Mr. President, that highlights the significant efforts the tax bill had to expand and increase the child credit. While many Senators were advocates of increasing the already existing child credit, and several Senators supported expanding the child credit and making it refundable—there is no question that Senator Snowe was the key to making it a reality.

Now, I would like to discuss the provisions in the bipartisan tax bill to help working families meet the costs of child care.

The tax bill helps with the costs of child care in two provisions. First, the tax relief bill provides greater incentives for employer-provided child care with the creation of a tax credit for employer-provided child care facilities.

The other relief act provides taxpayers a tax credit equal to 25 percent of qualified employer-provided child care and 10 percent of qualified expenses for child care resource and referral services. The maximum credit is $150,000 per year. This is 1.4 billion in tax incentives to encourage businesses to adopt in providing child care for their workers.

This new tax initiative will help mothers and fathers to obtain child care—and hopefully child care near their place of work which will allow them the opportunity to spend more time with their children. Senator Kohl has long advocated this proposal and deserves great credit for making this part of the Tax Code.

The second provision regarding child care expands the already existing dependent care tax credit. This is a tax credit that particularly helps low- and middle-income families who pay for child care for their young children.

Thanks to Senator Jeffords' work, the bipartisan tax bill expands this program and will allow low and middle income families to take a tax credit more of their costs of child care. The tax bill provides nearly $3 billion in additional tax relief for working families struggling to meet the costs of having their children in day care.

Thus, the bipartisan tax bill helps working mothers and fathers by encouraging employers to provide child care and also easing the cost burden of child care.

Let me turn now to the final provision I wish to discuss today in this speech that focuses on the provisions in the bipartisan tax relief bill that help working families and children. That provision is the expansion of the adoption tax credit.

I have long been a strong advocate of encouraging adoptions and know it brings joy to the children and the families. I am very pleased that the tax bill provides significant encouragement for families to adopt and reduces the costs of adopting parents.

The prior law provided for a $5,000 tax credit for qualified adoption expenses paid or incurred by a taxpayer in making an adoption. That amount was $6,000 for a special needs child. This full tax credit amount started to phaseout for taxpayers with modified adjusted gross income of over $35,000.

I am very pleased that the bipartisan legislation signed by President Bush increases the tax credit up to $10,000 for qualified adoption expenses and $10,000 for special needs children, regardless of whether there are qualified adoption expenses.

In addition, the new tax law expands the number of families eligible to take advantage of the adoption tax credit by having the credit begin to phaseout at $150,000 modified adjusted gross income.

This is a major expansion of the adoption tax credit and provides over $3 billion in tax incentives for families to adopt. Senators Craig and Landrieu are to be commended for their efforts in this matter.

Mr. President, that concludes my comments today on the tax relief act. As is plainly true, the tax relief accomplishes President Bush's goal of giving back the people's money. What is also plain and true is that a great deal of the tax relief is focused on helping working families with children.

I know many in the Capitol are very upset about the bipartisan tax bill because the tax relief means less money and is an increase in the already existing child credit. But let me assure my colleagues, we do far better by allowing working families to keep more of their hard-earned money.

The benefits of the tax relief bill will be realized in millions of small, unseen, quiet acts and decisions that don't make the evening news and unfortunately for the politicians, don't involve cutting ribbons and making speeches. I see working families now, because of the bipartisan tax bill, having more money in their pocket and being able to finally do the things they've planned or hoped for; be it buying a computer for their children; moving to a bigger apartment in a neighborhood with better schools; or purchasing healthier food for the dinner table.

These are just a few examples of the multitude of priorities that only the families can best decide—and not the bureaucrats in Washington. It is my belief that with families getting to keep more of their hard-earned paycheck—the quiet talks at the kitchen table, after the children have been put to bed, will be more about opportunities and possibilities rather than fears and concerns.

Mr. President, I hope this speech will make those who have recently called for a tax increase think again. My hope is that they may now better appreciate the expanse of benefits of this legislation and think long and hard before they try to undermine its accomplishments.

The Acting President pro tempore, The Senator from Montana.

MEXICAN TRUCKS

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the issue of Mexican trucks.

