertilizer use.

American farmers deserve more than this short-sighted, inequitable, shot-gun approach to farm policy. This nation, and this body, needs to have a thoughtful discussion of the commodity price problems facing rural America. H.R. 2559 short-circuits the deliberative process that is the great hallmark of democracy. Hopefully, rural America will see through this half-hearted approach and call on Congress to act in a more responsible manner.

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, this Member rises in strong support of the conference report for H.R. 2559, the Agricultural Risk Protection Act, which provides for the reform of our Federal crop insurance program, and urges his colleagues to vote for it.

This Member would like to begin by expressing appreciation to the distinguished gentleman from Texas (Mr. COMBEST), the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee, and the distinguished gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), the Ranking Member of the Committee, for their hard work on this important legislation.

As an original cosponsor of H.R. 2559, this Member is pleased that this conference report is being considered today. Agricultural producers throughout the country continue to suffer from disastrously low commodity prices and in some regions from adverse weather conditions. For instance, Nebraska farmers are confronting one of the most serious droughts in decades.

This Member believes that this conference report is an important step toward developing a more effective long-term approach to assisting agricultural producers. Improving crop insurance is certainly not the only solution to the current problems, but it does provide a more adequate safety net to farmers who are too often confronted with natural disasters and low prices.

The Agricultural Risk Protection Act will make crop insurance coverage more affordable at every level. It will offer producers significant incentives to purchase higher levels of protection and provide farmers with the flexibility to purchase the coverage that best meets their needs.

It is important to note that this crop insurance reform bill also improves the current risk management structure by providing better coverage for both production and revenue. It does so by making possible more affordable policies to protect farmers against price and income loss. The legislation also initiates a livestock pilot program to test the effectiveness of risk management tools to protect livestock producers.

This Member's constituents have made it clear that crop insurance is a necessary risk management tool. Unfortunately, it is often too expensive or offers too little protection to be of real value. This legislation takes these concerns into account and offers agricultural producers what they need—meaningful and more affordable crop insurance.

This Member is also pleased that this conference report includes funding for emergency payments to farmers. The 1996 Freedom to Farm Act was based on the premise of expanding international markets for the commodities produced by our nation's farmers. This clearly has not happened. Certainly, one of the root causes of the current low commodity prices was the drop in exports, especially to Asia as a result of the region's economic down-turn. Nobody could have predicted the Asian financial crisis or the contagion effect which is still being felt.

Also, because of the strength of our national economy relative to most other countries, the value of our currency compared to others now makes our exports less price-competitive in Asian markets than our competitor exporters like Canada, Australia, Brazil, or the nations of the European Union. Thus, there is not only a dramatically reduced agricultural export market in Asia, we are also getting a reduced portion of the remaining Asian import business.

Clearly, an emergency agriculture relief package is needed immediately. Producers are in desperate need of a quick infusion of cash to help them deal with low prices and increasing costs. However, as important as that relief is, it is only a temporary fix. A long-term approach is clearly needed. This conference report, which includes significant improvements in the crop insurance program, is an important component of that effort.

This Member urges his colleagues to vote for the conference report for H.R. 2559.

Mr. LAHOOD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the conference report for H.R. 2559, the Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000. I believe that this legislation is paramount to providing much needed assistance to our nations farmers and ranchers.

In 1996, Congress passed the Freedom to Farm bill, which was designed to limit government's role in agriculture. This legislation addresses some of the short falls of Freedom to Farm by providing temporary economic relief to our farm community, as well as implementing crop insurance reform.

The reforms to the crop insurance program will strengthen the farm safety net by providing producers improved risk management tools to address the inherent risks associated with farming. I believe that these reforms are necessary, and that they will remove need for the type of emergency assistance Congress has provided agricultural producers over the past two years.

I am especially appreciative that this conference report contains the House crop insurance reform language calling for the implementation of livestock pilot programs. These pilot programs would provide livestock producers with the necessary risk management tools to cope with disasters, weather shifts, and other natural acts beyond their control without fear that the cost of doing the right thing will put them out of business.