I want to applaud Senator MURRAY and Senator SHELBY for their efforts to craft a common-sense solution on this issue. Their provision would ensure strong safety requirements and would
be consistent with our obligations under NAFTA.

As most people are well aware, the last Administration delayed opening the border to Mexican trucks because of serious safety concerns.

Indeed, numerous reports have documented these concerns—failing brakes, overweight trucks, and uninsured, unlicensed drivers—to name just a few.

The most recent figures of the Department of Transportation indicate that Mexican trucks are much more likely to be ordered off the road for severe safety deficiencies than either U.S. or Canadian trucks.

While a NAFTA arbitration panel has ruled that the United States must initiate efforts to open the border to these trucks, we need to be clear about what the panel has said.

The panel indicated:

The United States may not be required to treat applications from Mexican trucking firms in exactly the same manner as applications from U.S. or Canadian firms. . . . U.S. authorities are responsible for the safe operations of trucks within U.S. territory, whether ownership is United States, Canadian, or Mexican.

Moreover, the panel also indicated that U.S. compliance with its NAFTA obligations “would not necessarily require providing favorable consideration to all or to any specific number of applications” for Mexican trucks so long as these applications are reviewed, “on a case-by-case basis.”

In other words, the U.S. government is well within its rights to impose standards it considers necessary to ensure that our highways are safe.

The Administration has suggested that it is seeking to treat U.S., Mexican, and Canadian trucks in the same way—but we are not required to treat them in the same way. That’s what the NAFTA panel said.

With Mexican trucks, there are greater safety risks. And where there are greater safety risks, we can—and must—impose stricter safety standards.

I yield the floor.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRANSPORTATION APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I rise to speak on the issue of the cloture vote that is upcoming, I also rise to speak on the amendment that is pending called the Murray-Shelby amendment, which is in violation of NAFTA.

As a person who believes very much in reducing barriers to trade between countries—and particularly for the benefit of America because other countries have much higher barriers than the United States—as we bring down barriers to trade and other countries, going to our level, it is obviously going to help the United States have a more level playing field in order to export our products and to be able to do it in a way that creates jobs in America. We all know export-related jobs are jobs that pay 15 percent above the national average.

While we have had a very big expansion in trade as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement between the countries of Canada, the United States, and Mexico, we now have a rider on this bill providing an opportunity to put in place restrictions which may in fact bring retaliatory action on the part of Mexico.

Obviously, when I hear a threat against American agricultural products as one form of retaliation, it gets my attention, being from an agricultural State, particularly when we work so hard to get lower barriers on trade in these international agreements.

Quite frankly, barriers to trade are much greater on agriculture than they are for manufactured products and for services, because the worldwide tariff on agricultural products is 45 percent, whereas for most other products the average is about 10 percent to 12 percent.

U.S. tariffs and obstacles to trade are very low in agriculture compared to other countries.

As indicated in a letter, which I co-signed, to our colleagues for them to consider when voting on this provision of the bill, it is our concern about safety of trucks from other countries using our highways. But I also understand that our Department of Transportation is also concerned about that. And it is going to put in place very short-ly the very successful California system of inspection of trucks so we can make sure the trucks and drivers from other countries are using our highways safely.

But it was suggested yesterday by the Economic Minister of Mexico that if the Senate approves this provision and it becomes law, as the Reuters news article of yesterday indicated, “It would leave us”—meaning the country of Mexico—“with no other recourse than to take measures against the United States.”

The Economic Minister of Mexico, according to this report, said one option would be to block imports of high-fructose corn syrup from the United States.

This issue has already been one source of friction between our two countries. Mexico has already been placing prohibitive tariffs on our sweeteners. The United States won a World Trade Organization decision against Mexico on this issue. We will be putting in jeopardy the compliance of that measure if they retaliate.

I ask unanimous consent to print in the Record a letter from Lee Kilen, president of the National Corn Growers Association, and Charles F. Conner, president of the Corn Refiners Association, speaking to their concern about the Murray-Shelby amendment and asking us to take into consideration the position of the Mexican Government, that they might retaliate