I am also supportive of the anti-fraud provisions in the crop insurance legislation. These provisions direct the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation and the Farm Service Agency to work together to reconcile producer information on an annual basis, to identify producers and insurers who are abusing the program.

As I stated earlier, I believe that this is sound legislation. I want to commend all the conferees and committee staff for their hard work and dedication, particularly Chairman COMBEST and Ranking Member STENHOLM.

Mr. CLEMENT. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate Congressman COMBEST of Texas for introducing the Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000. The conference report that we are voting on today will provide a badly needed overhaul of our crop insurance system.

All of us who represent and have grown up in rural areas know the importance of our nation's farmers. The weather over the past couple of years has not been very generous to Tennessee's farmers and now, more than ever, they need federal policy to help them these tough times.

Farming is not only a job that requires endless hours of hard work and planning. It also requires a substantial amount of courage to be a farmer. Our farmers take risks every year by putting their livelihood on the line in order to produce for their communities. They invest the money they have worked so hard to save in a crop or a number of crops with the hope that the rains will come and that a tornado and the insects will not.

But, as we all know, those conditions are never guaranteed. But my fellow Congressmen and I can guarantee them an affordable safety net. Providing our dwindling farming population with a cheaper and broader insurance program is the least we can do for the men and women who work to provide for each one of us in this House.

The provision in this conference report that makes catastrophic coverage available for all farmers for a simple fee is certainly appealing to Tennessee's farmers who have been hit by a recent wave of tornadoes and droughts over the past several years.

Tennessee's single crop and lower yield farmers are especially excited about the change in their actual production history formula. These farmers will now be able to insure more of their investments and feel more secure about their ability to support their families. Ladies and gentlemen these are only a few examples of the benefits of this legislation.

I call on each one of my fellow members of Congress to join me and support this conference report for America's courageous farmers.

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the previous question is ordered on the conference report.

There was no objection.

The conference report was agreed to. A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. COMBEST. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the conference report to accompany H.R. 2559 just passed.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE FROM THURSDAY, MAY 25, 2000 OR FRIDAY, MAY 26, 2000 TO TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 2000, AND RECESS OR ADJOURNMENT OF SENATE FROM THURSDAY, MAY 25, 2000 OR FRIDAY, MAY 26, 2000 OR SATURDAY, MAY 27, 2000 OR SUNDAY, MAY 28, 2000 TO MONDAY, JUNE 5, 2000 OR TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 2000

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, I offer a privileged concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 336) and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the concurrent resolution, as follows:

H. CON. RES. 336

Resolved by the House of Representatives (The Senate concurring), That when the House adjourns on the legislative day of Thursday, May 25, 2000, or Friday, May 26, 2000, on a motion offered pursuant to this concurrent resolution by its Majority Leader or his designee, it stand adjourned until 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, June 6, 2000, for morning-hour debate, or until noon on the second day after Members are notified to reassemble pursuant to section 2 of this concurrent resolution, whichever occurs first; and that when the Senate recesses or adjourns at the close of business on Thursday, May 25, 2000, Friday, May 26, 2000, Saturday, May 27, 2000, or Sunday, May 28, 2000, on a motion offered pursuant to this concurrent resolution by its Majority Leader or his designee, it stand recessed or adjourned until noon on Monday, June 5, 2000, or Tuesday, June 6, 2000, as may be specified by its Majority Leader or his designee in the motion to recess or adjourn, or at such other time on that day as may be specified by its Majority Leader or his designee in the motion, or until noon on the second day after Members are notified to reassemble pursuant to section 2 of this concurrent resolution, whichever occurs first.

SEC. 2. The Speaker of the House and the Majority Leader of the Senate, acting jointly after consultation with the Minority Leader of the House and the Minority Leader of the Senate, shall notify the Members of the House and the Senate, respectively, to reassemble whenever, in their opinion, the public interest shall warrant it.

□ 1130

The concurrent resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.